

## STRATEGY 20

### Conduct Research and Evaluation on Current Programs to Increase Access to Services

- a. The North Carolina General Assembly should fund:
  - i. A study to understand the adult day health program landscape, how to expand in rural areas, what the funding landscape is now (i.e., adequacy, range of rates from different funding sources), and how to ensure equitable access for populations who are lower-income, historically marginalized, and/or experiencing physical or sensory disabilities.
  - ii. The UNC General Administration System to support research and evaluation studies, with input from the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services, that would inform future aging service planning and development and the promotion and support of “Aging in All Policies” (also see Strategy 14).
- b. The North Carolina Department of Transportation should work with relevant partners, such as the Division of Aging and Adult Services, Area Agencies on Aging, local departments of health and social/human services and health/medical providers to identify innovative ridesharing and transportation-hailing solutions that are demand-responsive (e.g., RideSheet), streamlined, and consumer-friendly and seek funding for additional program implementation and advertising across the state.
- c. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services should identify Division representatives and other partners to review terminology used in human services program applications, systems, and other data collection sources and make recommendations about inclusive methods of collecting gender, race/ethnicity, family status, and other demographic information.
- d. The Governor’s Highway Safety Program, in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and the UNC Highway Safety Research Center, should develop training materials for relevant aging services providers on how to screen for fitness to drive and make appropriate referrals to medical providers.

**Desired Result** – Research and evaluation will guide activities, priorities, and best practices to enhance access to a variety of services for older adults.

**Why does the task force recommend this strategy?** – Through the task force process, members identified topics for possible research and evaluation related to services for older adults. Research and evaluation can help increase understanding of how programs or services are working, best practices for replicating them, and/or ways to enhance access to them. This strategy details several areas of research and evaluation to address some specific service needs.

The task force also wishes to emphasize the importance of planning for ongoing evaluation of all programs and services beyond those detailed in this strategy. Evaluation is essential to identifying whether programs are achieving intended outcomes and meeting the needs of all intended participants or beneficiaries, with particular attention to unintended disparities in who is served when considering race, ethnicity, disability status, and other characteristics. Ongoing evaluation of new and existing programs can also help identify how cost-effective programs are in supporting health and wellness.

#### Context –

##### Adult Day Health Programs

According to the National Adult Day Services Association, “Adult Day Services centers provide a coordinated program of professional and compassionate services for adults in a community-based group setting. Services are designed to provide social and some health services to adults who need supervised care in a safe place outside the home during the day. They also afford caregivers respite from the demanding responsibilities of caregiving.”<sup>21</sup> Services can include social activities, transportation, meals and snacks, personal care, and therapeutic activities.<sup>22</sup> Studies show that participants in these programs experience improvements in physical and emotional problems and perceived well-being, as well as positive changes in social support and quality of life.<sup>22</sup> Caregivers of people with disabilities who attend adult day programs experience lower caregiver burden and improved well-being, including reduced isolation, worry, guilt, and stress.<sup>22</sup>

In North Carolina, only around half of counties have an adult day program available, drastically limiting the number of people who could be served. Adult day service centers in North Carolina are certified annually by the North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services. Starting a new program can be challenging, with barriers including funding, staffing, and identifying transportation options for participants. Information on program landscape in the state (e.g., funding status and adequacy) is needed to understand potential opportunities to expand access in rural areas.

##### University of North Carolina System and Aging Studies

The University of North Carolina (UNC) System schools have historically collaborated on aging-related research, education, and community service. This began in the 1990s with the development of the UNC Institute on Aging, which received state funding, conducted research, and hosted an annual conference on aging. The Institute eventually dissolved and the Partnership in Aging Program (PiAP) at UNC-Chapel Hill was developed with a narrower focus on Orange County. That program continues and has demonstrated success in local collaborations. Development of similar programs or an umbrella structure across the state would allow for the expansion of aging studies and collaboration with local partners at the university and community college level. Gerontology programs or certificates are also available at other North Carolina universities, including UNC-Greensboro, Winston-Salem State University, UNC-Charlotte, and UNC-Wilmington.

##### Ridesharing and Transportation-Hailing Services

Nationally, around 24% of older adults do not have access to a vehicle, 21% report that they are no longer able to drive, and 52% say they no longer drive long distances.<sup>23</sup> Adults aged 60 and older in North Carolina can contact their local transit authority to learn about transportation options for general and medical needs, although transit authority services vary significantly throughout the state and may or may not meet the needs of the communities that they serve.

Ridesharing – typically a service arranged through a third party and using another driver’s private vehicle – has the benefit of providing door-to-door service on demand. These services may help to address barriers some can experience where there are little to no public transportation options available or they do not meet accessibility needs.



Another area of potential study and action relates to insurance policy when using personal cars for volunteer transportation. Some task force members raised this as a concern, however, it is unclear if there is a policy barrier to address or if there is misunderstanding of the policies currently in place in North Carolina related to volunteer driving and insurance coverage.

### **Demographic Terminology**

Having accurate and robust data helps to inform evaluations of services and programs. Task force members identified some challenges with current social services data collection in the use of birth names, binary gender options, limited racial and ethnic identification categories, and other demographic limitations. Analysis and modernization of these data collection fields can inform future program and service improvement, particularly for historically underserved and/or marginalized populations.

### **Fitness to Drive and Referrals**

The Governor’s Highway Safety Program has the goal of “reducing the numbers of traffic crashes and fatalities in North Carolina” by “promot[ing] highway safety awareness through a variety of grants and safe-driving initiatives.”<sup>24</sup> With this goal, partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Aging and Adult Services could be a useful strategy to identify providers and services that can be outreach partners in the identification of older adults for further screening and connection to resources related to driving. See more information about screening for fitness to drive and referrals to medical providers in [Strategy 25 on Page 88](#).

The UNC Highway Safety Research Center has a mission to “improve the safety, sustainability, and efficiency of all surface transportation modes through a balanced, interdisciplinary program of research, evaluation and information dissemination.” Along with the Governor’s Highway Safety Program, they lead the [ncseniordriver.org](#) program, which has resources for older adult drivers, caregivers, and professionals in health, social services, law enforcement, and other fields.

### *How would this impact the health of older adults?*



Services like adult day programs can help older adults with disabilities remain safe during the day and avoid falls.



A variety of transportation services can help more older adults move around their communities safely.



Adult day programs and transportation services help older adults maintain access to appropriate nutrition.



Adult day programs and transportation services help older adults remain socially connected.