

"For many members of the Yakama Nation, transportation challenges significantly impact access to essential healthcare services, a critical component of overall well-being. One such challenge is the inaccessibility of the nearest Amtrak station, located in the Tri-Cities, roughly 85 miles away—a drive that takes over an hour and 20 minutes from the reservation. While public transportation like Amtrak is often considered a means to increase access to healthcare services, this is not the case for residents of the Yakama Nation Reservation.

This lack of accessible rail transport creates a serious health disparity for our community in the following ways:

1. **Limited Access to Healthcare:** *Many Tribal members need specialized healthcare services that may only be available in larger cities. Without reliable, accessible public transportation, members must rely on personal vehicles or finding a ride, which poses a barrier for those without these resources. This can lead to missed medical appointments, delayed treatments, and overall poorer health outcomes.*
2. **Increased Financial Burden:** *For those without access to a vehicle, the cost of arranging transportation to the Tri-Cities Amtrak station or directly to healthcare appointments in distant cities is a significant financial burden. Gas, rideshares, or hiring transportation services add to the cost of seeking care, further increasing economic strain on Tribal members already facing economic challenges.*
3. **Time Constraints and Fatigue:** *Even if transportation is available, the time required for long-distance travel can be prohibitive. An hour and 20 minutes to reach the Amtrak station, followed by a train ride, and possibly more transit to reach medical centers, makes healthcare access a day-long event. This causes fatigue and difficulty, especially for elders or those with chronic conditions, making it less likely they will seek necessary care.*
4. **Inequity in Health Access:** *For many urban areas, access to healthcare through public transportation is far more straightforward. The disparity in transport options for Tribal members compared to non-Native populations in nearby cities leads to unequal access to healthcare. This reinforces a cycle of health inequity, where our community continues to face poorer health outcomes simply due to logistical barriers that others do not encounter.*

In order to truly improve healthcare access for Yakama Nation Tribal members, transportation barriers must be addressed. Accessible public transport options or local services need to be developed so that members can attend medical appointments without facing undue hardships. Without this, efforts to increase healthcare access remain incomplete, and our community will continue to experience this avoidable health disparity..."

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