

Terry Redman MLA

Member for Warren Blackwood
Minister for Regional Development, Lands
Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development
Leader of The Nationals WA

Our Ref: BM 976/Sub-50

15 May, 2014

Ms Lauren Mesiti
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council, Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

Public Administration Committee – Inquiry into the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme Submission

Since I was first elected to the Parliament in 2005 I estimate Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) enquiries to have been among the top five issues most frequently raised by my constituents.

It was on the basis of PATS issues raised with me and with my colleagues that in 2008 we moved to support PATS through a \$30.8 million injection of Royalties for Regions funding, over four years, to improve outcomes for country patients. This funding enabled an increase in subsidies, however, there is the scope and need for further improvements to be made across several aspects of the program.

In highlighting areas of need for adjustment to the PATS program, it is important to note that Royalties for Regions has also made considerable investment in the provision of regional health care. This has been via direct investment into new hospitals and hospital upgrades, new facilities such as the South West Coronary Care Unit and programs to attract health professionals and improve regional emergency cover. While improvements to the availability of health care in regional areas must remain the goal, there will always be occasions where medical visits to Perth or regional cities are a necessity. It is on those occasions that country patients rely on PATS to ease the financial and emotional burden.

As the submission made by the Parliamentary National Party (PNP) is representative of the concerns raised by my constituents and those of my PNP colleagues my submission will be confined to highlighting several specific issues and case histories.



PO Box 327 DENMARK WA 6324 | 5/78 Strickland St DENMARK WA 6333

terry.redman@mp.wa.gov.au | www.terryredman.com.au

Ph: (08) 9848 3171 Fax: (08) 9848 1595 Freecall: 1800 644 811

Eligibility for PATS funding

I have included with my submission, a comprehensive submission from the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes outlining the key concerns of its residents in relation to PATS. The issues highlighted in that submission are ones that I have raised previously and that I endorse.

A key issue highlighted in the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes submission is that of distance eligibility. Bridgetown is deemed to be 97 kilometres from Bunbury rendering visits to Bunbury specialists ineligible for PATS, despite a round trip of 194 km. A similar issue impacts on Augusta residents travelling to Busselton for treatment and is replicated for various communities around the electorate where travel to a regional centre is significant but does not meet quite the 100km limit.

I'm aware that one of my Nannup constituents has made a submission highlighting the financial burden of his need to travel thrice weekly to Busselton for haemodialysis. The distance between the two towns is deemed to be less than the 70km eligibility limit for dialysis and yet the patient calculates his actual distance travelled at 75kms. This totals 450kms per week in medical travel for which he cannot access financial assistance.

The administration process

Historically, concerns raised by my constituents in WACHS' South West region have related to delays in processing of claims and receipt of payment, delays in getting through to staff on the 1800 telephone number and the application process itself. Historically, fewer concerns have been raised by my constituents in the Great Southern WACHS' region, who routinely lodge applications through their local hospitals.

Constituents indicate that the necessity of having to see their GP just to have a PATS application form signed can be inconvenient if there is a significant wait for appointments or if they live many kilometres from their nearest practice. For patients who are not bulk billed the appointment cost can negate part of the value of the eventual subsidy.

As highlighted in the Parliamentary National Party's submission, concerns are frequently raised about the level of PATS subsidy. In my Warren-Blackwood electorate this most often relates to the accommodation element, with constituents making the valid point that the \$60 dollar per night subsidy represents only a portion of current city accommodation costs.

Some age pensioner constituents who have successfully applied for advance PATS payments in the past, on the basis of financial hardship, have related that it is now more difficult for them to access this option. Many then pay for their travel using a credit card, resulting in additional costs if there is a delay in reimbursement.

Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances

I highlight two of a number of cases highlighting circumstances of need that do not currently meet eligibility criteria. The first relates to a constituent of senior age who suffered an accident some months ago which had significant and lasting ramifications. She has had multiple operations and will require ongoing surgery. Due to complications, this lady is currently unable to put her foot to the floor and her surgeon has requested that she be fitted with orthotics to try and improve the situation while she waits for surgery. Due to her high risk of further deterioration her surgeon has asked that her orthotics be fitted at Shenton Park, a round-trip of around 500 kms for which she does not meet PATS eligibility. Although this is an allied health service it is an intrinsic part of a very complex treatment and recovery plan.

A family in my electorate has a child with a congenital illness manifesting in a range of significant medical issues over a number of years. This young child requires regular visits to PMH, some of which are to specialists and therefore PATS eligible. However, many visits are to audiologists and speech pathologists and therefore not covered. Of the estimated 50 visits to PMH, a 560 km round-trip, one quarter were not covered, resulting in a significant impact on this family who are doing everything they can to improve their child's health and quality of life.

The importance of the PATS scheme to regional residents cannot be overemphasised. The necessity to travel away from home for treatment when people are often at their most vulnerable can be both financially and emotionally burdensome. Improvements that streamline the process and provide added support would be welcomed in my own electorate and across regional WA.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry into the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Terry Redman', written in a cursive style.

Terry Redman MLA
MEMBER FOR WARREN-BLACKWOOD