

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT CARNARVON
FRIDAY, 29 AUGUST 2014**

SESSION EIGHT

Members

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

Hearing commenced at 2.56 pm**Ms PENELOPE WALKER****sworn and examined:****The CHAIRMAN:** We are all ready. Please take the oath or affirmation.

[Witness took the oath.]

The CHAIRMAN: Are you happy if I call you Penelope or Penny?**Ms Walker:** Penny for short.**The CHAIRMAN:** Okay. I am Liz, and you heard me introduce my colleagues Nigel and Jacqui before. Penelope, there was a whole screed of things that I went through in relation to the witnesses. You signed a document that you agreed to be a witness for us today. Were you happy to sign that document and understood what you were signing?**Ms Walker:** Yes.**The CHAIRMAN:** You know that the lady down there is taking a recording of the hearing and a copy of what you said will be sent to you so that you can make sure that it is okay and that it is all fine. It will become a matter for the public record, but you are happy for that to take place.**Ms Walker:** Yes, that will be okay.**The CHAIRMAN:** That is terrific. We can dispense with the rest of that, because you have been here for all of those and you know how we are dealing with it.

Penny, why don't you tell us about your PATS story?

Ms Walker: I go down twice a year—a check-up for my heart. I have an echo heart, and my grandson, he comes down with me. I am a full care carer. I have got a membership there. I am a full carer for Ashley and when he is sick, I go down with him. I am an escort for him and he also escorts for me. We go down by PAT—the PAT scheme papers and that. I go on the plane because I have got a hip replacement and I also have a walker, so they put me on the plane—me and my grandson. Sometimes I go to Geraldton and the specialist come up from Perth to Geraldton and I see the doctor there. Now, we get a PATS form from Carnarvon to Geraldton, a taxi voucher to the accommodation, the accommodation taxi voucher to the hospital, and a taxi voucher back to the accommodation, and the accommodation taxi voucher to the airport. Now, the Skippers is our plane and sometimes they travel twice a week and sometimes they are late. We were down there in Geraldton and the plane had to turn around in midair because there was a bit of a faultage in the engine and we never got on the plane until about nine or 10. The accommodation where I was staying in Geraldton, that was at the RSL and the PATS forms they pay for the beds only, so if you are going down like today, the PATS will say, “Well, you have got tonight and tomorrow night to camp there and then you have got to come back.” So, if you are going down there early, you have not got the money because it is not my pay week this week, my pension, and we have no money. So, we go down on the PATS form and at the RSL place there they have got disability people living there. Well, we are just the patients and we do not get a feed there because we are not local. So, we have to have money to walk down to the shop to buy a pie or a cool drink or something. So, you stay there with nothing, and sometimes the staff, they see you with nothing, you know, they are all eating in the kitchen and everywhere, and they come along with a plate or something, a chop or a spud, and they will sort of, you know, feed you, more or less, and then you just sort of stay there until it is time for you to leave there.

[3.00 pm]

Now, there is an Aboriginal accommodation, the Boomerang, and that has got local Aboriginals there, but I think they are permanently there staying, and sometimes you have got appointments for doctors' appointments and things there, and that is always full, so you cannot stay there, so they send you down to RSL. That is one part of it. And now going down to Perth for my heart again, I get on the plane—me and my grandson—and we go to Perth. There are two places down there where you can go. They will ask you at the hospital where you want to camp or which hostel you want to go to, and, well, I come from Perth. I left there in 1969 and I have been up here all that time, and Perth has changed and the people I know are all passed on, so you have got nowhere to go, so you just follow whatever they say. Well, Jewell House—talking about Jewell House. Well, from the airport to Jewell House, the taxi voucher—and you have got to have \$20 to get in to get a bed. So, you give them \$20 and then they give you a room with—what do you call that thing?

The CHAIRMAN: Bunk beds?

Ms Walker: No.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Stairs?

Ms Walker: No. All rooms and that —

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Like a dormitory?

