

Understanding Transportation Brokers: A Guide for Community and Advocacy Organizations

Helping people navigate non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT)

Why this matters for community and advocacy organizations

Community-based organizations, advocates, and care navigators often help people:

- Get to medical appointments
- Understand transportation options
- Resolve problems when rides do not work as planned

In many healthcare programs, transportation is coordinated through a broker. Understanding how brokers operate—and what limits their role—helps you better support the people you serve.

What a transportation broker does

In regulated healthcare programs, such as Medicaid and managed care, a broker is responsible for:

- Arranging transportation to covered medical services
- Making sure rides are available when needed
- Assigning trips to approved transportation providers
- Following safety, accessibility, and program rules

The broker typically:

- Does not own vehicles
- Does not employ drivers
- Works with a network of transportation providers

Why understanding the broker's role matters for advocates

Advocacy organizations are often asked:

- “Why can’t I get a ride with the same company every time?”
- “Why did they change my ride?”
- “Why does the answer change depending on who I talk to?”

These questions usually come down to program rules, not individual decisions. A broker’s flexibility is often limited by the specific program paying for the ride, including that program’s rules for provider selection, ride type, documentation, and oversight.

What a transportation “network” means

A network is a group of transportation providers approved to deliver rides for a specific healthcare program.

Providers in a network must:

- Meet licensing and safety requirements
- Carry required insurance
- Train drivers
- Agree to program rules

Only network providers can receive trip assignments through a broker.

How rides are assigned—and where advocacy can help

When a ride is scheduled, the broker:

- Reviews location, timing, and transportation needs
- Identifies network providers that can serve the trip
- Assigns the trip to a provider that accepts it

In some situations, provider or driver preference may be considered, such as when:

- Continuity helps with communication or comfort
- A provider regularly serves a specific facility or route

However, preference:

- Is not guaranteed
- Cannot override program requirements

Advocates can help by:

- Making sure needs are clearly communicated
- Helping people explain accessibility or functional requirements
- Asking what options exist under the specific program

Choosing the right kind of ride

Brokers must follow rules that require them to:

- Match the ride to the person's needs
- Use higher-cost ride options only when they are necessary
- Document decisions for oversight

This framework exists to help ensure:

- Fair access
- Program sustainability
- Compliance with public funding rules

It does not mean:

- Needs are ignored
- Safety can be compromised

A simple example: same company, different funding, different rules

Here is a common example.

A rider may call the same transportation company twice in one month and get two different answers.

In the first situation, the ride is being arranged through the person's Medicaid transportation benefit. The broker must follow Medicaid program rules, use approved network providers, and make decisions based on what type of ride the program allows and what documentation is required.

In the second situation, the same company may be helping coordinate a ride paid for directly by a clinic, community program, or other non-Medicaid source. In that case, the rules may be different, the provider options may be broader, and the process may be more flexible.

To the rider or advocate, it may feel like the company is being inconsistent. In reality, the same company may be operating under different rules because a different program is paying for the ride.

Why the same company may act differently at different times

Community organizations often notice that:

- The same broker gives different answers in different situations
- One ride is handled flexibly, while another is more rigid

This usually happens because different programs are paying for the ride.

Even when the same company is involved, the rules can change based on the funding source.

That can affect:

- Scheduling
- Provider selection
- Shared rides
- Documentation
- Complaint processes

Understanding this helps advocates explain that what looks like inconsistency is often the result of different program rules rather than arbitrary decision-making.

What does not change

Regardless of funding source, brokers must:

- Follow safety and accessibility requirements
- Use approved transportation providers where required
- Accept and track concerns
- Provide ways to report problems

Advocates can always ask:

- Which program is paying for this ride?
- What options are available under that program?
- What is the escalation process if there is a problem?

Complaints, concerns, and advocacy support

Brokers are required to:

- Accept complaints
- Track and review issues
- Participate in grievance and appeal processes

Community organizations can help by:

- Documenting issues clearly
- Helping individuals report concerns
- Following up on outcomes
- Escalating when patterns emerge

These systems are designed to protect access and improve service.

What this guide is—and is not

This guide:

- Explains how transportation brokers operate
- Helps advocates set realistic expectations
- Supports informed problem-solving

This guide does not:

- Change program rules
- Guarantee specific outcomes
- Replace formal grievance processes

Want to learn more?

This overview is based on a detailed Broker Guidance Document that explains:

- Broker authority and obligations

- Differences between regulated and non-regulated coordination
- Oversight and accountability requirements

Most advocacy organizations do not need the full document day to day, but it is available as a reference when deeper context is helpful.

Final takeaway

Transportation brokers play a key role in connecting people to care, but they operate within program rules tied to funding and oversight.

That means the same company may handle two rides differently when different programs are paying for them. A broker's flexibility is often limited by the specific rules of the program involved, not simply by preference or convenience.

Community and advocacy organizations are critical partners in helping people understand those rules, communicate needs clearly, and navigate challenges more effectively.

