



The Healthcare Consortium

**Children and Adults
Rural Transportation Service
Client Handbook**

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WELCOME!

We are delighted that you have chosen The Healthcare Consortium's Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service (CARTS) to meet your non-emergency medical transportation needs!

ABOUT US

The Healthcare Consortium is a local charitable organization founded over 25 years ago to improve access to healthcare and support the health and well-being of the people in our rural community. One of the first programs that The Healthcare Consortium created was the Children and Adults Rural Transportation Service, or **CARTS**, and it continues to be one of the Consortium's largest and most impactful programs. Since its start in 1999, CARTS has provided nearly **4,000 people** with over **245,000 rides** to and from their medical appointments and has covered more than **3,700,000 miles!**

THE NEED THAT CARTS MEETS

Unfortunately, the distance that must be traveled to get to a healthcare appointment and home again can often be a very real barrier to getting and staying healthy. This can be for many reasons. For instance, individuals may not own a vehicle, or even if they do, they may not have the resources to maintain it, fill its tank, or pay tolls. Having certain kinds of procedures, like cataract surgery, or getting certain treatments, like chemotherapy and dialysis, can also make it difficult or even impossible to drive safely thereafter. And frankly, the reluctance of some of our older neighbors to drive in unfamiliar urban areas where healthcare providers are often located is also common. Whether it is the lack of a vehicle, resources, injury, illness, or age, there are many things that can limit a person's ability to get to and from their healthcare appointments without help. Providing that help so our neighbors can connect to care is where CARTS comes in.

OUR APPROACH

We take pride in our approach to delivering transportation services to the members of our community. There are three key elements to that approach:

We own our own fleet...

CARTS operates its own clean, well-maintained, smoke/vape-free fleet of 12 vehicles that includes minivans, sedans, and a multi-passenger wheelchair accessible vehicle.

We employ our drivers...

These are driven by employed drivers who are professional, friendly, and deeply dedicated to our mission.

We enjoy helping others...

Our goal is to help others and we truly enjoy doing it. The CARTS motto is “Our cars, our drivers, our pleasure” and we mean every word of it!

DAYS AND HOURS OF OPERATION

CARTS operates Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. CARTS does not operate on weekends, or on the following holidays:

- New Year’s Day
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Presidents’ Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- The Friday after Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

Note that CARTS does operate on Veterans Day.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO USE CARTS

Any Columbia County resident with a need for non-emergency medical transportation is eligible to receive this service; there are no other eligibility criteria.

We transport people of all ages...

...from infants to the elderly. Clients may be minors under the age of 18, provided that they are accompanied by a parent or guardian. Additionally, children are allowed to accompany their parent(s) or guardian(s) to appointments. In either case, CARTS does not provide child safety restraint systems for passengers who are children. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian who is accompanying a child to provide a child safety seat, harness, vest, or booster seat as required by NYS child passenger safety laws, and to properly install and secure the child in these child safety restraint systems.

We transport individuals of every income...

Therefore, you will not be asked to surrender any information about your financial circumstances.

We transport individuals of any insurance status...

You can have public health insurance (like Medicaid or Medicare), private health insurance, or none at all.

We transport individuals with different abilities...

While most CARTS clients are ambulatory—meaning they can walk unassisted, with or without the use of a cane or walker—some are wheelchair-bound. Our wheelchair-accessible vehicle can safely transport our wheelchair-bound clients. Unfortunately, we are not an ambulette, and cannot provide stretcher service.

The service is door-to-door, meaning that a CARTS driver will escort an individual from the threshold of their home or other pickup location to the threshold of a healthcare facility or provider's office.

CARTS drivers will not, however, enter homes or facilities, so anyone needing a greater level of assistance should be accompanied by a family member, friend, or aide.

WHERE WE GO AND WHEN

Our service can pick up someone from any location in Columbia County, and deliver them to locations throughout the County, and well beyond it. For instance, CARTS regularly provides rides to healthcare providers in Catskill, Kingston, Poughkeepsie, Albany, Troy, Pittsfield and Great Barrington (MA), and Sharon, CT, as well as other locations.

