

For Your Health:

# CARTS: Connecting You to Care

Jim Funk, Transportation Program Director

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The Healthcare Consortium is a local charitable organization founded over 25 years ago to improve access to healthcare services and support the health and well-being of the residents of 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!

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 safely drive thereafter. And frankly, a reluctance 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 our neighbors connect to care is where CARTS comes in.

How do we do it? CARTS operates its own well-maintained, smoke-free fleet of 12 vehicles that includes minivans, sedans, and a multi-passenger wheelchair accessible minibus. These are driven by employed drivers who are professional, friendly, and deeply dedicated to our mission. The CARTS motto is "Our cars, our drivers, our pleasure" and we mean it!

Any Columbia County resident with a need for non-emergency medical transportation is eligible to receive this service; no other factors, like age, income, or disability, are considered when someone asks for our help. The service is door-to-door, meaning that one of our courteous and compassionate drivers will escort an individual from the threshold of their home or other pickup location to the threshold of a healthcare provider's office (anyone needing a greater level of assistance should be accompanied by a family member, friend, or aide). Our service picks up individuals from any location in Columbia County and delivers them to any location within the Twin Counties Monday through Friday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. We also provide transportation services to destinations north, such as Albany, Troy, and East Greenbush, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and to areas south and east, such as Kingston, Poughkeepsie, Pittsfield (Mass), Great Barrington (Mass), and Sharon (CT), on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Any experienced CARTS rider can tell you that the program does not require any payment from our riders for the services we provide. However, 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. Toward that end, we welcome and gladly accept donations, which often come in amounts both big and small from our riders themselves. We greatly appreciate these contributions to maintaining the service, but also want to stress that a rider's inability or unwillingness to make a donation will not affect the service they schedule or receive.

And scheduling a ride is easy! For most people, scheduling a ride may be done by calling CARTS directly at 518-822-8020. 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 longer for out-of-county trips, so contacting us as soon as you make your appointment is key to making sure we can help meet your needs.

For those enrolled in Medicaid, scheduling must be done by calling 1-866-883-7865 to confirm eligibility for transportation and receive prior authorization for the trip. During this call, people are encouraged to request our organization by its full name "The Columbia County Community Healthcare Consortium" as the preferred provider for the 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 opportunity to do so.

For 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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*The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information, visit [www.columbiahealthnet.org](http://www.columbiahealthnet.org) or call 518-822-8820.*