

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT KALGOORLIE
TUESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION THREE

Members

Hon Liz Behjat (Chairman)
Hon Darren West (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Nigel Hallett
Hon Jacqui Boydell
Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson

Hearing commenced at 12.10 pm**Mr JOHN BRAVEN, sworn and examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: John, you were sitting in the room while we were doing that process, and we need to put you through the same process so that we then have your evidence on the Hansard record. I ask you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: Are you just appearing here today as a private witness?

Mr Braven: As a private witness, yes, and on behalf of all persons who are in the same boat, I suppose, to be fair, being a very shy person.

The CHAIRMAN: You signed a document titled “Information for Witnesses”. Did you read that document and understand it before you signed it?

Mr Braven: Yes, I did.

The CHAIRMAN: The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you. To assist the committee and Hansard, please quote the full title of any document that you are going to refer to during the course of the hearing. Be aware of the microphone that is there near you, and try to speak into it, and do not cover it with any papers. Your transcript will become a matter for the public record. If there is something that you want to say to us as a committee in private, and you are not happy to talk about it in front of the public gallery, you need to make us aware of that. We will consider your request and, if we accept that request, we will go into a closed session and any members of the public or media will be excluded from the hearing. So, just be aware of that. Please note that until such time as the transcript of your public evidence is finalised, it should not be made public. I advise you that publication or disclosure of the uncorrected transcript of evidence may constitute a contempt of Parliament and may mean that the material published or disclosed is not subject to parliamentary privilege. That is the formal part of it, John. Were you in the room when I introduced my committee members?

Mr Braven: I was indeed.

The CHAIRMAN: So you are aware of who we all are, and we now know who you are. The best thing is: tell us your PATS story.

Mr Braven: With respect, Madam Chair, and all the honourable people that are here, PATS is the greatest thing that ever happened to persons who do not live within a bus ride of Perth, or any other major centre, where your local hospitals cannot provide the medical attention that you require, either urgently or as a foreseeable thing. It is the greatest thing that ever happened. However, there are situations where people are caught in a very awkward situation where the PAT scheme not only does not assist them, but mentally or physically can make them worse. There is a peculiar situation where, when I first started going to Perth some eight years ago now for an operation for a tumour, I went down for an examination, then I went back for an operation, and went every three months, and then every six months over a period. I was treated with the greatest respect by my doctor, and I still am, and by the PATS association in Kalgoorlie. My doctor decided he did not particularly want me to drive to Perth. I said, “Why not? I can do that”, but he did not like the idea. I have had my collarbone removed and all this stuff here, and he did not want that to happen. I decided I would go on the train. Having said that I travelled down to Perth on the train, and I will explain that I used to live in Perth some 45-odd years ago so I know Perth, generally. You get caught with your right-turn arrow on the road, which you do not know is there.

The CHAIRMAN: So do we!

Mr Braven: However, it is one of those peculiarities. Because I know Perth, and some people do, when you get off a train at Midland, the Perth railway station, or wherever you decide you need to get off to continue your trip, life can be reasonably easy. You have got other things, but the transport itself, to get into and from and return, can be reasonably easy. To go by train to come onto Perth station, and be physically fit enough, to walk over to St Georges Terrace and to know where to get a bus to go down to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; and from there to know that you can get off a little bit earlier or walk through the hospital, the first couple of times you go to Crawford Lodge, is very easy. I may say that in Crawford Lodge and also Milroy Lodge you are treated with the greatest respect—as a member of their family, not as a sick person; you are treated as a member of their family. I mean that sincerely, and I do not believe anybody will ever tell you different.

The difficult part is that for persons who have never been to Perth and do not know their way around—you may find this is ridiculous, but actually people who are new to Perth never do—you get off a train, if you go by train, how on earth are you going to get to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital? What we did some time ago was got this wonderful couple of things given to us by the local authorities here called a taxi voucher. You got into a taxi, you told the driver you had a taxi voucher or they would ask you, because they got to know about it—I used to be a taxidriver years ago—and the drive down to Crawford Lodge would be \$35 to \$45, depending on traffic. When taxi vouchers stopped and you did not have a taxi voucher, that would run anywhere between \$65 and \$75 for the same trip; I am saying this on record.

