



Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament Transport to Hospital Appointments Report

October 2016



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Background

The Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament was established in 2011.

Organised by Age Sector Platform, the parliament provides a truly democratic and bottom-up approach to tackling the issues of concern for older people. Since 2011 almost 3,000 older people have attended at least one parliament event and over 5,000 older people across Northern Ireland have been consulted on issues and challenges facing them.

This year the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament Survey has revealed concerns among older people regarding transport have increased dramatically (from 20% in 2014 to 51% in 2016).

The below table demonstrates the percentage of people that selected 'Transport' as one of their top five concerns since the establishment of the parliament.

Year	% of older people that selected 'Transport' as a top concern
2011	26%
2012	26%
2013	21%
2014	20%
2016	51%

Earlier this year, Age Sector Platform held eleven local Pensioners Parliaments - one in each of the new council areas in Northern Ireland; and concerns regarding transport to hospital appointments was a worry raised at most of these events.

In order to find out more, an online survey was conducted between 20th July and 14th August 2016 (inclusive). Over 600 older people from across Northern Ireland completed the survey.

This report details the findings of that survey.

Executive summary

Almost half (45%) of respondents said they experienced difficulty in travelling to hospital appointments within the last two years

Main reasons for difficulty:

1. I don't drive
2. I don't have family or friends to drive me
3. Parking is problematic
4. There is no public transport (bus / train) service
5. Appointment is allocated in a hospital too far away

One in five (19%) had cancelled a hospital appointment due to problems with transport

One in seven (14%) had missed a hospital appointment due to problems with transport

Almost nine out of ten (87%) respondents did not receive information on transport options with the notification of their appointment

95% of respondents had never availed of the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme; and 77% had never heard of it

Almost half (49%) of respondents said travelling to hospital appointments was 'expensive' or 'very expensive'

94% of respondents had never availed of the non-emergency ambulance passenger transport scheme; and 74% had never heard of it

56% of respondents had never used public transport to travel to a hospital appointment; with 61% rating the ease of travelling by public transport to hospital appointments as 'difficult' or 'very difficult'

One in ten (10%) rated travelling to a hospital appointment by public transport as 'easy' or 'very easy'

More than three quarters (78%) of respondents had never availed of community transport to travel to a hospital appointment, although 50% were aware of community transport

Only 5% of respondents had combined public transport and community transport in order to travel to a hospital appointment

Who completed the survey?

The survey collected 637 responses from older people (aged 60+) across Northern Ireland.

- 34% male
- 66% female

Responses by age group

Age group	%
60 - 64	15.7%
65 - 69	24.5%
70 - 74	25.0%
75 - 79	16.8%
80 or over	18.0%

Responses by Council area

Council	%
Antrim & Newtownabbey	8.2%
Ards & North Down	9.0%
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	9.5%
Belfast City	8.5%
Causeway Coast & Glens	13.9%
Derry City & Strabane	6.0%
Fermanagh & Omagh	10.6%
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	10.6%
Mid & East Antrim	6.2%
Mid Ulster	4.7%
Newry, Mourne & Down	12.8%

46% live in an urban area, 54% in a rural area

67% have a disability or long term health condition

Transport difficulties

Almost half (45%) of respondents said they had experienced difficulty in travelling to hospital appointments during the last two years. Those with a disability and those living in a rural area were slightly more likely to experience difficulties.

Geographically, those living in the following council areas were more likely to experience difficulties:

1. Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon (57% experienced difficulty)
2. Newry, Mourne & Down (54% experienced difficulty)
3. Fermanagh & Omagh (48% experienced difficulty)
4. Causeway Coast & Glens (47% experienced difficulty)
5. Antrim & Newtownabbey (46% experienced difficulty)

The main reasons for difficulties were:

1. I don't drive (35%)
2. I don't have family or friends to drive me (28%)
3. Parking is problematic (28%)
4. There is no public transport (bus / train) service (24%)
5. Appointment is allocated in a hospital too far away (24%)

I have to get someone to drive me and people are not always available.

I don't drive and my husband is sometimes too ill to drive me. We have no public transport nearby and have to use a private taxi which is so expensive.

