

SUBMISSION RE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEMES

A submission by Charlene Thompson, (BSW, B.EdSt.), Social worker, of C A Thompson & Associates, Christmas Island Social Work Service, PO BOX 679, CHRISTMAS ISLAND, WA 6798 (Phone 08 9164 7384) on behalf of the following men and women of the Territories of Cocos and Christmas Islands: Faridah Hj Bahrom, Zainal Majid, Sam, Yuliani, Norzaini Ali, Jamil Jantan, Zuraishah Zainal, Noobaya Abu, Bacha Pal, Salawah Mohamed, Abd Ghaffar Ismail, Jamilah Yusoff, Abidin Sabtu, Rospah Omar, Kamsah Pal, Fatimah Kassim, Bahari, Reslizaiwati Behair, Anuar, Zuniani Nook Mohd, Hamdan Osman, Rohainah Asbi, Rossati Wahid, Othman Dardak, Ronani Fadzil, Salleh Abu, Salbah Abdullah, Assbi, Rosedah MD Sharid, Hajil, Nilam A Muin, Ustaz Ghaffar, Fauzi Kassiam, Mohd Isnin Bahari, Mahani Daud, Nasaruddin Ali, Norasmah Ismail, Zariha Ishak, Safurah Budin, Norafezah, Ibrahim Hussain, Aiesyah Kasim, Awi Md Di, Fazela Kasim, Ashari Fadal, Moho Taufiq Kasim, Ismay Idroos, Anwar Mohd Afan, Ahmad Risal Abdullah, Hamdan Osman, Ayu Sri Rahayu Kasim, Dodi, Hussianita Ayat, Mohd Jahis Ayat, Lin Gaff, Karen Lwin.¹

Signed: C A Thompson

¹ The list of names is taken from a page of signatures provided voluntarily in support of this paper at a community meetings at the Kampong, Christmas Island May 2007. It is not the author's intention to show disrespect to the person, should their name be inadvertently spelt incorrectly in this paper.

PREAMBLE: We welcome the broad nature of this Senate Inquiry into a critical support service for families and individuals in remote Australia. The scope of your terms of reference however should require access to time, data, and supported research to allow your enquiry best practice information.

This is not possible in the scope of this submission due to limits placed by the Department of Transport and Regional Services on current human service information and research available in the Territories. This latter point serves also to demonstrate the remarkable and unique situation of governance of these Australian islands by a Commonwealth Government Department.

Whilst Christmas Islanders, in particular, are being asked to accept “normalization” of services by the government, this paper demonstrates that the process of having a baby for islanders engaging in the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme, is far from “normal”, and that such schemes, managed by a Commonwealth government department through a hospital service, create new and unexpected difficult circumstances for the people they are expected to assist.

Our submission refers to criteria (e.) and (i.) and focuses upon women, childbearing, and family needs and the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS).

BACKGROUND: Christmas and Cocos Islands (CI/CCK) are territories of Australia. **They are the remotest parts of Australia because the only means of transport for residents is by air. No other public transport is available.**

Cocos Islands and Christmas Island have 2 regular weekly flights to/from Perth. Christmas Island has a flight to Asia once a week. The flights to Perth are long, arrive at 23.40pm (approx) in Perth and air travel is contracted to the carrier, National Jet, by the government.

This transport system is so significant in the lives of islanders. Mail is received once a week. Surface mail is received by ship every 7-8 weeks. Broadband Internet is available only to a smattering of organizations. The assumptions by most Australians about the ease of communication and travel within Australia are incorrect here. The islands, Cocos and Christmas **are very remote and require special consideration in regard to many matters. Patient Assistance Travel is one such consideration.**

These communities are also unique, in an Australian context, because

- the majority of their populations were born in Malaysia.
- The majority of families continue to enjoy close family links in Malaysia, Indonesia, China or Singapore.
- English is the second language in 85% - 90% of CI homes.

The Patient Assistance Travel Scheme is used extensively by Cocos and Christmas Islanders. It is in the context of the PATS scheme for pregnant women and the benefits for their families that this submission focuses on.

The island women wish to address the following criteria:

Criteria e. variations in patient outcomes between metropolitan and rural, regional and remote patients and the extent to which improved travel and accommodation support would reduce these inequalities:

Anecdotal evidence gathered for this submission from European, Chinese and Malay women suggests there is significant disadvantage currently suffered, not only by pregnant women but by their entire family under the current arrangement for Christmas Island and Cocos Island.

