



NEW HAMPSHIRE ALLIANCE
FOR HEALTHY AGING

DRIVING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

Volunteer Driver
Programs in New
Hampshire



The NH Alliance for Healthy Aging strives to promote communities across NH that advance culture, policies and services that support older adults and their families. Ensuring that transportation options are available to older adults and individuals with disabilities is an important aspect of this vision. For the past several years, the NH Alliance for Healthy Aging's (NHAHA) Transportation Work group has focused its efforts on supporting Volunteer Driver Programs (VDPs) across the state. For decades, these programs have been the sole connection for thousands of older adults and disabled residents to their communities, their medical providers, and other essential networks.

During the pandemic, VDPs struggled to maintain their volunteer driver pools because of concern regarding the spread of Covid. Despite driver shortages, VDPs were often the only means for many of their riders to get to critical medical appointments. Volunteer recruitment has always been a priority for the state's VDPs, but the pandemic created a new sense of urgency. To help address the challenge, NHAHA's transportation work group created their Volunteer Driver Initiative. Starting in 2022, the program, funded by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to support COVID vaccine access and outreach, developed an inspired outreach campaign intended to reach potential volunteer drivers. Television and radio ads, social media clips, a website www.nhvdp.org, and a VDP [mapping tool](#) were created to educate and encourage potential drivers to find a VDP near them and sign up to volunteer.

Since then, 19 Volunteer Driver Programs (VDPs) in New Hampshire have come back from the challenges of COVID, gaining traction in recruiting volunteer drivers and continuing their success within the landscape of community transportation. While many people understand transit as fixed-route bus systems, which serve more densely populated cities such as Manchester, Concord, Keene, Claremont, Dover/Portsmouth, and West Lebanon, it is the network of VDPs that fills the transportation gap for most of NH's rural communities.

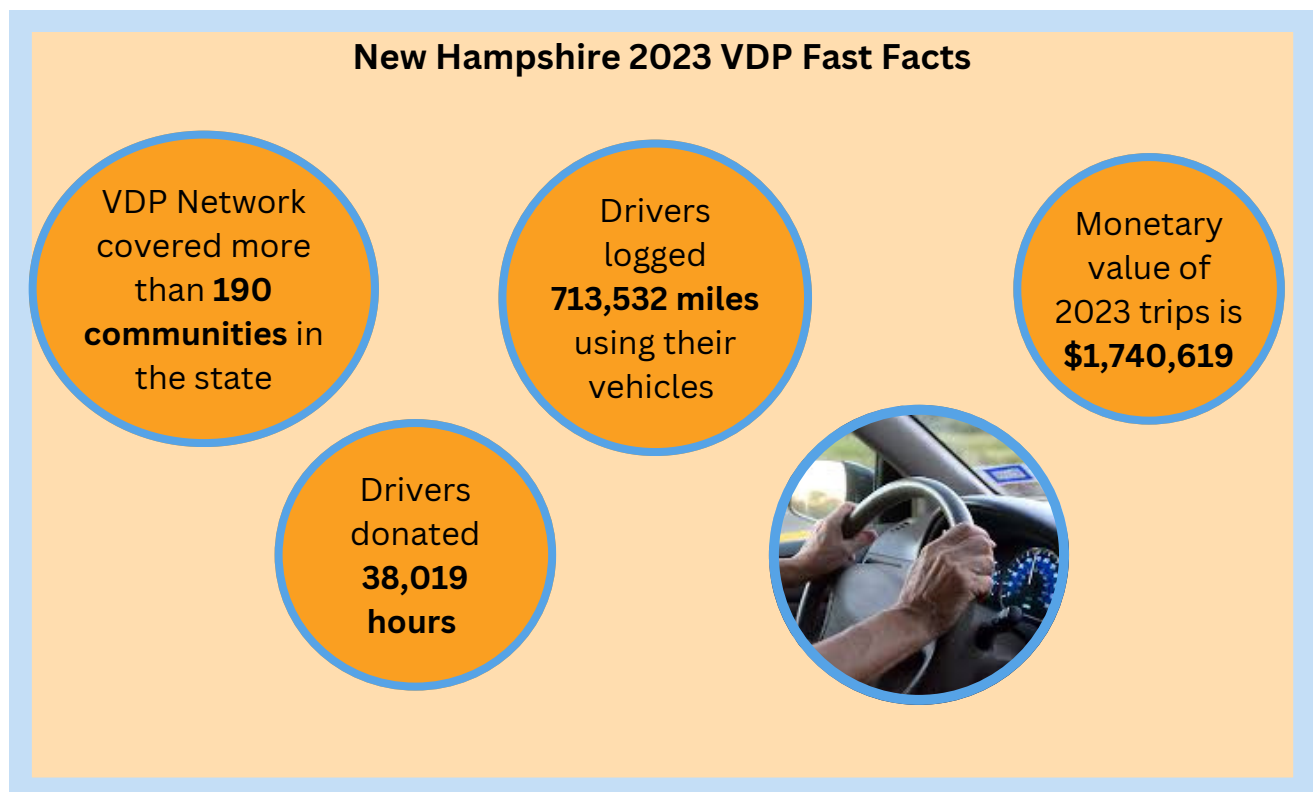
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Getting to Know New Hampshire's Unique VDPs

Although the network of VDPs have similarities, the individual programs often are unique in how they are funded, in their administration, and who they serve. Some serve just one town, others serve entire regions, and one covers the entire state. Most have paid staff, while a few are managed by volunteers. The winning formula in all cases is the reliance on volunteer drivers using their own vehicles. Typically, a volunteer driver picks the ride requests that fit into their schedule and often become familiar with their riders. These relationships strengthen over time and often riders acknowledge that their drivers are critical to their health and independence .