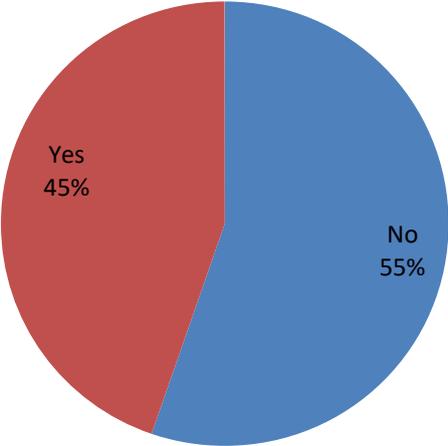
Driving is not a problem but finding a parking space is a nightmare, especially if the appointment coincides with visiting times.

Arrived at hospital disabled car park 45 minutes before appointment time. No spaces became available so I had to cancel my appointment.

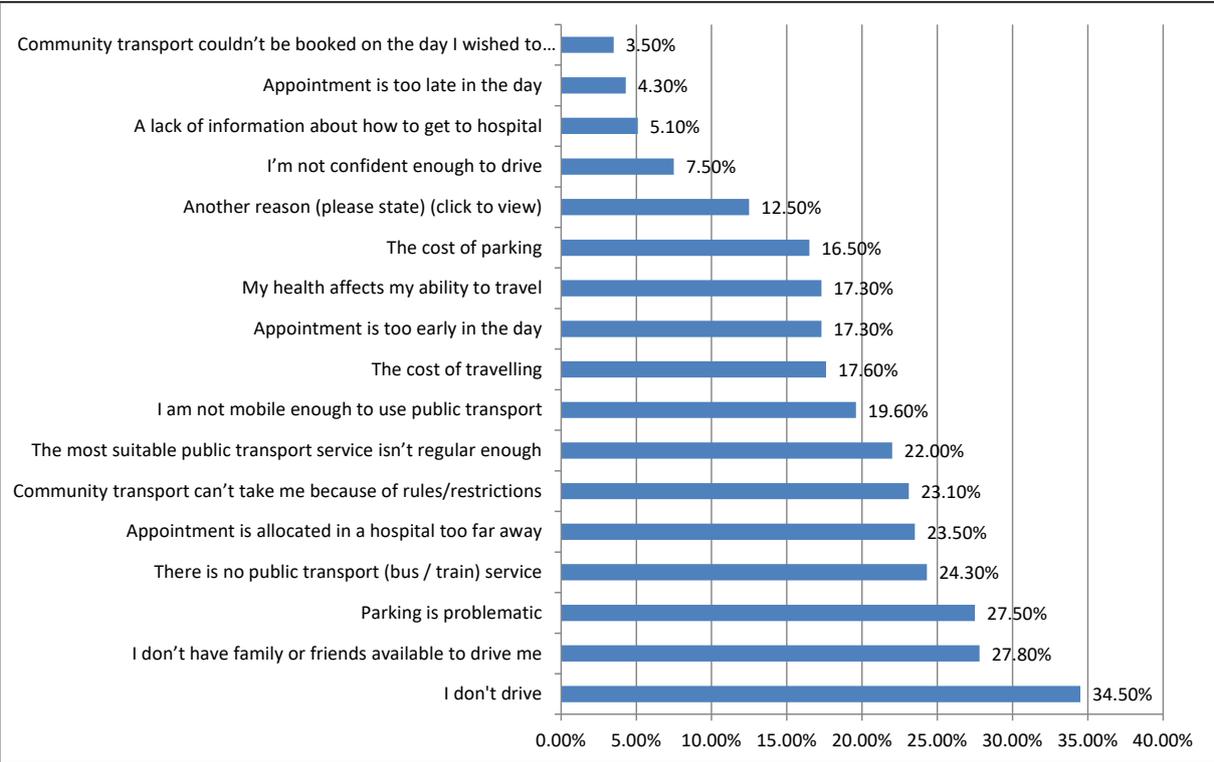
I live six miles from the nearest bus stop and depending on which hospital I need to travel to, it could take two or three different buses. It would be virtually impossible.

We have a state of the art hospital ten minutes from where we live. It seems ridiculous that we have to do a return journey of 130 miles to avail of certain services.

Have you experienced difficulty in travelling to hospital appointments within the last two years?