Ms Walker: Yes. I find Jewell House very dirty because they have got dialysis men there and they all stand outside and smoke. I do not smoke or drink or anything like that and I do not go down there to watch what they do and all this and that; I go down for my doctor's appointment. But I have got nowhere else to live, so they put me in Jewell House there. Now, I have a bit of problems. I have a weak bladder too and I asked the Aboriginal people there if they could put me where the toilet is because I am always up and down to the toilet on account of my weak bladder, and they look up in the book and they say, "Well, we have not got a room in the flats for you to live in, because it is upstairs and downstairs". So what they do is they put me up into the men's quarters up there, right next to the toilet, so my room is here and the toilet is over there, so I just slip in and out. But they have the patients that go there, and the dialysis patients—all men who smoke and that—and then they have got all the backpackers and things like that, so I have to hurry along. My grandson will stand at the door and say, "Nanna is in there; she's having a shower", or something like that. One time, you know, I thought they were gone and I went and had a shower, and the bloke next door, he is having a shower too. I did not know nothing, and when I came out, I just put my nightie over me and I walked out all wet and when I looked, I saw him there, and he goes, "Oh, good morning", and I just said, "Oh, good morning; they put me up there, you know". So I went downstairs. You have the breakfast. They give you a feed. So, you have, you know, eggs, bacon, sausages and things like that. Good tucker they give you, but sometimes you are rushing for the doctor. This is at Jewell House. So, you go across the car park and there is a big lot of stairs. That is where we have to go to check in to see the doctor there instead of going to Royal Perth, where the big church is there, so you just go straight across there. And you forget because you already had a bellyful and you forget to ask the lady to put something for lunch and supper. So we go to the doctors and we sit there till about three o'clock because we are not the only patients there in the room. So, we have to wait there that long, and when we come back, we go to our room and we have no money because it is not my pension day today, and tomorrow is not my pension day. It is on a Friday or a Thursday, and we seem to go down on a Tuesday, Wednesday and a Thursday. But we got to pay first before we get in. And, anyway, we sit down and I ask one of the blokes, "Where do you get the soup from, you know, the soup kitchen, the truck or bus?" They have got a big bus there. Well, from here to Woolies, that is how far I have to walk with my walker, because my grandson, he gave up. So, I walk straight out down there to the corner and see all the druggies and whatever there; they see me standing there. "There! The bus is coming now! The bus is coming." So, I stand up in line and the lady said, "How many cups you want?" and I said, "Give us

four cups”—pea and ham soup and a bun. I say thank you and I go back and have a good old feed and then I got to wait then. Sometimes we stay there for two nights. And another thing I find down there in Perth, the taxis, because I have a walker and the taxis have got—what is that thing in the back, the little tank thing?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: The gas thing.

Ms Walker: Yes, they have got that. So they refuse me because I forget what I want a taxi for. They say, “Oh, we cannot take you because we cannot put your walker in the car; it has got no room.” I have got told plenty of times by the taxi man, “Oh, why do you not ring for a station wagon?” So I get on the phone again and ask for a station wagon, and I go down by that. Sometimes I have a fuel card; sometimes I run it out, sometimes I do not. I have a taxi voucher. I have two when I am travelling or going up north or down to Perth, down for a funeral; I have one of these here. So, I was—how much is it? It is about 25 per cent, I think, the government pays half for me, so I have that. That comes in handy when I am going, because I have got no money, and if the taxi from here down to Woolies costs me \$8, well, I do not have \$4 on me because the government pays \$4 on this here. So, it is very hard for me to get around, and especially when I have a walker and that there.

The CHAIRMAN: How old is your grandson, Penny?

Ms Walker: Well, my daughter died of MS, 40 age, and I had to go to the Family Court because the other ones wanted my grandchildren, and I said, “Well, I moved out of Perth because, you know, I was an alcoholic and that and I came up here and I worked around and things like that”, so I had to go back to Perth to the Children’s Court and I won for my two grandsons—Ashley and Jeffrey. So, I brought them up here. Ashley was four years old and Jeffrey was two. But in the meantime I reared another little boy up—he was two—because his mother was a drug addict and she did not want him, so I had three little boys to look after, and Ashley is still with me, like I just shown you the carers card I get, and I go to meetings and that there. Ashley is mental distressed—he is a suicide—and I am 24/7 with him. I go to meetings, carers and that, from Geraldton; they come up. But nothing about mental people and things like that. So, for the last 26, 27 years that I have had Ashley—he is 31 years old now—I never had a break. I never had a nervous breakdown because I am so calm and I manage and I am 24/7 with him.