To ensure that CARTS functions efficiently, we must limit transportation to out-of-county locations as follows:

To points north...

...such as Albany, Troy, and East Greenbush: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays only

To points south and east...

...such as Kingston, Poughkeepsie, Pittsfield and Great Barrington (MA), and Sharon (CT): Tuesdays and Thursdays only

HOW TO SCHEDULE A RIDE

How one schedules an appointment depends upon whether or not they are enrolled in Medicaid.

For people who are not enrolled in Medicaid...

Those clients who are not enrolled in Medicaid may call CARTS directly at 518-822-8020. During scheduling, you will be asked to provide the date, time, and location of the appointment. It is also extremely helpful to know the length of the appointment, if known, and whether, in your experience, the healthcare provider or facility typically runs on time or behind.

For people enrolled in Medicaid...

Those clients who are enrolled in Medicaid must call Medical Answering Services, or MAS, at 866-883-7865 to confirm eligibility for transportation and receive prior authorization for the trip. Medicaid enrollees who try to schedule a trip with us directly will be refused, and redirected to call MAS. During this call, people are encouraged to request the "Columbia County Community Healthcare Consortium" as the preferred provider for transport. While there is no guarantee that The Healthcare Consortium will provide the trip, making a request for us by name will ensure that we are given the option to do so.

For all people scheduling a trip...

Scheduling is done on a first-come, first-served basis and our schedule is always jam-packed. It is not unusual for us to be scheduled two weeks in advance for in-county trips and even longer for out-of-county trips, so contacting us as soon as you make your medical appointment is key to making sure we can help meet your transportation needs. Note that we will not schedule a trip for a medical appointment that is not yet made.

Once your ride is scheduled, we will contact you the day prior to your ride as a reminder of your upcoming trip.

RIDE-SHARING

Please be advised that no CARTS client should expect to be the sole passenger in a vehicle. Our service frequently groups riders from similar points of origin or similar destinations together. Furthermore, a trip may be lengthened to accommodate additional pickups, drop-offs, and appointments. This is done to ensure that the program can provide the service to the greatest number of people.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG AND WHAT TO DO WHEN IT DOES

Sometimes, things come up. When they do, here's what to do:

If you need to change or cancel a trip...

Please, please, please do this with a call to our office at 518-822-8020 at your earliest opportunity. Trip changes, particularly those made within 24 hours of when it is scheduled to occur, are extremely disruptive to our operation, and most disruptive if we arrive at your door to find that you are not at home or no longer intend to go. It is important that you understand that when a trip is cancelled or worse—a client “no shows”—precious resources, in the form of a driver's time and wages, vehicle fuel, etc. are wasted. Moreover, there is an even heavier price to be paid by the person who did not get to go to their medical appointment because the service was otherwise committed to the client that cancels or no-shows. For these reasons, it is essential that any changes to your trip are communicated to us as soon as possible. Please note that repeated cancellations and failures to report (no-shows) may result in suspension and/or disqualification from future use of the service.

If bad weather disrupts your trip...

Should bad weather or any other event prevent us from providing transportation to you, we will notify you at our earliest opportunity. If you are uneasy about travelling in bad weather, please contact our office at 518-822-8020 immediately.

If we have an accident or other mechanical difficulties...

Like all vehicles, ours occasionally will have a flat tire, deer strike, or a mechanical issue that can affect our service delivery. If some problem occurs prior to your trip that would disrupt it, we will notify you at the earliest opportunity. If it occurs during your trip, please know that we will deploy every resource to ensure that you are returned safely home as quickly as we can.

EXPECTATIONS, FOR BOTH OF US

We think it is important to outline our expectations—both what you can expect from us, and what we expect from you—for our partnership to be successful.

What you can expect from us...

- You can expect our office staff to be responsive, respectful, and helpful.
- You can expect that they will do everything they possibly can to schedule you for transportation services.
- You can expect your driver to be on time, respectful, and courteous.
- You can expect our vehicles to be clean, smoke/vape-free, and well-maintained.