Why have you experienced difficulty in travelling to hospital appointments? (tick all that apply)



Knowledge of transport schemes

Almost nine out of ten (87%) older people did not receive information on transport options with the notification of their appointment. Of those who did, more than two-thirds (70%) found it useful. Comments confirmed the most commonly provided information as being details of public transport routes and hospital location maps.

A massive 95% of respondents had never availed of the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme; with almost four out of five (77%) having never heard of it.

94% of respondents had never availed of the non-emergency ambulance passenger transport scheme; with almost three out of four (74%) having never heard of it.

Information takes no account of public transport frequency. Just because a hospital is on a bus/train route doesn't mean it's realistic to get there by public transport.

I was given a map and bus route number with my appointment letter.

For the ambulance, it's all about availability. If there aren't enough users from my area they won't justify putting on an ambulance, and without it I can't attend appointments.

Ambulance arrived an hour after my appointment time, but driver said it was ok. Then I waited an hour to be seen, and then four hours for ambulance to bring me home.

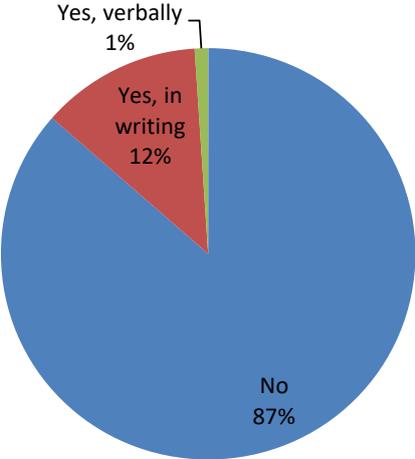
If I could not get a lift from family or friends, then a taxi is the only other option I'm aware of. I have never been given information on any of these schemes.

No ambulance service at weekends or for mid-afternoon appointments. No ambulance service for short notice appointments.

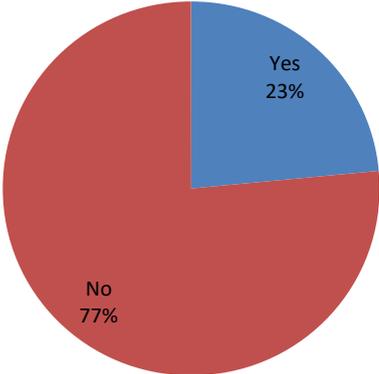
When I've been in too much pain to use public transport I use a taxi and get a refund of the fares. A taxi driver informed me of this recently. I'm very grateful for this service.

Ambulance took me to hospital but I was told at the end of the appointment that I would have to make my own way home. I think I should have been informed of this earlier.

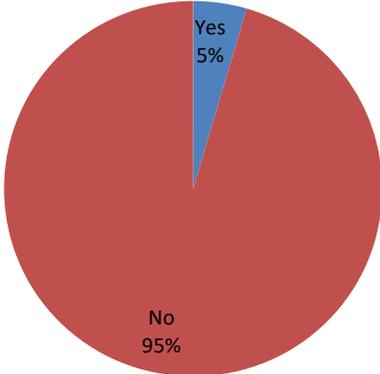
Did you receive information on transport options with the notification of your appointment?



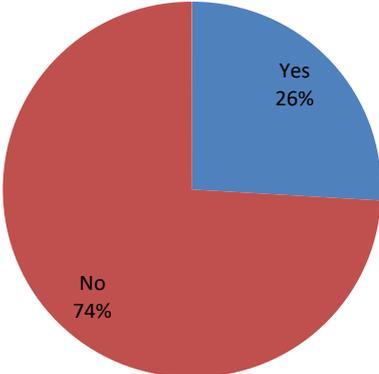
Have you heard of the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme?



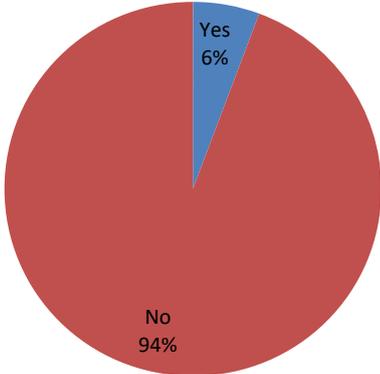
Have you availed of the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme?



Have you heard of the non-emergency ambulance passenger transport service?



