

ALBANY COMMUNITY RESOURCE AGENCIES NETWORK

**P.O. Box 5712, Albany, W A 6332
Telephone/fax 08 9841 3876**

**The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Dear Secretary,

**Inquiry into operation and effectiveness of
Patient Assisted Travel Schemes (PATS)**

In response to the advertisement in our local paper, The Weekender on 6th April, 2007 our Network of agencies providing emergency relief (see attachment) to those in need have requested that I compile the following information on their behalf for your consideration. The PATS inquiry was discussed at our meeting on May 7th and these are the points members wished to raise with your Committee.

Terms of Reference Items:

- a) 1. Many patients miss out on PATS due to not asking or being informed by local GPs to complete an application for approval prior to travelling to Perth for specialist appointments/procedures. This means they then present to various ER agencies on their return home, significantly out of pocket and a compounding debt crisis can ensue.

2. Many young families must all travel to Perth due to the lack of extended family support or child care over an extended (48 hours or more) period. Often their cars aren't up to scratch and breakdowns occur, adding to the cost and stress of a medical trip to Perth (486 kms from Albany). These costs rise even further when extra meals and accommodation for the whole family is factored in. Some small financial assistance may be available through the Department for Child Protection's Family Crisis Program on a one off basis, on top of their PATS application which covers the ill patient and carer.

3. Our members all commented on the inadequacy of the \$50.00 fuel allowance (for one way only) whereas with recent fuel cost increases, in a small care, the cost of a trip is approximately \$120.00 return.

In some cases PATS appears to re-imburse the \$50.00 on the patient's return from the medical trip, even if the travel application was approved beforehand, creating further stress on the family budget.

4. At a rare community information seminar about four years ago the Albany Regional Hospital Administrator explained the system for PATS in Albany and

eligibility as being prioritised on the basis of patient needs due to the limitations of funding. High priority was given to cancer treatment patients, (which few would argue with. It does appear that the needs of the young families who are vulnerable (indigenous, unemployed, single parent or low incomes) are missing out through ignorance of the system, and as stated earlier, not automatically being informed of the application process by some GPs.

5. Albany is fortunate to have access to a Royal Flying Doctor Service, commendably supported by solid community commitment and fundraising. This works well for urgent cases and no doubt would be covered by PATS in most instances.

6. Members report lack of flexibility in how they travel to Perth, for example, not being eligible for the RFDS but having to go to Perth for a major operation and being unable or unwilling to catch the bus. The bus is a 5 hour trip each way, approx.cost of \$87.00 return, plus taxi fares in Perth to and from bus terminal, to accommodation, to hospital and return: at least another \$60.00-\$80.00. This makes taking a car to Perth much more feasible and convenient.

One example was cited of a woman requiring a gynaecological day procedure in Perth and PATS would not pay for a return fare, just the airfare to return to Albany, even though patient was instructed not to drive care or sit in bus on return trip. Although she could ill afford it, she was had to pay the airfare to Perth, because she could not take her car to Perth, nor take an extra day off work to take the bus.

7. Generally members made the point about the inflationary nature of costs, like fuel, \$35.00 per night accommodation which PATS allows goes nowhere near a standard motel room which range from \$85.00 – \$200 per night, depending on location and proximity to medical service.

8. One agency stated that some mental health clients are particularly disadvantaged when acting on pap smear follow up tests at the women's hospital (KEMH) in Perth in that the Carer/MH support worker is not covered by PATS nor the MH budget to accompany vulnerable clients, due to wages costs (approx. 50 hours)

9. See several case studies attached, giving details of some of the points raised.

Items b, c, d, e. g, no further comments to make.

f) This aspect of benefits to patients is fairly obvious and is strongly supported by our Network, particularly in the area of obstetric and gynaecological services for women, which appears to be an area of common complaint in Albany.

h) Extending PATS to all treatments on the list of medical benefits schedule, especially dental care, is strongly supported by our members.

i) We trust from these brief points you will get some indication of how local charitable agencies, (three in Albany in receipt of Commonwealth

Emergency Relief funds) are subsidising the PATS, at a rough estimate of 5% of our client load and allocation. As most members rely on parish donations to provide ER, material aid and pastoral care, it can stretch their resources more than intended.

