

To Whom it May Concern

SIRS (Sunraysia Information & Referral Service Inc.) is a volunteer group. Our parent body is Community Information Victoria (CIVic)

One of the services we provide freely is to pay upfront the cost of travel necessary to access Specialist Treatment more than 100kms from Mildura. SIRS pays the cost and is re-imbursed by Department of Human Services Victoria (DHS) under the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS)

SIRS has had to stop this service because DHS has not provided clear guidelines and not all travel may be funded. In the past SIRS volunteers accepted the referring practitioners direction as to whether the patient travels by air or to which Specialist. We are now told even when referred by the local GP there is no guarantee of flights being covered and that Specialist recommended may not be accepted. Also that the Specialist may cancel the referring practitioners choice of travel. ie. Cannot fly. SIRS are now being told that the patient must attend the nearest Specialist, Bendigo or Adelaide in our case.

The only available travel to Bendigo from Sunraysia is road. Air travel is available to Adelaide however there is only one small plane each way, each day.

SIRS can no longer upfront fund these patients as we cannot rely on being re-imbursed by DHS.

This has caused real hardship and concern to patients who have been travelling regularly for necessary treatment.

There needs to be established clear guidelines as to who/what will be funded and money made readily available for such travel.

Mildura is on the border of NSW and the people of Wentworth, Gol Gol, Dareton, Buronga would come to Mildura for medical assistance. The practitioner has to refer these patients to Broken Hill, Adelaide or Sydney and use a different form. More paperwork for the doctor. These patients have had no upfront resource available for their travel costs.

Travel for Dental treatment may not be funded and many cannot afford the cost of local Specialist treatment.

Travel to have a prothesis fitted is also not covered.

For those patients who can pay the cost of travel themselves, access the Specialist treatment and be re-imbursed the problem lies with the turn around. If re-imburement could be given within a few days they would manage, but SIRS have discovered that the re-imburement can take anything from four weeks to four months. For many who require fortnightly or monthly treatment this becomes an impossible financial burden.

By making patients travel to Bendigo or Adelaide and not Melbourne, rural people are being denied any choice.

Also it must be remembered that Adelaide is part of the South Australian Health Services and should not that be for SA Taxpayers.

In Victoria patients with no Health Care Card or Pension Card are required to pay the first \$100 of the first trip which then covers them for twelve months. If the patient with an escort travels by air they must pay \$100 each even if the escort has a Health

Care/Pension Card, but if the patient has a Health Care/Pension Card then the escort doesn't pay the \$100 even if they do not have HCC or Pension Card.

Accommodation costs also add to the concerns of the patient as they have to wait to receive \$33 per night refund.

Air travel is usually required when appointments are given at very short notice.

SIRS would ask that the Government make clear guidelines which are the same across states and further that travel costs be covered either up front by booked seating or else re-imbursed within a few days.

Thank you for considering our concerns

Mrs Jill Jennings, Volunteer,
On behalf of SIRS.

P.O. Box 1091, Mildura Vic. 3500
122 Ninth Street, Mildura Vic. 3500
Phone: (03) 5023-4025
Fax: (03) 5021-3281