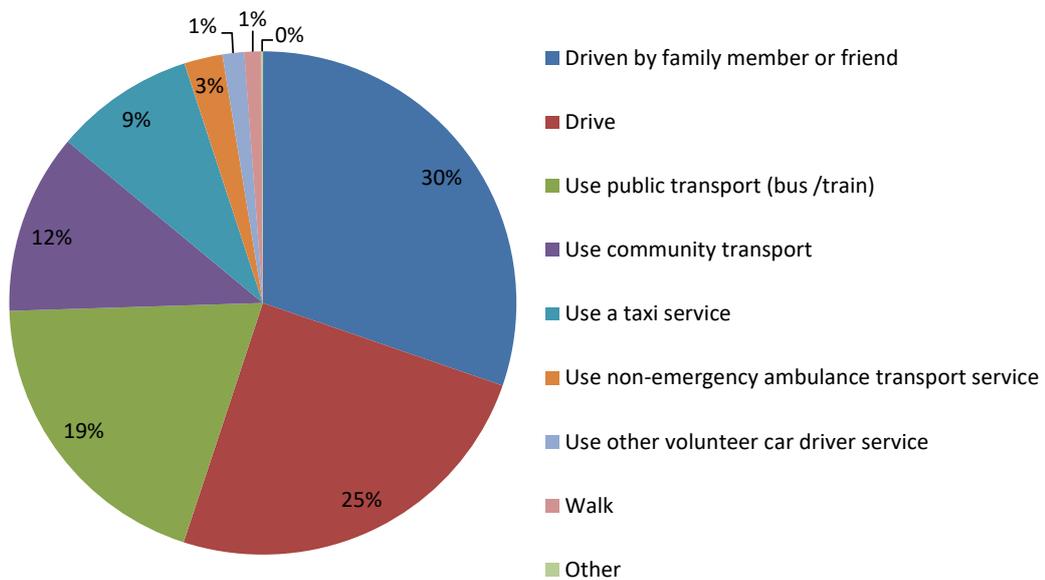
Have you availed of the non-emergency ambulance passenger transport service?



Most popular modes of travel

The most popular modes of travel for attending hospital appointments were:

1. Driven by a family member or friend (30%)
2. Drive (25%)
3. Use public transport (19%)
4. Use community transport e.g. Disability Action Transport Scheme or Dial-a-lift (12%)
5. Use a taxi service (9%)



I am dependent on family members taking time off work to take me to appointments.

My family are very good about taking me to my appointments but I feel bad about them having to use up their holidays or take time off work to do so.

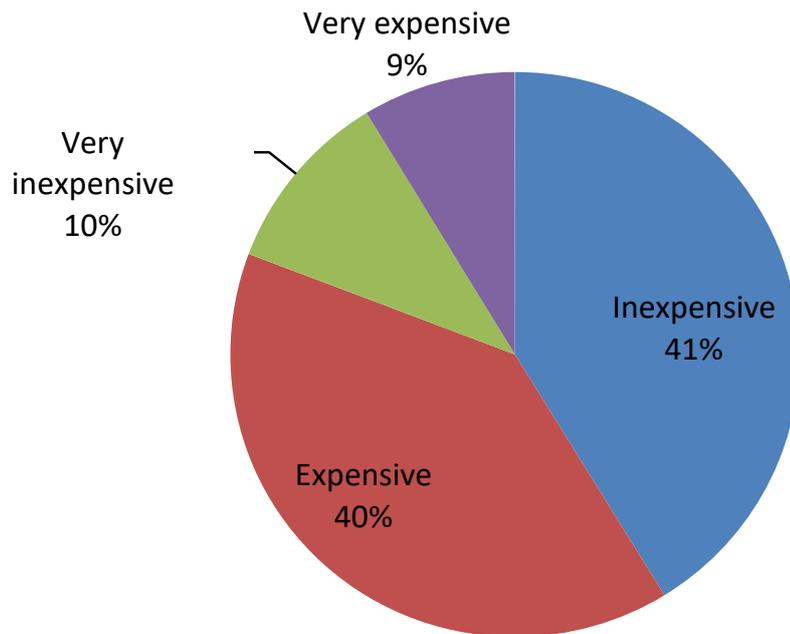
It's very stressful having to drive to Belfast for appointments.

Translink has made a lot of effort to help people get to their chosen destination and the bus pass is an added blessing. However, one drawback is having to wait for transport to come, which can be very challenging for an older person.

