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Heading the list of almost every "Senior Needs Assessment" is transportation followed by affordable housing. We seem to have lost sight of the interconnectedness of these two basic needs which says something about our culture and our changing values. Job changes and varied interests have separated families geographically so that seniors and the disabled often are alone and must fend for themselves. Many turn inward, might not keep doctors' appointments or take their meds, have no transportation, no exercise, no socialization.

The pity is that within this aging population there are hundreds of productive people who are able to contribute to society, could reach senior centers for food, companionship and social services, could get to the market, to the doctor to a part time job or provide assistance to others EXCEPT for the fact that they have no dependable, accessible transportation to connect them.

To meet this need several advocacy and service organizations, Community Council and Area Agency on Aging and the Dallas Senior Affairs Commission applied for and received a grant offered by the north Texas Conference of Governments, which provided for the start of a transportation network offering door to door service to seniors and the disabled in the Dallas metroplex. We are completing the second year of the grant. The response and outpouring of interest has been phenomenal, but we are limited in reaching those in outlying areas because of cost constraints.

If there were to be state funding available to support this project and others for which it provides a model, seniors isolated in rural areas that have no hospitals or medical centers in their area could receive medical care as needed. Today, many of those populations have no transport without family or friends to get them to doctors' appointments or the nearest hospital. Often these emergency trips are further complicated by having to take circuitous routes to avoid crossing district lines into other jurisdictions.

It is time that the welfare of the people should take precedence. Yes, the downturn in the economy has wreaked havoc with both lives and state coffers, but even in the best of times Texas has consistently held the unenviable position as the state which provides the least funding for its seniors such as in APS and for its children in Schip. Even the surcharge to which all Texans contribute intended as a dedicated fund to assist seniors in utility payments is diverted to the general fund and used as general revenue. This is wrong!

Senior services need your support. Please consider them in your budget recommendations.

Thank you.