What we expect from you...

- **Promptness.** We will let you know what time we will be picking you up, so we expect you to be ready to exit your house or a healthcare facility and get into a vehicle at that time.
- **Courtesy.** While we understand that you may not be feeling well due to illness or injury, rudeness to our drivers and/or your fellow passengers is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Furthermore, the use of foul language, sexual language, insults, racial epithets, etc. and any form of aggressive or sexual touch will result in automatic disqualification from future use of the service.
- **Communication.** We expect you to communicate with us any time you need to change or cancel a trip, or if there are any concerns that arise during your ride, at your earliest opportunity. Please also let us know if any of your personal information (address, telephone number, email address, insurance information, etc.) changes so we can update our own records accordingly.

The No-No's List

And then there are things that you really must not do. The following are a list of “no-no’s”:

- Don't schedule a trip with us before you schedule a medical appointment.
- Don't assume that we know you won't need a return trip home. We always schedule a return trip unless you advise us otherwise.
- Don't cancel a trip at the last minute when you have been aware of the need to cancel or change your trip well in advance.
- No mid-trip changes to the pickup or drop-off locations.
- No addition of stops during the trip (except as noted in the FAQs).
- No riding in the vehicle without wearing a seatbelt (both front and back seats included!)
- No eating or drinking in the vehicles.
- No smoking or vaping in the vehicles.
- No swearing at the office staff, drivers, or other riders.
- And never, ever open the vehicle door while it is in motion!

Doing any one of these things may jeopardize your future use of the service.

HOW THE SERVICE IS PAID FOR

It is a common misconception that the transportation services that CARTS provides are somehow reimbursed by private health insurance. This is not true. While it is true that we are a Certified Medicaid Transportation Provider that can be reimbursed by Medicaid for any rider that is enrolled in that public health insurance program, the vast majority of our clients have other public insurance (e.g. Medicare) or private insurance that does not compensate us for the service we provide.

Instead, every year we chase support for the program from a variety of sources, including and especially from philanthropic foundations; it is a charitable endeavor that must find its support from one year to the next.

DONATIONS

Since CARTS is a charitable endeavor operated by a charitable organization—The Healthcare Consortium—we do welcome and appreciate donations to support the ongoing operation of the program. A flyer is posted in each vehicle which suggests a donation amount based on the type and length of rides. Furthermore, drivers can provide you with a donation envelope, to which you can add a cash or check, or link to an online portal for credit card donations. Since donations are tax-deductible, in their entirety, we track them throughout the calendar year, and acknowledge them in a personalized letter to each donor in the early part of the following year.

Please note that we cannot accept donations from clients receiving Medicaid benefits.

Moreover, please know that while we greatly appreciate and even depend upon these contributions to maintain the service, we also want to stress that a rider's inability or unwillingness to make a donation will not affect the service they schedule or receive.

TIPS

We love that our riders love our drivers, but please don't tip them. Instead, please consider a donation to the program.

OTHER RECOGNITIONS

Our clients are wonderfully generous, both in spirit and in deed, and we frequently receive handwritten notes and cards thanking us for our service. We love these and save every one! Moreover, when a particular staff member is mentioned by name, these notes are copied, shared with them, and put in their file, so we can make sure to remember your special recognition. We also strongly encourage our clients to write to their Town Supervisor whenever they want to commend the service.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Can I request a certain type of vehicle?

A. Yes. We have different types of vehicles, and some work better for a person, depending on their size and mobility, than others. Although we will not guarantee that you will be assigned to a particular type of vehicle, we will make every attempt to accommodate your request.

Q. Will CARTS staff call my doctor's office and find a date/time that works for all?

A. No. CARTS staff will not make outgoing calls to doctor's offices to arrange for your appointment, nor will we schedule transportation until an appointment has been made. However, your doctor's office is welcome to contact us to see if there are dates and times for an appointment when we would be able to provide transportation to it.

