

**SHIRE OF YILGARN
PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME (PATS)
SUBMISSION**

CONFIDENTIAL

The following responses have been provided from residents who use the PAT Scheme and staff involved in the administration of the program in Southern Cross, which is classified as a remote regional town.

1. How adequately PATS delivers assistance to regional people accessing specialist medical care.

- For those patients that have a good understanding of the parameters of the system and realise that the program is only to assist with travel and accommodation, not pay it fully, these people see the program as adequate.
- The issue we find is that patients and Doctors do not understand the parameters of the system i.e for patients to be eligible the Doctor needs to refer the patient to the closest specialist, which may not be Perth instead Northam or Kalgoorlie and may not be their preferred doctor. If the patient is classified as eligible then 16c per km is paid for round trip and \$20 – \$60 is paid in accommodation per night, which equates to approximately 40% of actual costs to patient.
- Another issue is that currently the scheme only covers referred visits to specialist and not visits to Primary Health appointments e.g. physio, dentist, mental health. If assistance can be funded so that residents from regional communities can access these primary health services with assistance, it will reduce the treatment of illness in the long run. It has been documented in the Primary Health Care Reform policy that early intervention with Primary Health Services focuses on prevention of disease and the maintenance of health, reducing the treatment of illness in future years.
- The Shire believes that it is important for Doctors and patients in regional areas are effectively educated in the PAT Scheme so that regional residents can benefit from the assistance fully, as there are a lot of people in our town that may be eligible for assistance who either do not know about the scheme or think it is too difficult a process to apply.

2. The level of funding applied to the transport and accommodation subsidies provided.

- We understand that the scheme is about Assistance with travel and accommodation, although a slight increase to cover 50% of patient's costs would be well received.
- Currently the funding being provided to the individual regional Hospital sites to administer the scheme appears to be sufficient, although should future education campaigns in relation to the scheme be conducted and there is more awareness through-out the community of the PAT scheme and the assistance available, the funding will need to be increased to meet the need.

3. Eligibility for PATS funding.

- The current guidelines allow assistance for the closest specialist. In real terms this is not always realistic for someone who has been seeing the same specialist for many years and if they want to start getting assistance through this scheme, they may have to change specialist if it is shown that the specialist is not the closest. We believe that some middle ground can be found here where, the patient can be paid for km's up to the closest specialist and accommodation.

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4. The administration Process.

- Currently the PAT scheme is administered at the local level at the Southern Cross Hospital and paperwork is forwarded to the Northam WACHS office for processing on a weekly basis and clients receive payment between 30 – 90 days from Northam.
- There are two necessary forms that need to be provided the Yellow form (PATS Application Form) and Blue form (PATS Specialist Certification Form) which needs to be completed fully by referring doctor, patient and Specialist. These forms need to be accompanied by any relevant receipts as supporting evidence of travel and accommodation costs. There are several occasions when one or all the parties have not completed their section of the forms hence making the application for PATS invalid, these applications are not processed and no advice is given to the hospital or the patient that no payment will be forthcoming. Then the Southern Cross Hospital will get an enquiry from the patient, who then needs to follow up with the Northam PATS Clerk, who will advise that not all information was provided and application has been disregarded. A better procedure needs to be put in place so that feedback is provided from Northam to the initiating hospital so that additional information can be provided and application can be processed accordingly.
- The local PATS Clerk is unable to track a patient's application currently the turnaround time from submission of application form to payment from WACHS is between 30 – 90 days and the local site during this period gets many enquiries from patient's asking where their reimbursement is. If there was the ability for PAT Clerks from regional hospitals to access online the progress of application this may minimise the angst in the community in relation to the lengthy turn-around times, which should also be addressed from the review.

5. Whether there is consideration of exceptional circumstances.

- It appears that the current system does make consideration for exceptional circumstances i.e. people who are being treated with cancer or chronic diseases have allowances made for frequent visits to their specialist.
- It is important that the Doctor in the regional town keep the PATS Clerk informed of the exceptional circumstances so that allowances and consideration can be made in relation to travel and accommodation.



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