



Department of Health
WA Country Health Service



ROYALTIES
FOR REGIONS

Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS)

A Guide for Patients and Carers



Working together for a healthier country WA

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What is PATS?

The Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) provides permanent country residents in a WA Country Health Service region with financial assistance when travelling more than 100kms to access the nearest eligible medical specialist service (including Telehealth).

Country patients needing to travel more than 70kms to access specialist medical treatment for cancer or dialysis, where the health service is unable to provide a transport service, are also eligible for some assistance.

PATS provides a subsidy to eligible patients, however it does not cover all costs associated with travel and accommodation.

To access PATS a referral must be made by the patient's medical practitioner. The application for PATS assistance needs to be lodged prior to travel via fax, mail, email or in person at the patient's nearest health service.

For more information visit www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/pats or contact your regional PATS office. Contact details are listed at the back of this booklet.



Eligibility

You are eligible for assistance if:

- You are a permanent resident of a WA Country Health Service region.
- You need to travel more than 100kms each way to access the nearest specialist medical treatment¹
- You need to travel more than 70kms each way to access the nearest specialist treatment for cancer or dialysis and the health service is unable to provide a transport service²

If you are receiving assistance through another scheme then you are not eligible for PATS.

¹People residing within the town boundaries of Northam and York are also eligible for PATS travel and accommodation subsidies.

²People residing in the Peel region should refer to the brochure 'A Guide for Peel Residents' available through Mandurah Community Health or local GPs.



What specialist medical services are covered?

Most specialist medical services covered by Medicare are eligible for assistance under PATS.

Referrals must be to a recognised PATS eligible medical specialist service. However, referrals to other health professionals, for example allied health (speech pathology, physiotherapy, podiatry, clinical psychology, occupational therapy, audiology, and pathology), dentists and nursing professionals, **are not covered by PATS.**

Your local hospital or medical practitioner can provide details of specialist medical services covered by PATS.

Referral to the nearest specialist

PATS will provide assistance to the nearest eligible service providing you have a referral from a medical practitioner. Your local hospital can provide you with a list of specialists within your region (including visiting or Telehealth services).

Referrals to a specialist outside your region will only be considered for PATS if the regional service is unable to see you within a clinically acceptable timeframe.

Follow-up services

In some circumstances you will need to travel for your initial treatment but follow-up services such as checking the condition of a surgical wound may be provided locally. In such cases, PATS would only be available for the initial treatment and not for any associated follow-up services that can be provided locally.

Seeing your regular specialist

If you have been visiting a particular specialist and a similar service has since been established closer to your home, you will no longer be eligible under PATS to continue seeing your usual specialist, unless there are clinical reasons why you need to do so.

Assistance to return home following emergency treatment

If you have been taken to a medical service for emergency treatment, you may be entitled to assistance to return home.

Amount of Assistance

What kind of travel assistance is available?

If you meet the eligibility criteria, assistance is available to travel on the most economical form of transport appropriate to your medical condition as recommended by your doctor.

Accommodation subsidies are also available for people who live 100kms away and are required to stay overnight for medical reasons, distance or transport schedules.

Escorts may be approved for people with certain medical conditions including people having cancer treatment, the frail, disabled or people under 18 years of age.

Your local PATS office can provide help with organising travel and accommodation if required. Fuel and accommodation subsidies can also be provided prior to travel if necessary.

Taxi vouchers are not routinely provided but in limited and exceptional circumstances will be considered.

Fuel subsidy

If you are travelling by private vehicle you can claim a fuel subsidy of 16 cents per kilometre.

When two or more patients are travelling in a minibus or similar group transport vehicle owned by a community organisation, the fuel subsidy is 25 cents per kilometre payable to the relevant organisation. Only one subsidy per vehicle is provided.

Calculating distance

Distances between towns are calculated using the Distance Book from Main Roads, Western Australia. If you reside outside a town's recognised boundaries the distance used to calculate your assistance will be adjusted to take this into account.

Surface travel (coach or rail)

Costs are reimbursed according to the relevant economy or discounted fare.

