

Public Administration Committee

From: Vin Fordham Lamont <dceo@coorow.wa.gov.au>
Sent: Sunday, 4 May 2014 11:47 AM
To: Public Administration Committee
Cc: Love, Shane; Peg Hodgson
Subject: STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME (PATS)
Attachments: PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME.docx

Good morning. Community members in the coastal areas of the Shire of Coorow (centred on the towns of Green Head and Leeman) have asked the Shire to assist in a submission to the above inquiry. The general view of people living in these towns is that PATS is a very worthwhile scheme but that there are inherent problems with the system that need to be addressed.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Kind Regards,

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PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME (PATS) FOR RESIDENTS IN THE COASTAL SECTIONS OF THE SHIRE OF COOROW

People living in this area often find the administrative side of PATS difficult and confusing as the towns of Green Head and Leeman are caught between the Wheatbelt (based in Northam) and Dongara (Midwest) Health Services.

With regard to the delivery of assistance to regional people accessing specialist medical care, the level of funding applied to the transport and accommodation subsidies, appears to be reasonably adequate. Certainly, we have no anecdotal evidence of people complaining it is not high enough. Residents have, however, said that PATS can be very complicated and difficult to access.

No complaints with regard to eligibility for the scheme have been voiced to our knowledge.

The word “hopeless” has been used many times in relation to the administrative process, and another common complaint was “they take such a long time to send your money through”.

As to consideration of exceptional circumstances, we include the examples below to illustrate the inflexibility of PATS and PATS staff:

- “A problem I have with PATS is that I am a polio survivor living in Green Head and at times require treatment from specialists in Perth who know how to treat not only a medical condition but a condition that has been affected/caused by polio. My GP in Jurien gave me a covering letter for PATS explaining the reason for my required specialist treatment in Perth and I was paid the PATS travelling reimbursement for the first visit. Sadly, I was refused funds on my follow up visit because PATS staff felt I should attend a visiting specialist in Geraldton with no guarantee that he specialised in my condition.” Green Head is approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes from Geraldton and 2 hours from Joondalup.**
- “A gentleman living in Green Head was required to attend Hollywood Hospital in Perth for ongoing colonoscopy treatments (a duration of three**

years). Doctors in Geraldton told him they were unable to treat him and should continue his treatment in Perth. PATS paid for his first trip and refused all the following, maintaining he should have had his treatment in Geraldton. He also had a covering letter from his GP as to his condition, which was disregarded by PATS staff.”

- “One frail elderly couple from Leeman found the PATS system so confusing, the only way they could handle their PATS documents successfully was to organise their doctors’ appointments to coincide in Geraldton. On their way to Geraldton they detoured into Dongara where the staff of the PATS office helped them complete the correct forms. After treatment in Geraldton, they called in to Dongara again on the return journey to get help to sign the subsequent forms.”

People complained of the tersely worded letters from PATS they receive when a mistake has been made or the wrong form submitted. Some of these patients are visually impaired who, unable to see properly, have filled in the form incorrectly and received an abrupt, almost rude, letter but no PATS assistance.

Because of the difficulties they have with PATS, several families now “refuse to be bothered with the system”.

Basically, the communities of Green Head and Leeman consider that PATS is a good scheme, but it is not working properly in this area. Many of PATS inherent problems would vanish if all aspects of the system for our coastal towns were based in Jurien. This would give patients easy, immediate access to office staff and direct assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.