If you happened to go to Milroy Lodge, which is out at Shenton Park—I came to Australia in 1963 and I recall that Shenton Park was the dogs' home. Why? Because it was so far out of town that you could not hear the dogs howling and screaming all night. Milroy Lodge is out there, obviously, because reasonably it is not too expensive to build a property like that out there. I am not silly; I do understand money is money. But if you happened to be at Milroy Lodge— if I may, from PATS' own documents off the internet, there is a gorgeous picture on the front of a little suitcase and a road winding off into the bush. That is like going to Milroy Lodge, because if you know how to get there, even getting off at the end of the road, it is about a 300 to 350-metre walk along the bitumen and up the hill to get there. Please do not misunderstand me, but if you happen to be rather unwell or if you are rather old and unwell, as many people are getting into their 60s, 70s, and 80s in particular and have to go down for treatment or for investigations, that is one horrendous thing, even if you know what you are doing, to get to Subiaco. If I go by train, I get off at Subiaco station, I walk about two kilometres down through Subiaco to a main intersection where there is a BP service station and the council chambers and catch a bus there to take me out towards Milroy Lodge. You get off at the end of the road—because that is the end of the story—and you walk up to it. I know, because I have seen this. People who live in the houses that have been built on that piece of road have actually seen old people—I have seen it happen—they have come out of their properties and said, “Excuse me, hang on a bit” and they have got a vehicle out and taken them up to Milroy Lodge, because they care. Please do not misunderstand me, PATS does not care: “You get to Perth, you get your medical treatment; you get how much paid for, what is your problem?” The problem is that by the time you get to where you are going, you are a damn sight more sick than when you set off. After you have been through MRIs, CAT scans and/or whatever at Charlie Gairdner, you are treated like an absolute one-legged pup again. Even at Charlies you are part of the family. You go back when you are feeling unwell and know that if you are lucky you can catch the free transport from Milroy Lodge into town; you can catch the free transport from Crawford into town, or you can walk up and get a bus if you know where to go. But you are not feeling well and you are trying to get to the airport, and/or the train station—not well at all—and you do not have a little docket to give to a taxidriver to say, “Please take me, I've got a plane to catch at this time, or a train.”

[12.20 pm]

As I understand it—I am an ordinary person here—this stuff is supported by royalties for regions. In my opinion, that means that those very, very, very brave gentlemen who came here over a hundred years ago who were doing such a good job here they actually brought their water up on camels in sheep and goatskins—I was an engineer until they closed them down—and C.Y. O'Connor had a fantastic idea to put water up here so these people could live. Now, all these years afterwards, descendants and/or people who have come here to work and/or live in Western Australia and out in our major country areas, in what used to be the City of Boulder became the largest municipal section in the world—three and a half times the size of Texas, and I was a councillor once many years ago—now we have people that PATS is saying, “You are sick, you need assistance, you need to go to Perth.” We do not have their assistance in Kalgoorlie, certainly not in Leonora, Laverton, Leinster or wherever. It is not even available in Kalgoorlie; you cannot have it done here. Years ago it was going to be—it is not. There is a massive cost involved in setting up MRI CAT scans. We understand these things.

I had a terrible situation some two and a half years ago in church one Sunday when they called us all together for an old couple—I can say that as I have grey hair now—who had over \$3 500 of bills for going to Perth over the last 10 to 12 months. They had seen a doctor in Kalgoorlie who had said this lady needed treatment in Perth—“You must go.” It was a new doctor in town. After this happened I went and spoke to the gentleman as a friend. He went and got his girl to go through the records, pulled this thing out and literally went almost black in front of me and said, “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know.” He knew nothing about the PAT scheme, except that these people had to go to Perth to be treated.

The CHAIRMAN: So that was two and a half years ago?

Mr Braven: Yes. He did not know. So he said to these people the best thing to do. They rang the hospital and spoke to somebody who was in charge—the PATS office or whatever it was, which I believe is at the hospital—and were told, “If you haven’t got a docket from your doctor, the best thing you can do is keep your receipts and get the document signed by your doctors in Perth. When you come back, bring your receipts in.” They did. Being a little bit brought up that way over the years they kept the receipts for a period of time and then took them all in nicely—I think at the end of the financial year or whatever—and were told, “You’ve got to be joking! What’s this? Pardon!” They had a battle, but they did get them paid. It took a bit of doing but it was honoured. Some very shy people went and had some discussions and it was nicely fixed; however, as I understand it, as of this moment and some short while ago when I rang the number on this form for Kalgoorlie, taxi vouchers are no longer available. I was told two years ago by the PATS office in Perth that taxi vouchers had not been stopped. Somebody is telling me stories—I do not know who.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not know what your experience has been with that phone call that you made, but certainly on the PATS application form there is a section that is filled out by the referring GP and the question is: does the patient’s medical condition warrant the provision of taxi vouchers—yes or no?

Mr Braven: I fully agree with you.