Community transport is very good for people like me living in the country. Their car drivers leave you right up to the hospital door. They need all the support they can get.

Expense of travelling to hospital

Almost half (49%) of those surveyed described travelling to hospital appointments as 'expensive' or 'very expensive'. Comments emphasised the high cost of travelling by taxi and the expense of car parking charges at many hospitals.



I have problems walking so public transport would be out of the question. If I can't get a lift from friends or family I have to pay for a taxi which is expensive.

I find the cost of a taxi too much for me. I am on a limited budget and these extras throw me sometimes.

Car parking fees are a disgrace in hospital car parks. I pity anyone who has a lot of appointments - the expense of this on top of their health worries!

I have to prebook a special wheelchair friendly taxi to attend health appointments. It takes a lot of forward planning and is very expensive to use.

Travelling by public transport

56% of older people had never used public transport to travel to a hospital appointment, with three out of five (61%) rating the ease of travelling by public transport to hospital appointments as 'difficult' or 'very difficult', and only one in ten (10%) rating it as 'easy' or 'very easy'.

Comments highlighted difficulties in using public transport due to mobility/health issues, unsuitable public transport routes/timetables, lack of co-ordination with appointment times and the sometimes lengthy travelling and waiting times for buses and trains (especially when having to change a number of times).

I am awaiting a hip replacement and am not mobile enough to get to the bus stop. Nor can I get onto buses.

Post treatment I don't feel well enough to travel on public transport.

I live six miles from the nearest bus stop and depending on which hospital I need to travel to, it would take two or three different buses. It's virtually impossible.

I can't use public transport because of ill health. I would have to get two buses and then I couldn't walk from the bus stop to the hospital.

Appointments are not timed for people who have to travel long distances. You arrive much too early because the next bus or train will be too late.

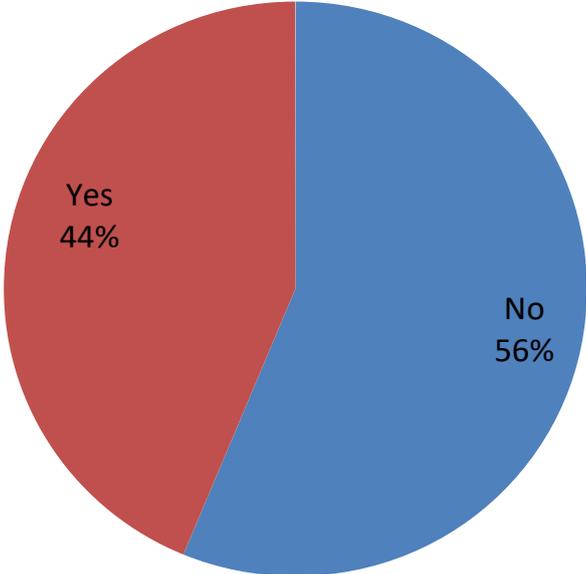
Early appointments are very difficult. Why can't people travelling over seventy miles be given afternoon appointments?

Times of appointments do not always correspond with train/bus times. This causes inconvenience which adds to stress for patients.

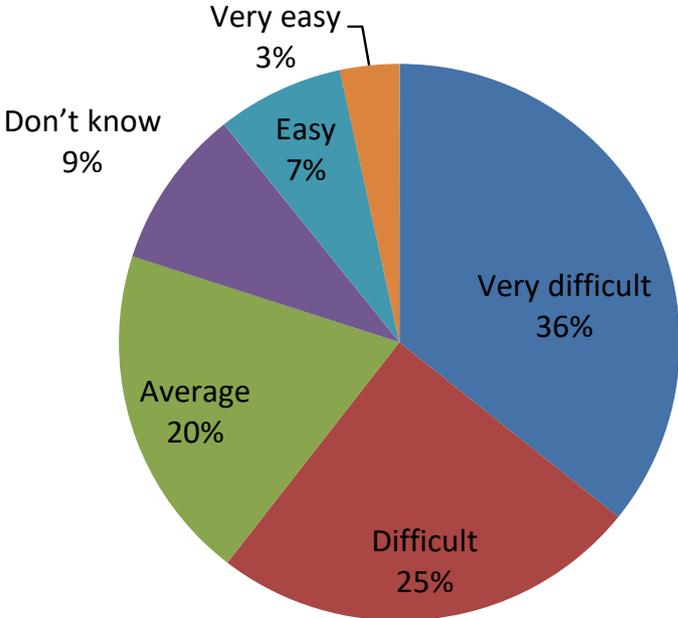
I went by public transport to visit my 90 year old sister in hospital. It took five hours.

