

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Transportation barriers (paratransit, NEMT, brokerages, and workarounds)

A missed pickup doesn't just cost a ride. It costs the appointment, the day program slot, the job shift, and sometimes the entire service plan built on the assumption transportation would show up.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · FIVE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS,
AND WHERE EACH ONE FAILS

5

MICHIGAN TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS WORTH KNOWING

Paratransit, Non-Emergency Medical Transportation, CMH transportation services, specialized brokerages, and volunteer driver programs. Each has real gaps. Together, they cover more ground than any one alone.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Transportation looks like a solved problem

Multiple transportation systems exist on paper, which makes gaps look like exceptions rather than the norm.



STEP 2

Each system has a specific failure point

Paratransit no-shows, NEMT authorization delays, and rural service gaps each undermine access in a different way.



STEP 3

Redundancy is the actual fix

No single transportation option is reliable enough to depend on exclusively. Layering multiple options is what actually works.

Common transportation failure points

Paratransit no-shows	Late or missed pickups affecting appointments and programs
NEMT authorization delays	Days-long approval windows for Medicaid-covered trips
Rural service gaps	Formal options thin dramatically outside metro areas
Same-day cancellations	Short-notice trip cancellations with little recourse
Coordination failures	Multiple providers, no single point of accountability

THE MISSED PICKUP THAT COST A JOB

Anthony's paratransit ride failed to show up three times in two months, each time during his scheduled work shift at a supported employment site. His job coach flagged the pattern to CMH, which authorized transportation through its own service as a backup on the days paratransit had a documented history of failure. The missed shifts stopped. The paratransit problem never got fully fixed. The backup did what the primary system couldn't.

THE SYSTEM THAT FAILED HIM THREE TIMES NEVER REALLY IMPROVED. THE BACKUP HE BUILT AROUND IT DID THE ACTUAL JOB.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

Paratransit

ADA-required complementary service to fixed-route transit, generally reliable but subject to scheduling windows and no-shows.

NEMT for medical appointments

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation covers Medicaid-eligible trips to medical appointments, subject to authorization delays.

Rural gaps are severe

Outside metro areas, transportation options thin out dramatically, sometimes to almost nothing.

CMH transportation services

Some CMH boards operate their own transportation for program-related trips, worth asking about directly.

NEMT authorization delays

Requests can take days to authorize, which makes last-minute or urgent appointments especially vulnerable.

Volunteer driver programs

Community and faith-based volunteer driver networks fill real gaps, particularly in areas with thin formal transit options.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐

A written log of missed pickups or cancellations, with dates

☐

NEMT authorization request timelines for your Medicaid plan

☐

A backup transportation plan for your most critical recurring trips

☐

Your CMH's transportation service contact information, if one exists

☐

Contact information for at least one local volunteer driver program

YOUR MOVE

When transportation keeps failing, here is how to build redundancy

1

Document every missed pickup or cancellation, with dates and times.

2

Ask your CMH whether it operates its own transportation service.

3

Request NEMT authorization well in advance of appointments when possible.

4

Research volunteer driver programs serving your area.

5

Identify at least one backup option beyond your primary transportation.

6

Escalate a documented pattern of failures to your CMH or PIHP directly.

One transportation option is a single point of failure. Two or three is an actual plan.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

cmham.org · <https://cmham.org>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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