Travel allowance for people travelling 70-100kms

If you live between 70 and 100kms from the treatment centre and qualify for PATS assistance for cancer or dialysis treatment you will receive a flat subsidy of \$20 per return trip, irrespective of mode of travel or the need for an escort. This travel subsidy is only available when the health service is unable to provide alternative transport options. *Note: People travelling 70-100kms are not eligible for an accommodation subsidy.*

Air travel

Air travel is provided when the journey to the nearest specialist is more than 16 hours (one way) by road.

Air travel may also be approved by the health service manager or approved delegate if deemed essential to the patient's medical condition or in other exceptional circumstances.

However, if you are a cancer patient undergoing cancer *treatment* you are entitled to air travel for trips associated with your treatment if the journey would take more than four hours by road, which is equivalent to travelling 350kms.

Additional transport assistance

Additional transport assistance, such as taxi vouchers, is available under strict conditions when approved by the referring practitioner based on the following:

- Severe ambulatory problems (such as permanent inability to walk, dependence on a wheelchair or complex walking aids).
- Disabilities or conditions that make it impractical to use other transport.
- If you are very ill and unable to use other transport (eg. Discharge following a major surgical procedure).

Can I claim for vehicle hire?

PATS does not cover the costs involved in hiring a car or chartering a plane. However, you **may be** eligible for the allocated fuel subsidy under PATS.

Can I receive assistance with accommodation?

Accommodation subsidies are available in certain circumstances to people living more than 100kms from the treatment centre.

You can apply for an accommodation subsidy if:

- The specialist certifies that you need to stay overnight for follow-up.
- You are receiving treatment for cancer.
- Approval has been given to extend your stay by one or two days to attend associated allied health specialist appointments.
- The forward and return journeys cannot reasonably be completed in one day. Consideration will be given to the time required to travel, type of travel and any other relevant factors such as your medical condition.
- You are travelling in a private vehicle on a journey in excess of 750kms one way, then you are eligible to claim an accommodation allowance to assist with the cost of a stopover en-route.
- Transport schedules do not permit returning home on the day of discharge.

The rate of accommodation subsidy is as follows:

- Private home accommodation (no receipts required) \$20 per night or \$40 per night for a patient travelling with an approved escort.
- Commercial accommodation up to \$60 per night for single accommodation or up to \$75 per night if you are travelling with an approved escort (taxation receipts required).

Is there a limit to long-term accommodation assistance?

There is a six-month limit to the provision of continuous PATS accommodation assistance.

What if I need someone else to travel with me?

If you need an escort, your doctor will explain the details of your case on the application form. The doctor will consider the following:

- Are you under 18 years of age?
- Do you need someone to assist you because you are unable to manage your treatment alone?
- Do you require someone to interpret?
- Are you a cancer patient travelling for treatment and in need of an escort?
- Is there anyone where you are going who can assist you in these ways?

Assistance can only be provided for one escort.

Assistance with coordinating appointments and travel

Many patients prefer to make their own appointments, however, your local/ regional PATS Office is able to assist with these arrangements on request. This may be particularly valuable for people who need to make multiple appointments.

The PATS staff will also book and pay in advance for air, train and bus tickets when this type of transport has been approved. Fuel vouchers or pre-paid fuel cards are also available.

Country Health Connection

Additional support is provided to people travelling to Perth from rural and remote locations. To discuss eligibility for support and coordination from Country Health Connection speak to your local PATS office.

What if I miss my appointment?

Typically only one journey to an appointment will be paid for by the health service. If you are unable to travel on a pre paid journey you must provide 24 hours notice of cancellation. If you do not provide adequate notice, or miss an appointment without good reason, you cannot claim PATS for a second trip unless there are exceptional circumstances. Individual circumstances should be discussed with your local PATS office.

How to Apply

The PATS application form

Application forms for PATS are available from referring medical practitioners, your local hospital or by visiting www.wacountry.health.gov.au/pats

People residing in the **South West** have a slightly different application process and should visit the above website or phone the South West PATS office on 1800 823 131 or refer to figure 2 overleaf for further information.