I would have to switch transport three times to attend hospital, and the possibility of a return journey is nil.

Have you used public transport (e.g. bus or train) to travel to a hospital appointment?



How would you rate the ease with which you could travel to hospital appointments using public transport?



Travelling by community transport

More than three out of four (78%) older people had never used community transport to travel to a hospital appointment, despite half (50%) having heard of it. More than two in five (45%) didn't know how to rate the ease of travelling by community transport to hospital appointments, whilst almost one in three (30%) rated it as 'easy' or 'very easy'.

Although these figures suggest some lack of awareness about community transport (particularly when travelling to hospital appointments), for those who are aware there is a strong indication that users view it as an easy method of travel.

Comments highlight some difficulties in using community transport to travel to hospital appointments, including boundary restrictions imposed on travel in certain areas, lack of flexibility in travel times and the difficulty in connecting with public transport.

I would find it a lot easier to get to hospital appointments if my local community transport provider was funded to travel outside of my county.

My local community transport service can only take me so far, then I have to get 2 buses after that. Due to health issues, it would be better if they could take me the whole way.

Attending a hospital appointment is a nightmare for me. Why can't the government allow community transport social cars to travel outside their operational areas?

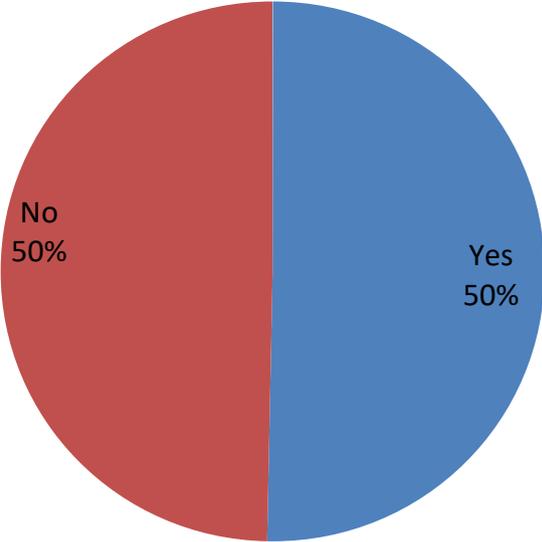
Not all appointments are at the same time and you have to hang around waiting for everyone. It makes for a long day.

No matter what time I have an appointment, I will be collected from my home between 8am and 9am and will have to wait at hospital until 4pm or 5pm to be returned home.

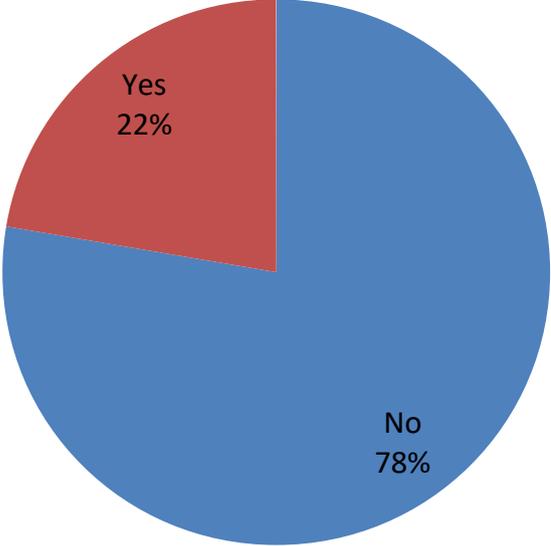
It is very difficult to book community transport for hospital appointments, even though they are given plenty of notice.

I have vaguely heard that there is some sort of scheme whereby one may be driven to appointments but I have no idea how to access it.