Over the course of 2023, the VDP network covered more than 190 communities and comprised a workforce of 645 drivers. Drivers donated 38,019 hours to serve 2,234 individuals without access to transportation, for 35,894 trips, and logged in 713,532 miles using their personal vehicles. These VDPs are orchestrated by a total of 35 paid managers for 19 different service locations. The monetary value of these trips is estimated at \$1,740, 619*. This figure does not include operational costs.



*The calculation of the value is as follows: \$.655/mile = \$467,363 and [1] donated time at \$ 33.49/hour = \$1,273,256, totaling \$1,740,619)

Performance Measures for VDPs

In 2021, The NHAHA Volunteer Driver Initiative began collecting statewide data from VDPs. The following table provides a summary of that data.

NH Volunteer Driver Program Data Totals (unduplicated #'s from 19 agencies)	2023 NH Data	2022 NH Data	2021 NH Data	Percent Change 2021-2023	Percent Change 2022-2023	Percent Change 2021-2022
Active volunteer drivers	645	626	588	10%	3%	6%
New volunteer drivers	173	162	178	-3%	7%	-9%
Unique riders requesting trips (counting each person only once)	2,234	2,189	1,854	20%	2%	18%
Requested trips	35,894	30,909	28,629	25%	16%	8%
Miles traveled	713,532	619,820	591,098	21%	15%	5%
Volunteer hours donated	38,019	35,432	33,835	12%	7%	5%
Monetized miles traveled (\$.655/mile)	\$467,363	\$374,991 (\$.61/mile)	\$331,014 (\$.56/mile)	-	-	-
Monetized volunteer hours – donated (\$21/hour – DOT)	\$798,399	\$637,776 (\$18/hr.)	\$609,921 (\$18/hr.)	-	-	-
Monetized volunteer hours – donated (\$33.49/hour – <u>Indep.</u> Sector)*	\$1,273,256	\$1,126,738* (\$31.80/hr.)	\$1,013,358* (\$29.95/hr.)	-	-	-
Total Value	\$1,265,762 *\$1,740,619	\$1,012,767 *\$1,501,842	\$940,935 *\$1,344,372	-	-	-

It is interesting to note that since 2021, the number of new drivers has been relatively steady while the number of riders has jumped 20%. The same level of increase has been similar for the number of requested trips and miles traveled, which have both increased 25% and 21% respectively. The number of volunteer hours donated has increased from 2021 to 2023 by 12% while the number of active volunteers has also increased 10% from 2021 to 2023.

One performance measure that not all VDPs track is the number of rides that could not be fulfilled by drivers. Unmet rides can occur for a variety of reasons but regardless of the reason, the impact on riders and families is significant. In 2023, almost 1,800 unmet trips were reported. These unmet trips combined with the increased demand on existing volunteers indicates that there is an ongoing need for more drivers.

Impact

The numbers tell a powerful story about the impact of NH VDPs. VDPs help keep NH's residents healthy, independent, and engaged in their communities. Older adults and others who can no longer drive, along with their extended families, are challenged daily with making connections that are critical to their health and well-being. Like anyone, they too want to enjoy living independently in their own homes without burdening family or friends. More often than not, these vulnerable populations don't have funding for expensive private transportation services. A volunteer driver program servicing their community makes all the difference between healthy connections or isolation, stress, and depression.

Without community transportation, older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, and others have few options and often run into the following dilemmas:

- May forgo healthy meals if getting to the grocery store is a problem.
- May avoid making appointments with their doctor/dentist to avoid asking for a ride.
- May miss medical appointments where health issues may worsen and require more expensive treatment or become an emergency.
- May need to rely on Town Welfare Departments, other town services, or local churches for assistance



Volunteer driver recruitment remains the biggest challenge for NH's VDPs. In order for these programs to thrive and to reduce the number of rides that cannot be met, volunteer drivers are needed. Often volunteer drivers are retired and looking for ways to give back to their community. Through driving, they have an increased sense of belonging to their community, a renewed sense of purpose, and feel more connected to people. Many have shared they are happier and more satisfied with their life.



Volunteer Driver Snapshot



Signs up for rides based on their availability



Uses their own vehicle



“Donates” their hours of driving



Serves as a community ambassador



Serves as “boots on the ground” and can detect if a rider is experiencing difficulties that may need professional attention.



Decreases social isolation for themselves and their riders



Knows that driving people without access to transportation makes a difference in the rider’s life and well-being.

New Hampshire is an aging state and each community, rural or urban will be challenged to address the growing needs for community transportation. Volunteer driver programs can be part of the solution to these challenges. As residents learn about the VDPs in their area and take that first ride, their lives will change.

Talking with riders, they often share the following about themselves:

- Health improvement or stability
- Eating healthier meals
- Maintaining their independence
- Feeling more connected to people
- Feeling less anxious, are happier, and feel more control in their lives
- Feeling less of a burden on family and friends, and
- Being more satisfied with their lives
- Wanting to give back, by becoming a Volunteer Driver once they can drive again, or volunteer to help in other ways.

