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## NC Looks Ripe for Medical Transport from Lyft

September 23, 2020 By [Kevin LaTorre](#)

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Who needs a ride to a medical appointment? Enough people for Lyft (the ride-sharing company) to devote a fleet of cars to them. But could Lyft medical transport work in North Carolina?

### Lyft Expanded to Medical Transports for Both Patients and Providers

You might've caught [our look into healthcare equity](#) from earlier this month. But this second glimpse into how hospitals and providers can reach more communities has to do with literally reaching them. As in, patients physically reaching their appointments.

On Sept. 10, STATNews hosted the 2020 Digital Health Summit, which presented tech leaders' insight into what digital healthcare looks like now and how it'll change in the near future. Lyft's VP of Healthcare Megan Callahan joined journalist Erin Brodwin to discuss what the ride-sharing company does to get patients to hospitals and clinics, and how it supports overall health outcomes.

## **Lyft serves patients by partnering with medical systems and insurance providers.**

“What we’ve created is a business-to-business platform,” Callahan said, “and that business-to-business platform allows for a ride to be called on behalf of a patient or member without them having to use the Lyft app.” The ride-sharing company partners with healthcare systems and insurance providers to transport their patients and members. If you have a plan from one of Lyft’s partners, you receive the ride-share as a benefit. “[Partners] arrange the ride for the member,” Callahan said, “and they pay for the ride.”

Though the company only added [Lyft Healthcare](#) in 2016, its plans aim high. Callahan explained that their goal is “to really solve the problem of access to care. Four million people in the United States can’t physically get to their

Image courtesy of [Lyft](#).

appointments.” Most often, those people without medical transports tend to be disproportionately poorer, older people of color. “We see a huge applicability of ride-share,” Callahan said, “an on-demand model that is incredibly convenient, fast and responsive.”

## **Ride shares can shrink gaps in healthcare access, she said.**

Before anything else, patients need the chance to actually make their visits. “There is a correlation between just physically being able to get to something,” Callahan said, “and impact on health outcomes.” She referenced research which found that “access to transportation increases your likelihood of not ending up in the emergency department and not ending up in multiple days of in-patient visits.” For those disadvantaged groups Callahan named, better chances at improved health outcomes are crucial. But, she reiterated, transport is their first step.

## **Improved ride-share options also improve outcomes for healthcare providers.**

“When these organizations are paying for transportation,” Callahan said, “the benefits coming back to them and their members are substantial.” Which benefits, exactly?

Patient satisfaction, for one. If you use a medical transport, many options require you to share a van with multiple other people. And ahead of the ride, you may have to wait two to three hours. Your time wasted waiting could cause you to skip the visit altogether. And if your visit was preventative, you’ve now taken a step back in your future health. Callahan explained that Lyft cuts down on the wait, shrinks the number of passengers and often gives a more direct route.

Also add in that regular, feasible preventive visits save healthcare providers future costs. If you can reliably receive care ahead of time, you’ll likely avoid more serious (and preventable) illnesses. Callahan named decreased emergency room usage and fewer ambulances used as two of many cost-saving benefits. Her point? Not only do Lyft medical transports improve patients’ access to care – they also save resources for healthcare systems as well.

## What About Lyft in NC?

Lyft didn't respond to our questions about any partners in our state. Their [current partners](#) are mostly healthcare systems and organizations out west. But our current Lyft presence, healthcare industry and commitment to healthcare equity could make North Carolina ripe for Lyft medical transport.

If you need a Lyft ride in NC, you can already find options for the [Raleigh-Durham](#), [Charlotte](#) and [Greensboro](#) areas. Add in substantial healthcare systems (Cone Health, Atrium Health and the UNC system) and insurers (BlueCross BlueShield, Cigna and others), and possible partners are already entrenched. And our hospitals [have already shown](#) they lead the pack on healthcare equity.

If Lyft expands its medical transport services, North Carolina would make a good host. We have the coverage, clients and interest in its mission of medical equity and improved healthcare outcomes.

If you're interested in learning more about healthcare news in North Carolina, please visit our [Health section](#).

Image courtesy of [Lyft](#).

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Kevin serves as the associate editor for North Carolina News Daily. He is also a graduate student living in the Triangle Area of North Carolina. He graduated from the Univ. of Texas – Austin with an English degree in 2019, going from there to study strategic communications at the Univ. of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. He received the 2020 Kathryn M. Cronin Scholarship for health and medical journalism.

Though he writes and edits media and health news for NCND, his background includes substance abuse articles, medical marketing advice and public relations campaigns for a variety of brands. You can follow Kevin at @KLaTorre\_Writer.

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