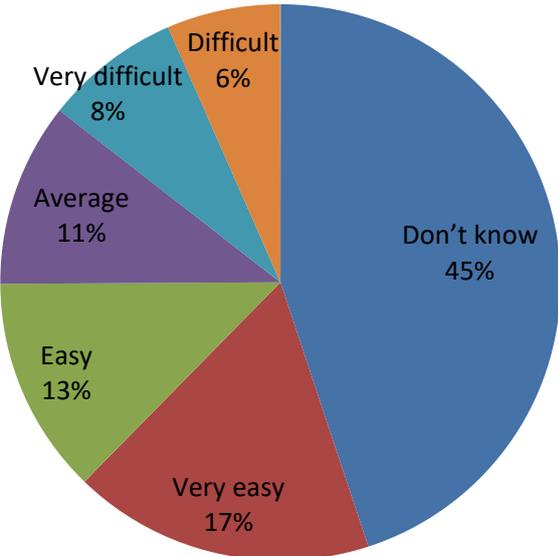
Have you heard of community transport e.g. DATS or Dial-a-lift (minibus or volunteer car driver)?



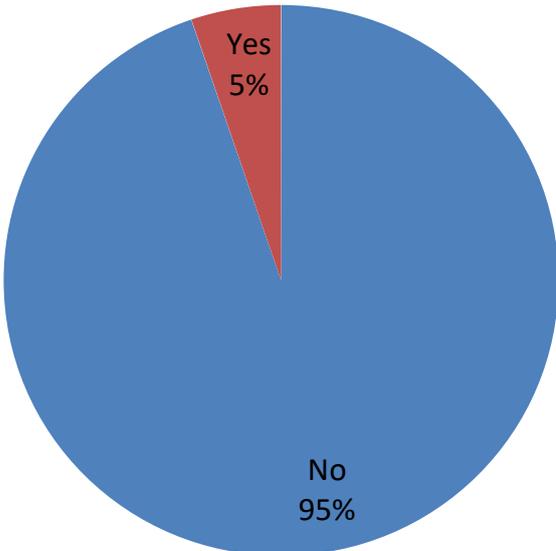
Have you used community transport to travel to a hospital appointment?



How would you rate the ease with which you could travel to a hospital appointment using community transport?



Have you combined public transport and community transport in order to travel to a hospital appointment?



Missed and cancelled appointments

Almost one in five (19%) older people have cancelled a hospital appointment because of problems with transport, with one in seven (14%) missing an appointment due to problems with transport.

Missed appointments are of considerable cost to the NHS, and there is clearly a link between missed appointments and a lack of transport options / poor transport links. Investment in better transport to hospital appointments and a more considered appointments system could help address this ongoing problem.

I have had to cancel appointments because there has been no transport available with the ambulance service.

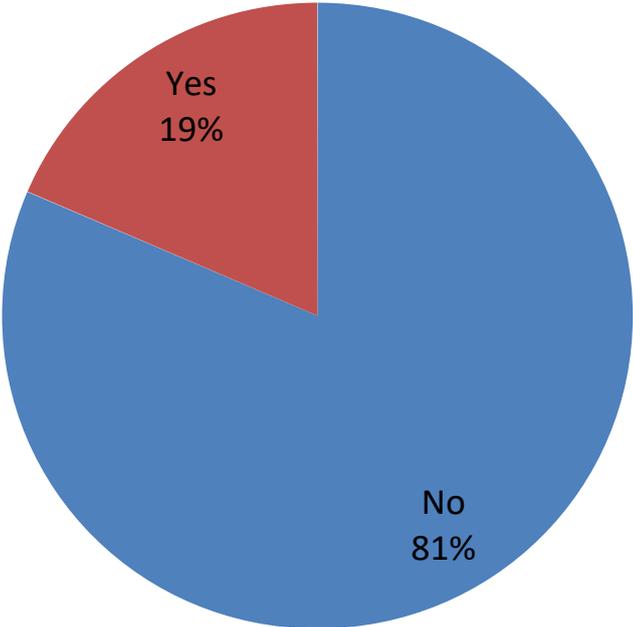
I have cancelled and missed appointments as the appointment times did not suit the transport time schedule.

I have had to cancel an appointment because I could not get a family member to take me.