What is the application process?

In order to apply for PATS, you will require a referral to the PATS eligible medical specialist service. Any medical practitioner or medical specialist can make a referral. The referring practitioner needs to clarify on the PATS application form that the required treatment is not available locally or within a clinically appropriate timeframe.

See figures 1+2 (overleaf) for an easy guide on how to apply for PATS.



Figure 1: The PATS Six Step Application Process General - For all WACHS Regions except the South West

1 Ask your GP to complete **and sign** a PATS Application form.



2 Fill out your information on the PATS Application form and post, fax, email or take the form to your nearest PATS office for approval.

3 If approved, you will receive a PATS Specialist Certification form to take to the specialist.



4 The specialist will sign this form to confirm your attendance and any further necessary appointments.

5 Post, fax, email or take the PATS Specialist Certification form to your nearest PATS office as soon as possible and ensure all necessary receipts are attached.



6 Payment of any assistance you are entitled to will then be posted within six weeks.

Figure 2: The PATS Six Step Application Process South West

- 1 Ask your GP to **phone or fax** the PATS office to register your claim.



- 2 Contact the SW PATS office on **1800 823 131** to complete your registration prior to your appointment.

- 3 If approved, you will receive a **PATS Specialist Certification form** to take to the specialist.



- 4 Make sure the specialist **signs** this form to confirm your attendance and any further necessary appointments.

- 5 Post or fax the **PATS Specialist Certification form** to the South West PATS office within eight weeks of your appointment and ensure all necessary receipts are attached.



- 6 Payment of any assistance you are entitled to will then be paid directly into your nominated account or posted out.

Can I apply for assistance after I have travelled?

You must get approval for PATS assistance before you travel. Retrospective applications will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

If you need to travel urgently and don't have time to submit your application, call your local/regional PATS office for advice as soon as possible following travel.

When will I receive payment?

The health service will normally book and pay for air, train and bus fares directly and can provide you with pre-paid fuel cards. In some instances accommodation will also be arranged and paid for by the health service. Your local PATS office may also be able to provide you with taxi vouchers or shuttle bus tickets if you are eligible.

In all other cases you will be reimbursed the travel or accommodation subsidy after completing your journey. You should expect to receive payment of your subsidy within six weeks of lodging the completed form.

Further information

A list of your regional contact numbers is printed at the back of this booklet.

If you are unhappy about a PATS decision you should first approach the health service manager where the PATS application was lodged.

If, however, you would like further independent assistance with a PATS problem you can contact the **Health Consumers' Council** on 1800 620 780. The Health Consumers' Council is an independent community based organisation that represents health consumers.

Or

The Office of Health Review, an independent State Government agency established to deal with complaints about health and disability services on 1800 813 583.

Interstate Patient Travel Scheme

Patients who need to travel interstate to obtain essential specialist medical treatment not available in WA may be eligible for assistance under the Interstate Patient Transfer Scheme (IPTS). For further information about IPTS contact the IPTS Travel Clerk (08) 9222 2474.

Department of Veteran Affairs

The DVA offer some forms of travel and accommodation assistance to their Gold and White DVA card holders through the Repatriation Transport Scheme. To discuss eligibility, PATS Clerks can contact the DVA on 1300 550 454. A DVA Fact Sheet on the Repatriation Transport Scheme is available on their website at www.dva.gov.au

The Cancer Council of WA

The Cancer Council of WA is a non-government agency which provides a comprehensive range of support, information, resources and services including accommodation. To find out more visit www.cancerwa.asn.au

For further information visit
www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/pats
or contact your local PATS office on the
numbers below:

Goldfields:

<i>Kalgoorlie</i>	9080 5681
<i>Esperance</i>	9071 0801
Great Southern	1800 728 747
Kimberley	9194 2855
Midwest	9956 2216
Pilbara	1800 138 653
South West	1800 823 131
Wheatbelt	1800 728 792
Peel	9581 5088



