

# JFS Patient Navigator

## Enhanced Medical Escort Program: Volunteers providing transportation to medical appointments with social support for frail elders

Jewish Family Service  
of MetroWest



### The Need

Going to the doctor alone can be stressful, overwhelming, and/or confusing. Older patients may have problems with vision, hearing, and memory as well as cognitive impairment or other physical difficulties which can impede treatment adherence. Also, older patients ask fewer questions and defer to physician's authority more than younger patients which can also impact health outcomes. These realities pose a significant challenge to treatment compliance among older adults and studies show that only 15% of older patients fully understand what their doctors tell them and 50% leave their doctors' offices uncertain about what they need to do to care for themselves.

Another issue for many older patients is transportation. For those who no longer drive or who have driving restrictions, accessing medical care can be extremely difficult. Studies have shown that 9-12% of older adults report they are unable to get medical care consistently due to transportation or distance. Other factors that can lead to missed appointments are stress, forgetfulness, and finances. For older patients that have chronic or multiple medical conditions, missing appointments can contribute to declining health outcomes. Together, these factors impact not only patient outcomes, but also the overall cost of healthcare. One report found that the provision of non-emergency medical transportation results in a net cost savings across the transportation and health care domains for heart disease and diabetes. These analyses take into account increased life expectancy and improved quality of life and indicate that the provision of additional transportation is worth the investment for these conditions. Also, patients that miss appointments increase office waiting times and the overall cost of operations for all patients.

The JFS Patient Navigator program addresses these issues by enlisting volunteers to provide transportation to medical appointments with social support for frail older adults. These trained volunteers support older adults who live alone and also provide respite for family caregivers by taking their place within the consultation room and reporting back after the encounter. It is projected that by the year 2030, 30% of older adults aged 65+ will live alone; all signs suggest that living alone will become even more common in the future and at every stage of adulthood. The JFS Patient Navigator program is positioned to support the healthy aging of this population.

### Program Design

Launched in April 2012, the JFS Patient Navigator program serves frail older adults living in Framingham and the Metrowest region who need extra support with and transportation to medical appointments. The typical client is a 77 year old woman who lives alone and has a daughter who works full time.

All volunteers are carefully selected and trained. Training covers topics related to confidentiality, HIPAA regulations, aging, communications, accessing healthcare, and documentation.



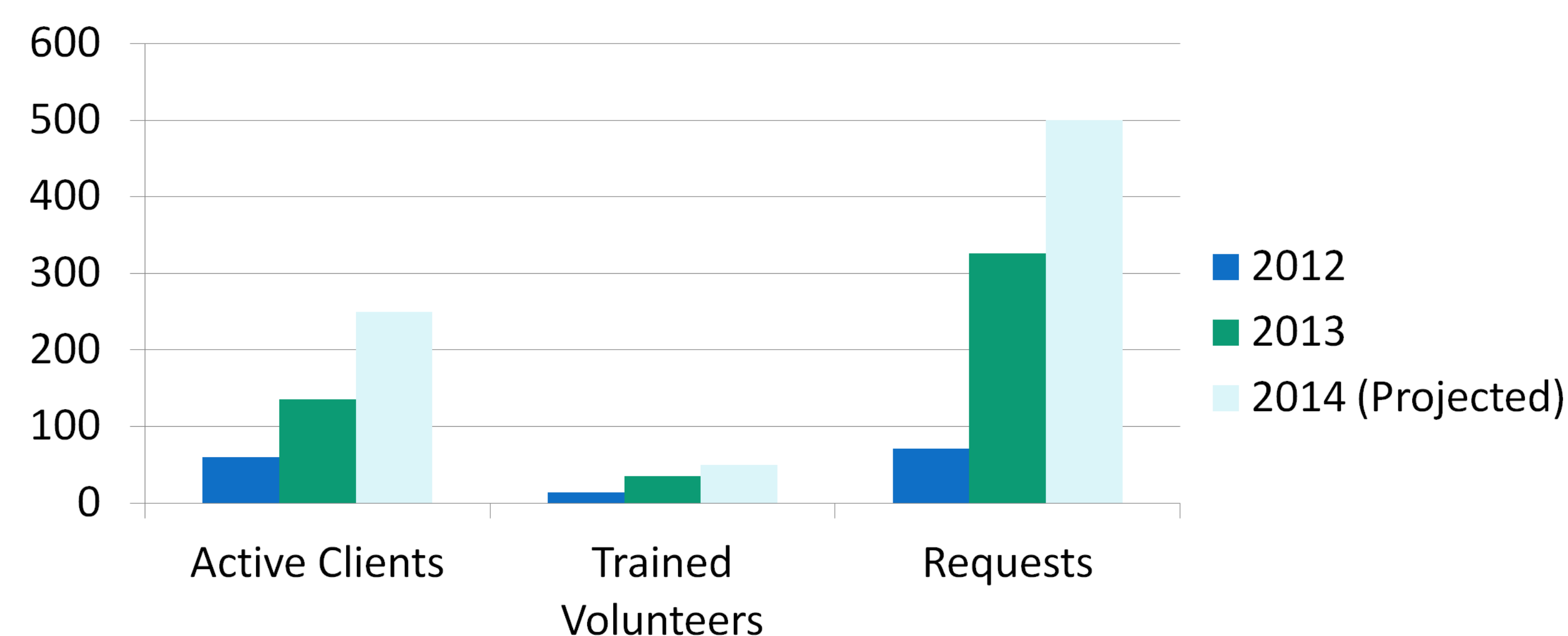
JFS Patient Navigator Volunteers

To access the service, clients call the program to request a Patient Navigator and staff manages client requests. Patient Navigators use an online interface to accept assignments that match their availability. After accepting an assignment, the Patient Navigator conducts a pre-appointment interview with the client. The day of the appointment, the Patient Navigator escorts the client to the appointment, takes notes during the consultation, encourages the client to self-advocate, and provides the client with a written summary of the encounter before escorting the client home. The Patient Navigator often picks up prescriptions and makes sure a follow-up appointment is made.