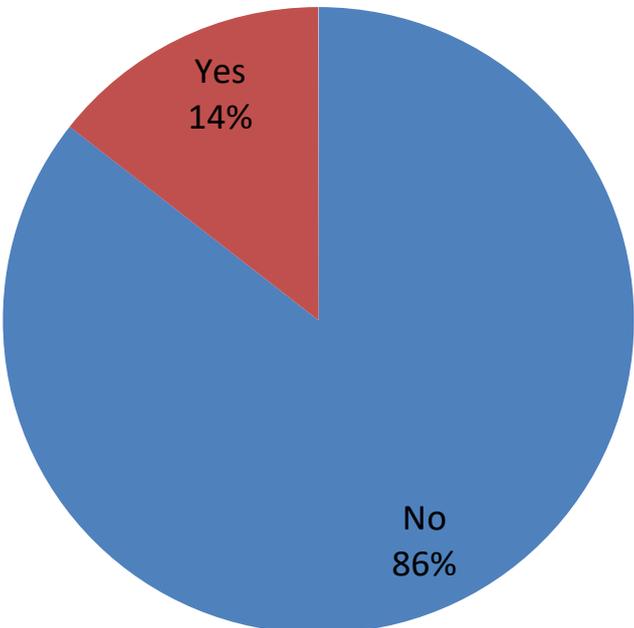
If I don't have a member of my family available to take me to hospital, due to their work commitments, then I have to cancel my appointment.

I have had to cancel appointments as I could not arrange travel to the assigned hospital, which is too far from my home.

Have you cancelled a hospital appointment due to problems with transport?



Have you missed a hospital appointment due to problems with transport?



Recommendations

The Department for Regional Development (now the Department for Infrastructure) consulted on a new Accessible Transport Strategy in Autumn 2015. This strategy and its associated action plan, once finalised, will aim to deliver on its vision of “a transport network in Northern Ireland that is inclusive and accessible to all.”

It is vital that the new Accessible Transport Strategy addresses problems currently being experienced by patients when travelling to hospital appointments. The Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament suggests a review of transport provision to hospital appointments would be a valuable exercise for the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health.

As part of such a review, and based on the views given to us by older people in this survey, the Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament suggests the following recommendations are considered:

- Patients should always receive information about transport options with the notification of their appointments. This should include a location map, information on public transport and community transport options, as well as details of the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme and non-emergency passenger ambulance transport service.
- When appointment times are being allocated, consideration should be given to the distance being travelled by patients.
- Community transport providers should be funded to provide services to older people who are expected to travel outside of their local area for specialist health services.
- Translink and relevant bodies within the Health & Social Care sector should regularly share information to ensure public transport services meet the needs of those travelling to hospital.
- Hospitals should evaluate their car parking facilities on a regular basis, in particular the demand for disabled parking spaces.

Appendix - Hospital transport schemes

Hospital Travel Costs Scheme

You may be able to get financial help from the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme if you're on a low income, need Health Service (HS) treatment at a hospital, other HS centre or private clinic and have been referred by a doctor, dentist or other health professional. You can claim if you, or those you depend on, get at least one of the following; Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based), Employment and Support Allowance (Income-related) or Guarantee Pension Credit.

If you're on a low income but don't get any of these benefits or allowances, you may still claim travel costs through the HS low income support scheme.

If you're on a relevant benefit(s) or allowances you get back the full travel costs by using the cheapest form of public transport available, including any concessions or promotions. This applies to however you travel. If for example, you use a private car you can claim for petrol instead (and car parking charges where unavoidable) up to the cost of the same journey by public transport. The hospital should tell you the mileage rate for petrol costs for private transport.

If public transport is unavailable or impractical, you'll need to contact the hospital well ahead of your appointment. They will need to check your new travel arrangements are allowed. If you're on the HS Low Income scheme you may get back all or some of your travel costs depending on which certificate you've been given. You can claim at the HS hospital or clinic at the time of your appointment.

Non-emergency ambulance passenger transport service

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service provides non-emergency patient transport services across the province. This enables patients, usually vulnerable and dependent, to get to routine appointments at hospitals and treatment centres throughout Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service provides transport for patients attending outpatient appointments at hospital, requiring investigation or treatment at hospital, being admitted to hospital, being transferred between hospitals and being discharged from hospital.

This service is not available to everyone attending appointments; there must be a medical need for transport. This reason could be that you are immobile and unable to utilise public transport, or as a result of your treatment. This medical necessity will need to be confirmed by a physician stating that your condition is so severe that you are unfit to travel by other means.

If you think you may require ambulance transport to take you to hospital, please contact your Doctor once you have received your appointment. Your Doctor will then assess your medical need and decide if you require ambulance transport.

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