

# Ronald McDonald House

at Monash Medical Centre

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The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Committee  
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Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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Dear Secretary

**RE: Submission to the Senate Enquiry into Patients Assistance Travel Schemes (PATS)**

Ronald McDonald House at Monash Medical Centre in Clayton Victoria makes the following submission to the Senate Enquiry into Patients Assistance Travel Schemes (PATS). Our role as a major disseminator of information about the scheme to parents from regional, rural and remote areas is we believe, particularly relevant to this enquiry.

Families accessing our service are from all over Victoria with a high proportion coming from the Gippsland region. Interstate families, particularly Tasmania, who need the specialist medical services of Monash Medical Centre also stay with us.

As a provider of accommodation to families of seriously ill children accessing this tertiary hospital, 85-90% of those residing subsequently access this scheme for both accommodation and travel assistance.

**Terms of Reference**

As identified in the Terms of Reference the following issues need to be addressed fully:-

- With access to knowledge and expertise in specific/specialist areas of medical needs and individual requirements in rural areas very difficult to access, it is important that the eligibility and opportunity of clients to access the appropriate treatment and specific knowledge is not hindered because of the criteria and inconsistency across the States' guidelines.

It is essential to remember that often many hospital admissions, medical treatments and need to access specialists is totally unexpected. Families and individuals are under great stress and anxiety, and this affects everyone across different socio and economic backgrounds.

- Consistency across all States with eligibility and criteria over 100 kilometres is required. Huge variations in distances within Australia require flexibility in provision of PATS to enable access to specialist health services throughout the regional, rural and remote areas and interstate, as identified above in our service delivery area to Ronald McDonald House Monash, Clayton Victoria.
- With rural recession, drought and high petrol prices the financial amount of travel assistance needs to be increased per kilometre.
- Marketing of PATS for families requiring this support needs urgent attention. Information about the scheme should be uniform to inform patients' families, beginning at the GP'S and their office managers.

Availability of information and access should be made easier about the scheme across government agencies. Eg a parent of a very sick child who had to travel to Melbourne urgently and was not a welfare recipient was told she could access a form from Centrelink, 'just go in and pick one up from the information stand'. As they were not visible she stood in the queue and inquired at the desk where she was told people may take them if they were on the information stand. After 35 minutes she was handed a PATS form.

- As a major provider of accommodation, the twelve Ronald McDonald Houses around Australia care for thousands of rural families each year and play a vital role in informing and assisting parents on how to access the PATS scheme.
- An additional issue which needs addressing is literacy issues. These issues may exist with parents and the fear factor of having to fill out a form. Colour coding and development of a user friendly form would assist.
- It is absolutely essential that patients have access to specialists who have the support of a multi disciplinary team. (see Case Study below)
- It is vitally important to extend PATS to all treatments listed on Medicare Benefits Schedule to provide equity. For example, patients requiring access to auditory specialists are currently ineligible and therefore disadvantaged.

This Case Study of J & J highlights the importance of PATS support to a rural family.

Case Study of J & J

*Double Income family from Lakes Entrance when their precious daughter became seriously ill and was admitted to the Royal Children's Hospital, after four admissions and approximately five months later: transferred to Monash Medical Centre.*

*Lakes Entrance is 320 kilometers from Melbourne 640 kilometers return journey and four (4) hours one way travel time.*

*Amidst the trauma the Mother immediately had to resign her consultancy position with a loss of income of fifty nine thousand dollars (\$59,000) immediately incurring the costs of living away from home and travel. The family was unaware of the Patients Assisted Travel Schemes. (PATS) These situations continued until being transferred to Monash Medical Centre Clayton and staying at Ronald McDonald House Monash where the family was assisted to access PATS where they received fourteen cents (14 cents) per kilometer for travel.*

*The family's daughter was a public patient: the family incurred an average of six hundred and thirty dollars (\$630.00) per week in direct costs associated with treatment and having to live in Melbourne. This situation continued for four years. The fourth year: it was essential that the family travel to Melbourne on a weekly basis to access specialist treatment including incurring the full costs of a psychologist by the family: as at the local level the expertise and knowledge was not available this compounded the illness to a life threatening situation requiring prolonged and specialists' treatment. Access to this expertise saved her life and was fundamental to a full recovery.*

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We now request to appear before the Senate Committee to discuss further the PATS scheme.

Yours sincerely



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