If you require additional information or clarification on any of these points, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address and phone number.

Yours faithfully,



**Janet Pine,
Network Co-ordinator,
Board Member, Albany Outreach Support**

23rd May, 2007

Janet Pine

From: Sherrill Duncan
Sent: Thursday, 10 May 2007 2:52 PM
To: Janet Pine ; albany DL
Subject: RE: PATS Review

Thanks for that Janet - I do have an issue in regard to PATS, around the amount allocated for accomodation in Perth. I cant remember the prescribed amount however I would consider it very unrealistic and the patients are being subsidised by other Depts, often DCD.

Recent examples would be as follows:

- One of my family support cases is very disabled 7yo child who has about 3x per year visits to PMH, normally as an outpatient as he attends multiple specialist appts over a few days, they usually stay about 3 nights in Perth. PATS does not cover the accomodation - he has to stay in disability friendly accom which is approx \$30 per night more than what PATS allocates. To date DSC have covered the difference for this one, including some funding for food. PATs arguement to me has been that the clients have to provide their food and living costs anyway, if they are at home or in Perth, so they should be covering this whilst in Perth. My arguement is that it is going to cost the client much more for living costs when they are not in their own home.
- Elderly/sick clients who are not very ambulant who have appts in Perth are being directed to Jewell House as virtually the only option within the PATS allocated funding. Jewell House is not appropriate for sick elderly people, and is often booked out. Jewell House is used for emergency housing for many charitable groups, including DCD, its a rabbit warren and also often very chaotic. Clients are having to pay the diffence out of their own pocket when they are unable to find any appropriate accomodation at the amount prescribed by PATS. And we or the Salvos et al are giving food allowances to enable the clients meet the extra accom cost.

Am not sure if the PATS allocated amount for accomodation has had any increase in the past few years and maybe this is the prob.....

Would appreciate if you can bring this up, thanks very much. Ciao.

From: Janet Pine
Sent: Thursday, 10 May 2007 12:31 PM
To: albany DL
Subject: PATS Review

The patient Assisted Travel Scheme is currently being reviewed in terms of whether it is funded adequately, operates consistently and fairly (priorities) to the same standard across Australia as well as it's flexibility for families in rural areas.

At yesterday's meeting of the Emergency Relief Volunteer agencies (St.Vinnies, Salvo's etc.) we gathered feedback and some members have agreed to compile local feedback to the review to improve, what they see as, the many anomalies within this system.

If you have any feedback, positive or negative, could you please respond to this email so we can feed it into the pot to compile the info. in a coherent form to improve things locally (and hopefully across OZ!).

Janet

1/05/2007

ALBANY COMMUNITY RESOURCE AGENCIES NETWORK (ACRA)

Background

This Network of volunteers and paid workers delivering emergency relief in Albany has been supported by the Department of Community Development since 1992 to ensure client's experiencing a short term individual or family crisis are assisted in a timely manner, either through its' Family Crisis Program, or by referral to an external non-government agency.

The ACRA Network includes a range of Non Government agencies including various charitable religious groups in Albany who offer a range of pastoral care services as well. Most are run by volunteers dedicated to service to their local communities. Meetings are held bi-monthly, with the November meeting being dedicated ensuring families in need receive Christmas parcels in a timely and co-ordinated manner.

Membership

The Network welcomes representatives endorsed by their agencies who work with low income clients and who are interested in the opportunities afforded by networking i.e. personal and professional support, community information sharing, raising relevant issues of concern about emerging trends in the community.

Members agree to co-operate in accepting referrals, where appropriate, from other agencies to assist clients of any faith in need of food, transport, clothing, medication or furniture. They also aim to share information on their programs, criteria for assistance, relevant tissues, new services or training opportunities.

Network members in 2007 include the Anglicare Financial Counselling Service, St. Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, The Albany Christian Family Church, Adracare, Albany Outreach Support Service, Financial Assistance Officer for Dept. for Child Protection.

Role of Network Representatives

1. To provide agency reports on emergency relief distribution in the region to ACRA Network Meetings.
3. To familiarise Network member agencies with any new or existing policies, programs, services or training opportunities impacting on Albany area.

**Enquiries: Janet Pine, Network Co-ordinator, 9841 3876
Albany Outreach Support**