It is acknowledged that there has been concession given to spouses of women expecting a child to travel under the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme by the government, and that this is a gesture towards the cultural and religious background of islanders.

These are some demonstrated and measurable inequalities suffered by child bearing women and families in CI/CCK.

Women are currently required to:

1. Travel 4 weeks to Perth before the impending birth.
2. Find and pay the greater sum for accommodation in an unfamiliar city, for their family for periods of a minimum of 6 weeks. (non Health Care Card Providers)
3. Accommodation in Perth is at a premium where motels are the only option due to minimum private rental leases of 6 months. PATS payments of \$35 per day for non Health Care Card holders are inadequate for long stays.

4. Travel by hire car, bus or taxi in an unfamiliar city receiving limited reimbursement for medical travel.
5. Take younger children at their own expense to Perth with them because of the time factor - up to a minimum of 6 weeks, 4 weeks as required by the Indian Ocean Territory Health Service prior to the birth and 2 weeks after the birth. Minimum time frame away from island homes is 6 weeks.
6. Spend sums from \$ 10,000 to an average of \$4000 - \$5000 for a birth, depending on the number of children in the family traveling to Perth, type of accommodation and travel for 6 weeks in Perth and the spouse's ability to obtain paid leave or not. See Appendix A for current PATS criteria applicable to Christmas Island.
7. Settle school aged children into unfamiliar schools in Perth for 6 weeks.
8. Cope in a stressful critical life period with a temporary residence in a large city which represents a foreign culture and a foreign language for many.
9. Cope with a significant temporary dislocation of the family before and after a birth.
10. Cope with seeking out suitable outlets for food which is halal (Malay) and rely on the purchase of food, rather than home cooking for an extended period. This is an unforeseen additional expense.
11. Travel 2650 kms by air both ways with younger children and a new infant on the return journey (5-6hr journey) for Christmas Island families.
12. Travel 3000 kms by air both ways with younger children, Cocos Island women.
13. Give birth in a foreign hospital with minimum prenatal induction to that hospital, its facilities and its staff.
14. Participate in Western style births where some aspects of religious culture are ignored and disallowed. This is particularly significant to Chinese background and Muslim families.
15. Continue to pay rent for the island home whilst having to pay the majority of accommodation expenses in Perth for a 6 week period.

16. Cope financially as a family with enforced periods of leave without pay for some spouses from work, and working women having to take significant chunks of long service or other leave available.
17. Some employers on CCK/CI are refusing to give leave (paid and unpaid) for 4- 6 weeks to spouses for the birth of children.
18. Families are seriously stressed because, once in Perth, there are no support structures in place – no carers for children when mother goes into labour and fathers want to be a support at the hospital, no carers for children at school should mother commence labour during school hours etc.
19. Some mothers report the loss of breast milk because of the continuing stress on them and their family after the birth.
20. The support of friends and a familiar community is missing. Having a child if you live in these remote islands is a process which currently creates huge financial and emotional stress on the family for a significant period. The importance of early bonding for child development and positive family dynamics between mother and baby and other siblings, is often denied in this difficult and stressful process.
21. Women reported an additional expensive and stressful process where there were complications after the birth with either the baby or mother.
22. Two such cases reported the routine discharge from hospital 2 days after birth in Perth, and babies developing serious problems. One case involved a woman on her own with a younger child, alone in a Perth motel room with a new baby vomiting blood. Whilst the baby was consequently put into intensive care, the emotional damage in these circumstances continues to affect the mother 7 years later, and she speaks with anger when retelling her story of struggling on her own under these circumstances.
23. Women expressed anger at the additional requirements to prove that they were required to stay in Perth for additional time to Indian Ocean Territory Health Service, under PATS criteria, when there were medical complications. They were required to seek out medical verification of the

change in their circumstances and fax evidence to the Indian Ocean Health Territory Service. In a strange and unfamiliar place, in a motel room, with a new baby and possibly younger children, a new mother, already with increased mothering responsibilities, with English as a second language, would find these kinds of administrative requirements of her almost impossible to cope with.