The CHAIRMAN: My understanding is that the doctor completes that, and it might be that the PATS people would sometimes question that, but from what we understand, there certainly is still a taxi voucher system.

Mr Braven: With respect, ma’am, and being under oath and being recorded, if I am wrong, I sincerely apologise to all concerned, but I have been told many times over the last two to three years at least that taxi vouchers are not available; they have been cancelled. Not, “You can’t have one”, or, “Your doctor signs the form”—they are no longer available. If I am wrong—if anybody else know that—you cannot get a taxi voucher.

The CHAIRMAN: That is information that has been given to you by the PATS service at Kalgoorlie Hospital?

Mr Braven: Yes, and I got that less than an hour ago. The situation, as I said, particularly if you go to Milroy Lodge and you do not know your way around Perth, Milroy Lodge is like taking a quick trip to Texas or something; you have no idea where you are, and people in Perth—I know this, because I have done it on purpose—I have asked them how to get to Milroy Lodge. I have asked people in Subiaco, and they do not know; they have never heard of it.

The CHAIRMAN: I am assuming that over the time that you have accessed the service, at one point you are given taxi vouchers, and then you get a bit further down the road in your treatment and it would seem that the doctor has then said, “This man is at a stage that he still needs to go and have that treatment, but the situation doesn’t warrant that he needs taxi vouchers.” This is what I am thinking is the process of thought that would have gone into that. Were you made aware at any stage when they said to you, “No, John, you don’t qualify for taxi vouchers”, that there was an appeal process that you could go through for that?

Mr Braven: No, ma’am, and if I may explain, when our doctor filled out our form to go down for PATS treatment, we then went to the hospital, told them where we were going and the dates of our appointments, and we were given taxi vouchers by the lady at the hospital to go from the airport or the train station and back again—use that to go in, apply for it, and go in another two or three hours later or whatever and pick up your actual documents. We never had to have documents signed by the doctor to say we needed taxi vouchers. We needed transport but not taxi vouchers. Suddenly—again, if I am wrong, I apologise—but that lady, from memory, left that position and somebody else took over the position, and we were told that taxi vouchers were no longer available. I asked my doctor and he said, “I’m sorry; taxi vouchers are not available.”

The CHAIRMAN: Your doctor is telling you that they are not available.

Mr Braven: No, the hospital people are telling us. I said, “I’ve got less than an hour—about an hour and a half here now.” “Sorry; taxi vouchers are no longer available”. Not, “You can appeal”, not, “You can make an application”, not, “You can come in here and cry and roll on the floor.” It was, “You will not get taxi vouchers.” Now, to be fair, even younger people—but if you go to Perth and you do not know your way, you do not know how to get to Charlie Gairdner. I mean, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, for goodness sake, it has been there a very long time. I took somebody there in 1962, would you believe, when they were ill. They were next door to me, and I picked them up and took them down there. But, to be fair, for people who do not know it, Perth is another country. It is a massive city; you are lost. The taxi voucher—to get off the train or the plane and hand your taxi voucher in, because your doctor has decided you must not drive, that is fantastic. The taxidriver takes you to exactly where you want to go. But refused, absolutely refused.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, I understand. John, I think that evidence you have given us is very useful and we will certainly use that in our deliberations. As I said, this is not an opportunity for us to say to you, “This is what’s wrong with the system”, or whatever; it is just for us to gather that evidence and to let people know what is happening in the system. I do appreciate you taking the time today to come and speak with us, and best of luck.

Mr Braven: May I say with respect, thank you for listening, and may I also say I am speaking on behalf of people I have not even asked, but I have lived here for a very, very, very long time—everybody knows me in this place—and they are saying, “You fix the taxi voucher problem, getting from where you arrive to the hospital and back again, PATS is again the finest system on this planet.”

The CHAIRMAN: What about, alternatively to a taxi voucher system, if there was a scheme in place where we knew that you were coming to Perth and it was arranged that there would be someone there to meet and greet you to take you to Milroy Lodge or Crawford Lodge?

Mr Braven: Absolutely fantastic.

The CHAIRMAN: Perhaps that might be another alternative.

Mr Braven: I swear, if I win Lotto, I will put someone on salary at Milroy Lodge to do exactly that! I mean that. Honestly, because people are mentally ill, they do not know if this lump inside is something they have eaten; they do not know if they are going to die in six months; they have no idea. They have left home, and getting from there to there in the city, they do not know where they are, and terrible things happen to people in cities these days, unfortunately. Thank you for your patience. I appreciate it. I mean that.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you so much for coming today. We are just going to give somebody else an opportunity to tell us their story. Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 12.28 pm
