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NEWS RELEASE

Volunteer Drivers Hold the Key to Helping Older Adults Maintain Their Independence

(Duluth, MN)— Throughout Minnesota we are experiencing an unprecedented shift in the age of our overall population. 2020 marked the year where we have more people aged 65+ than children 18 and under. By 2030, 1 in 5 Minnesotans will be 65+. Many older adults age out of the ability to drive safely, about 600,000 people nationwide each year (NADTC) and they will need to find viable alternatives to get to medical appointments, grocery stores, and community or family social functions. Alternative transportation options are imperative to keep people living at a home and in their communities, where they want to be!

Options for transportation other than a personal vehicle are slim, especially in rural Minnesota. Many members of our communities rely on volunteer driver programs as their main source of transportation. In addition to providing a safe ride, these volunteers provide important social interactions and address social isolation by helping riders stay engaged in their community. Several transportation agencies in our region offer volunteer driver programs and need volunteers to fill the role. Most volunteer driver programs offer a modest expense reimbursement.

The majority of volunteer drivers' passengers are older adults and persons with disabilities, and demand for rider services will grow along with changing age demographics. In addition, there is a higher percentage of people with disabilities in rural counties, and lower median household incomes, which means that some families only have one vehicle or none at all. According to The Minnesota Center for Rural Policy and Development, in 2010 a little over 50% of transit riders in Greater Minnesota reported not having either a car or a driver's license.

Volunteer driver programs save money and directly impact health. According to a 2017 report released by the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, each volunteer driver's round-trip can save a county on average \$18 to \$185 depending on trip length and the type of alternative services available.

Access to transportation has a direct impact on access to healthcare, with the American Hospital Association estimating that 3.6 million people in the United States do not obtain essential medical care due to transportation issues.

To learn more about becoming a volunteer driver in your community, visit arrowheadrtcc.org/volunteerdrivers, find us on Facebook at facebook.com/ArrowheadRTCC or call **xxx-xxx-xxx**