[3.10 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Penny, you are an amazing woman. I am quite emotional, as you can see, just hearing your story. I think in this day and age that if somebody like you has to go begging —

Ms Walker: Yes, I do ask for handouts.

The CHAIRMAN: — for food in the streets when you are sent down for medical treatment to me is abhorrent. There are so many atrocities happening all across the world at the moment, yet on our doorstep we have things like this happening to you. I am hoping that with this inquiry we can somehow get things changed. I do not know if other members have things to say, but thank you very much for sharing your story. This is what makes it very real for me.

Ms Walker: Yes. When the carer people come up from Geraldton, they have got—what do they call that other thing, you know, in little children? They are like ADD kids. They have got all that and they have got a package for that and things like that. But I do not have a package for that because Ashley is not one of those; he has been destroyed when he was young from drugs and alcohol, and his brain—in other words, excuse my expression, but I always say “shit for brains”.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: I know Penny very well and I know Ashley very well and have done for a long time, and I think Ashley would not be alive without the support that you give him, Penny. So I think that that is amazing and you know I think that you are very cool. As Liz said, I hope that we can try and make a difference to change the system so that people like you who are good community citizens actually get the support that you need.

The CHAIRMAN: You are a role model for your people.

Ms Walker: He has got a supervisor. I get the pension. I only get \$340 and Ashley gets his money. He pays two hundred and something for the rent; I pay two hundred and something. He pays \$50 for light and I pay \$50 for light and \$10 for water and \$10 for water and the rest goes on food. If he feels like he wants drugs or wants a drink, I cannot say no because that is his money. Because Ashley has got a supervisor, I have to account for his money. With my money, we got a loan from the government of \$1 000. Instead of buying rubbish, last year I said, “We’ll buy a car, Ashley.” So he said, “All right, then, Nanna; buy a car.” So I sent down \$1 000. I got my loan over \$1 000. I put it down for the car, and when Ashley got his loan, I said, “Are you going to help me?” and he said, “I’m not giving you all my money, Nan. I’ll give you \$500.” So I said, “Well, give me \$500”, and I put it in the bank, and that went down, and then I had to scratch around again for the other \$500 to make it two grand; it cost two grand. The Lottery House people down there—I do not know what is her name, the lady down there, the blonde one?

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Julie.

Ms Walker: No, not Julie; the other one. Anyway, I went down there and I asked Catherine for a handout for the vehicle, and she licensed my vehicle for me, so that was out of the way for 12 months. So once you have got a supervisor looking over your child’s shoulder all the time wondering where the money is going, I have got to show for it, because I do not rob my grandson. I was never brought up like that—you know, taking money off people, because I have got my own. What we have not got in the house, like milk and sugar, I said to Ashley, “Well, Nanna bought you two of this and two of that and we’ve got no sugar or milk; we’ve got to wait till Wednesday.” And he said, “Oh, Nanna, can I go over?”, and I said, “No; you go without, because you know why? You didn’t make a spin out.” You can only take so much and make the day to day what you want and then leave it for tomorrow—take like that. So I make him spin out and he gets very angry with me because he is a mentally unbalanced fella: “I jump on you and cut my throat and cut your throat.” I just back off and look at him. For 26 years, I more or less got into his head. I know what he is thinking. I know if he is going to go and do suicide. I know how long he takes the car for. I got a driver’s licence for him to help him go down to Perth for funerals and things like that. I cannot drive too far, so we exchange. I have got to think all the time for him. He puts a cigarette in the fridge. He puts the socks in the fridge on Wednesday: “Oh, Nan, where’s my smoke?” And I will say, “Open the fridge and get the milk out.” “Oh, there’s my smoke there, Nanna. Did you put it in there?” That is all I wanted to say.

Hon JACQUI BOYDELL: Thanks, Penny.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you mind me asking you how old are you, Penny?

Ms Walker: On 30 November, I will be 71.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you so much today for telling us your story. It has been really worthwhile.

Ms Walker: I am the last blackfella here, I think. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 3.17 pm