Q. Can my daughter call to schedule a ride if I'm unable to do so on my own behalf?

A. Yes. Family members, friends, and service providers may contact us on your behalf.

Q. If I've been told that I can't be transported on a particular day because the schedule is full, will you put my name on a waiting list in case there are cancellations?

A. We do not maintain a waiting list. However, we will let you know about our ability to transport you to the same destination at another time, so you can contact your healthcare provider to see if they would schedule your appointment for that time instead.

Q. I have a surgical procedure scheduled and I need someone to sign me out so I can be safely discharged. Can a driver do that for me?

A. While we are happy to transport you to and from your procedure, drivers are strictly prohibited from signing you out. If this is required, you must have someone accompany you to the facility or meet you there to take responsibility for signing you out.

Q. Is it possible to stop at a pharmacy to pick up my prescription after my appointment?

A. Yes, we are happy to stop at a pharmacy for you to pick up your medication, provided that the prescription has already been ordered and the pharmacy is on the way to your residence. We cannot make detours from the assigned route for this purpose.

Q. Can I schedule a ride to a doctor's appointment that won't occur for many months?

A. Yes, our schedule fills rapidly, so we actually encourage our clients to schedule their transportation with us as soon as that healthcare appointment has been made.

Q. You state that your hours of operation are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., but my appointment is scheduled for 8:00 a.m. in Albany. Will you still transport me, even though it's earlier than you typically operate?

- A. Yes. Our cars and drivers are often on the road well before 8 a.m. so that we can transport clients to early appointments. Similarly, if an afternoon appointment extends beyond 4 p.m., we will wait for it to end and make sure you get home again.

Q. Do you transport veterans to the VA Hospital in Albany?

- A. We do not transport to the VA Hospital, as this is provided for another way. If you have an appointment at the VA Hospital, we will refer you to the VA Clinic in Greenport (phone: 518-828-3610) to schedule a ride to Albany with them. However, we can transport veterans to and from one of the pickup/drop-off locations for the VA's Albany shuttle.

Q. How do I contact my driver after my medical appointment?

- A. Each driver is assigned a cell phone and is happy to share his/her number with you. You are also welcome to contact our office at 518-822-8020 and we will contact your driver on your behalf.

Q. Can a family member come with me to my appointment?

- A. Yes. If you want or need to bring a family member, friend, aide, or other companion with you to an appointment, you may. However, since we try to match riders going to the same location in one vehicle, companions must be limited to one, and we must be made aware that they will be with you when the ride is scheduled to ensure there is adequate space in the vehicle for all.

Q. What should I do if I unexpectedly get a ride home with my daughter?

- A. If a family member unexpectedly comes to your appointment and offers to take you home, you must contact our office so we know about this change in plan and can release our driver.

HOW TO CONTACT US

Communication is key to making sure that everyone has the best experience possible. Therefore, we encourage you to contact us any time you have a question, concern, or suggestion. You may contact our office by phone at 518-822-8020 or via email.

Here are your key points of contact in the CARTS Office:

- **Jim Funk, CARTS Program Director:**
jfunk@columbiahealthnet.org
- **Marcy Wolfe, CARTS Program Coordinator:**
mwolfe@columbiahealthnet.org
- **Floyd Mink, CARTS Program Assistant:**
fmink@columbiahealthnet.org

Additionally, you are welcome to contact The Healthcare Consortium's Executive Director, Claire Parde, by phone at 518-822-8820 or via email at cparde@columbiahealthnet.org.

Finally, should you ever have a concern that warrants the attention of The Healthcare Consortium's Corporate Compliance Officer, please contact Lisa Thomas by phone at 518-822-8820 (Option 5) or via email at lthomas@columbiahealthnet.org.



**To all of our riders
—both those we have already served
and those we haven't met yet—
CARTS is pleased and proud to help
you get and stay healthy
by connecting you to care!**



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Numbers to Call for Scheduling a Ride:

Medical Answering Service (MAS):

866-883-7865

For anyone with Medicaid insurance,
call MAS and ask for us by name!

The Healthcare Consortium's Transportation Department:

518-822-8020

For anyone who is NOT enrolled in Medicaid, call us directly!