

16th May 2007.

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT. 2600

RE: Inquiry into the operation and effectiveness of Patients Assisted Travel Schemes..

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to voice our concerns in regard to the new rules introduced for people wishing to claim travel expenses under the IPTAS scheme.

While we applaud the changes which cut the eligibility distance from 200 kilometres to 100 kilometres, we have now been informed that our clients who travel with Community Transport Services will not be eligible for any assistance.

While we can understand that anyone traveling with a Community Transport service on a trip which is funded by Non Emergency Health Related Transport funding should not be eligible as this would be “double dipping” we find that to make it a blanket rule across all government funded services will severely disadvantage many of our clients.

My understanding is that anyone using public transport or their own vehicles will be able to claim expenses, but for people who live in a community where there is very little public transport available or people are unable for health reasons use public transport and have no choice but to use Community Transport they are now ineligible to claim.

While I accept the fact that we do receive Government funding to provide the transport service, while ever the Government fail to fund services to an adequate level that they can provide the transport without a cost to the client these costs must be met which means clients do have to pay a fee for service and should be eligible to claim for assistance if they are financially disadvantaged. As a rural service, which has increased in size over the years due to a high demand for services we do provide services free of charge in cases of extreme disadvantage and do not refuse service because of inability to pay. Due to the small level of funding we receive we cannot afford to provide free travel regularly and it seems that clients will be even more disadvantaged now under this new ruling.

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Prior to this ruling our clients have always claimed travel to Sydney , under the new rules most of our trips would now come within the eligible distance and clients have been making enquiries and become very upset when they are told that they will not be eligible if traveling with us. Some have taken their concerns to local politicians as I have, and I saw this enquiry into the scheme as a means of providing you with information, which you may have overlooked in the big picture.

I understand that there are inconsistency across States and Health areas in the way these schemes are managed and the eligibility criteria and while our clients are not eligible for assistance, in other states this is not the case. I ask that during this inquiry you will look at these inconsistencies.

While we very much appreciate the Health Service providing some funding for NEHRT they need to realize that funding falls far short of meeting the need in the Community and that Community Transport Funding is not stretching far enough to cover the health transport needs of clients. New rules such as these are just penalizing Clients and making it even more difficult for Community Transport Services to continue to provide Health services.

I ask for your support in rectifying this problem. I quote the Premiers words in a News Release dated the 17th March 2006 “These are practical, compassionate reforms to help country patients and their families at a time when they need it most”” My question is how are you helping the country person who has no other way to travel long distances to health appointments but via Community Transport?-

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Rolfe
Service Manager Young Community Transport Service Inc.