The program has made significant strides in systematizing and streamlining the referral, intake, assignment, and tracking processes in order to increase efficiency and reduce the cost of service. The addition of paid Navigators has increased the reliability of the service. Also, increased funding has enabled the program to expand its service area to include Marlboro and Natick and provide services to the local Mandarin-speaking community.

### Results

At the close of 2013, the program included 132 active clients, 35 trained volunteers, and had received 326 requests from clients. Average growth in these areas from the prior year is 74%. Given these trends and the anticipated demand for the service over the next year, it is expected that by the end of 2014 the program will impact 250 clients, train 25 new volunteers, and manage over 500 new client requests.



### Conclusion

*I am 97 years old and I want to be as independent as possible. My neighbor told me about JFS' enhanced medical escort service and I called them for the first time in December. I have had 10 medical appointments since then. They contact me before the visit, pick me up, and help me in the visit if I need it and even send a report to my son. I don't want to be a burden and it gives me peace of mind that he doesn't have to miss work, yet I don't have to be alone.*  
- ES, a Patient Navigator Client



Providing Social Support, Transportation, Access to Healthcare

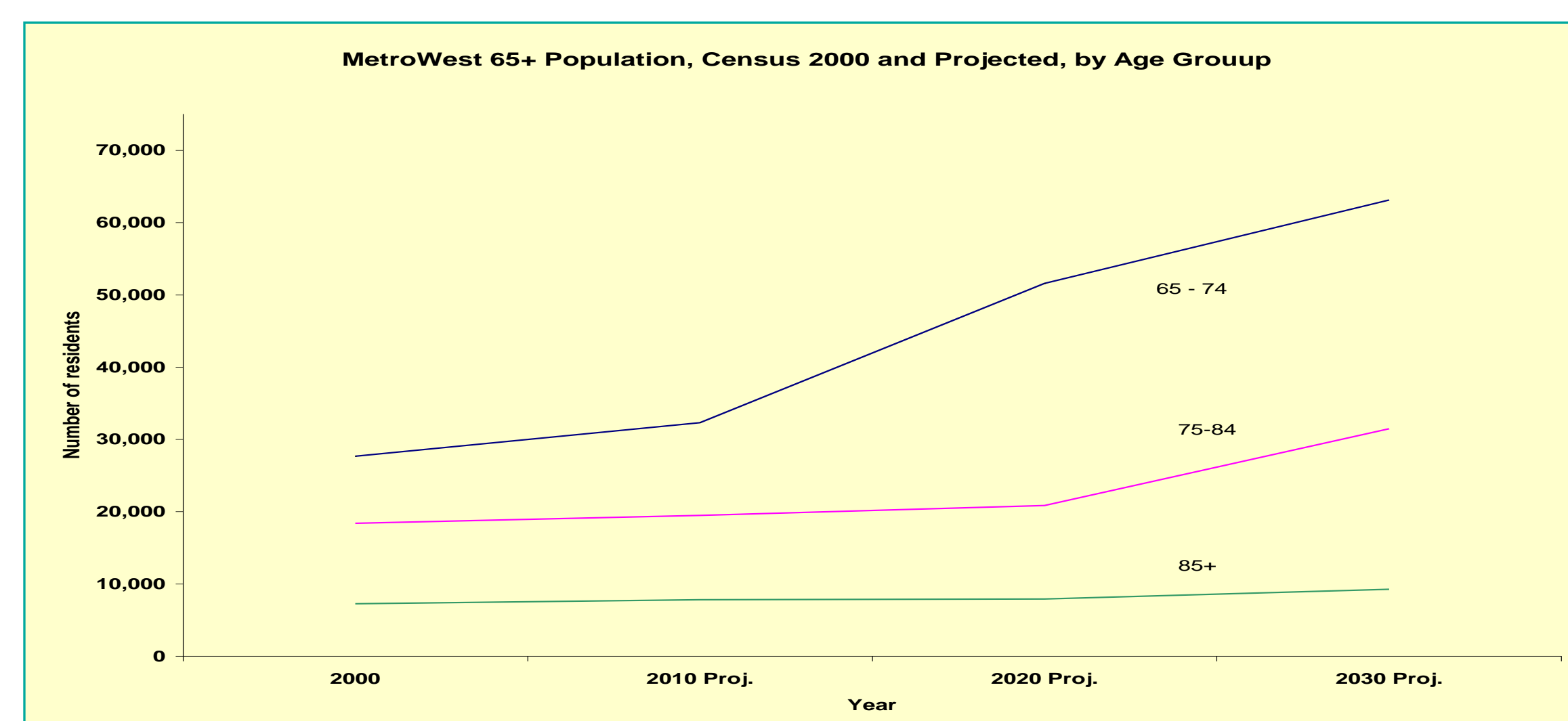
As the population ages and the healthcare system works to control rising costs, innovative solutions like the JFS Patient Navigator program are necessary to improve treatment compliance, reduce missed appointments, and provide vital support to frail older adults. The rapid growth of the program and projected population trends demonstrate an increasing demand for the service. As lessons are learned and strategies to increase program efficiency are implemented, it is expected that the JFS Patient Navigator program will emerge as a crucial and cost-effective solution that meets the needs of aging adults and lowers the overall cost of healthcare in Metrowest.

### References

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