24. Women acknowledged that there have been abuses of the Patient Assistance Travel in the past for other types of medical services; however they were passionate about the current inequities of the system and its negative impact on families before and after birth.
25. Women reported that there is a tradition for Malay families to have at least 3 children. Christmas Island and Cocos Islands are where homes are. Women want alternatives to the current arrangement for giving birth and better supports for the families.
26. There are serious inequities in this scheme. The calculations for financial assistance are meant to fit all medical scenarios. Child bearing island women's situations do not fit the general intent of the current scheme. Public servants on Travel Allowance to and from the islands are given more consideration in the provision of financial support, particularly in regard to the real costs of accommodation, for their work travel, than that which currently exists for island women and families having to go to Perth to give birth.
27. It would be fallacious to argue that the Commonwealth Government pays a baby bonus and Family Tax benefit and that island women should 'shut up and put up' as these payments maybe intended to ameliorate some of the costs mentioned in this submission. Whether one lives in Sydney or Cocos Islands these payments are made by the Government. This argument is obviously flawed for families in very remote locations required to travel and stay in cities for extended periods for "normal" life events such as giving birth.

28. The PATS scheme has been set up as a safety net, but it does not have the flexibility to account for unique situations such as those of families in very remote areas such as Christmas Island and Cocos Island.
29. The current arrangements and PATS scheme are ethnocentric in this context and do not account for the majority of island women, who DO NOT have friends and family in the nearest capital city or on the Australian mainland, family members with the ability to easily make a choice of transport and availability of transport to be near loved ones during a birth.
30. Emotionally, the current process offers very little support to the family. Families reported feeling disempowered by the system and resentful and angry over the costs, and angry with how insensitively the process was handled by the local hospital service in organizing the trip to Perth.
31. Families reported that there was a dearth of support at the Perth end with the practicalities of finding accommodation, food outlets, child care and travel all left to the family. Bearing a child in Perth was reported as a disappointing and stressful experience by islanders. A brochure giving information about Perth for families would provide only marginal assistance.
32. Some women reported that, whilst they wanted to have children, they were not willing to go through the difficulties financially and emotionally under the current arrangements.
33. Families reported that there was little support by the airline servicing the islands from Perth. Women with younger children and babies were given no special consideration in regard to checking in, or seating. Similarly, at the home end, women reported waiting in line for quarantine and customs checks with small children and a new baby, after a long flight. These practical difficulties continued to sour the whole process of having a baby.
34. Women reported that there was scant consideration given to their situation when the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service booked their flight. Christmas Island women reported that they were often required to travel via

Cocos Island, or in other unforeseen circumstances, Perth via Asia, thus extending the flight time (and stress) for themselves and their families. Whilst the Indian Ocean Health Service may not intend that this is the outcome of their endeavours in booking flights for expectant and new mothers, this is the perception of its service in the community. This issue demonstrates the limited nature of the current availability of seats on National Jet flights and the difficulties created for all islanders including the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service.

35. Some island women are traveling to other countries to give birth because they are fearful of traveling to Perth and facing the additional stress. This option creates difficulties currently because of the need to apply for a visa for the newborn baby in the country of birth to re-enter Australia and the additional issues of organizing Medicare, Family Tax Benefit and birth certificates once back on the islands.
36. The Malay community on Christmas Island is concerned that, as no babies are born here or on Cocos, that island birthrights are being denied. All children for the past 10 years have not been born on the islands.

CASE STUDY:

A mother to be for the first time, living on Christmas Island considers her options.

Born in Indonesia, fluent in her native tongue but with minimal English language skills, she is both nervous and excited about the birth of her first child.

Unable to cope with the confusion and stress offered by the prospect of giving birth in Perth, a city which she has never been to, she chooses to return to Indonesia to give birth to her firstborn.

The equivalent financial support of Patient Travel Assistance was denied the family because they were not traveling within Australia.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS, PATIENT TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SCHEME
TO REMOTE AREAS:**

1. ONE OFF PAYMENT:

- **Island women are given a one off payment through the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme for the birth of children, rather than the current arrangement operating on the islands, where air tickets for the woman and her husband are prepurchased and booked by the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service and all other legitimate PATS expenses are reimbursed to the family on the presentation of receipts .**
- **Such one off payments to be calculated based on a percentage of the real and current costs of traveling and relocation from very remote locations to the closest major Australian centres. The current allocation for accommodation and travel, for families having new borns, from very remote locations is inadequate, in a capital city context.**

**2. REASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF SIBLINGS TO ATTEND WITH
THE MOTHER AND THE FATHER:**

- **The current non payment in the PATS scheme for sibling children to travel is unacceptable in the context of what is known about separation anxiety and the critical nature of bonding in child and family development. Often families are unable to afford to take sibling children with them for a 6 week period yet they cannot find suitable carers for such a long separation. Such one off payments as**

PATS, need to be reassessed given this knowledge. The significance to siblings and fathers of initial bonding and its consequences for future family health, should younger children in the family, be excluded from being with their family, because of high costs, should not be underestimated.

3. THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE:

- Island women want choices. They want to be able to travel to Malaysia, Indonesia, China or Singapore to have their children.**
- Island women want to be empowered in the birth process. They want to be able to give birth where they choose and not to be disadvantaged financially and emotionally because they live in a remote location.**
- Patient Assistance Travel payments be payable in a lump sum to women living in such remote locations should they choose alternative options. Payments such as some pensions, Family Tax Benefit and Special Benefit are payable to Australian residents overseas. Patient Assistance Travel Scheme to align itself with this kind of flexibility.**

4. THE RIGHT TO GIVE BIRTH ON COCOS AND CHRISTMAS ISLAND:

- Island women's first preference is to give birth on island and not to participate in the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme for childbirth.**

- **There is a fully serviced birthing suite at the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service on Christmas Island.**
- **Drs Susan Downes and Dr Sally Roach² have posited the potential for 4 doctors to be stationed in the islands. The doctors argue that 4 GP's, 1 with anesthesia skills and one with obstetric skills, could satisfy the needs for safe births on the islands. Their paper demonstrates that there are 35 births per annum to island women and that the cost of 4 GP's with the correct combination of skills would be cheaper than the current GP locum system and allow for the possibility of live births at Indian Ocean Territories Health Service on Christmas Island. See www.wacrrm.uwa.edu.au for details of their paper.**
- **Islanders know little of this document nor the process for acting on its recommendations by the government.**

Re i: The role of charity and non-profit organizations in the provision of travel and accommodation assistance to patients

Christmas Island and Cocos families need more help in Perth. Whilst the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme offers some financial assistance, for people living in really remote locations, the current assistance is insufficient to cover even 30% of real costs.

However, this is only part of the problem. It is the practical “on the ground” help that is also needed by some remote families.

² Downes, Susan, Roach, Sally. Indian Ocean Territories Obstetric Project, Western Australian Centre for Remote & Rural Medicine, December 2005

Women reported:

1. Feeling scared and alone in a large city when coming from a very small remote island despite having their spouse with them.
2. Confused and concerned, worried about how to get to places and the overall costs of having a new baby.
3. Concerned about trying to find short term family accommodation in a city they had no contact with.
4. Feeling angry that they felt the prevailing attitude by the PATS provider was that “We were having a holiday (on PATS). No – we are having a baby”.
5. They wanted a provider or a place for the 6 week period where “they would feel more like home for us”.
6. Women reported not knowing where to look for a place, which suburb? What kind of accommodation? How to go about finding accommodation? Where to buy culturally appropriate food?

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

- **Women expressed a need for a non religious organization such as the Red Cross to be involved in assisting families with information, accommodation assistance and other support, should they continue to be sent to Perth for childbirth.**
- **Women asked for accommodation other than motels which they found difficult for an extended period to live in with a family.**
- **There has been networking between the Islamic Association in Perth and the Cocos Island community. A house has been made available to some Cocos Islanders visiting Perth. This idea needs to be explored further with the possibility of a similar setup being**

available to all islanders traveling with families to Perth for extended periods for childbirth.

- **Women need assistance with child care and after school care for siblings so that fathers can attend the birth and be with the mother and new baby.**
- **Larger families struggled with up to 5 children in such settings and need significant support in Perth.**
- **Families need support to travel to and from airports with young children and luggage.**
- **Families need advocates to argue for and seek out priority seating to accommodate babies and young children traveling long distances by the carrier, National Jet. Mothers reported an uncaring and insensitive attitude by ground staff towards families with new babies. Mothers reported that National Jet aircraft do not offer bassinets for newborns, forcing mothers to hold their baby for the long journey home. They reported change tables on aircraft that were too small and a general disregard for travelling family situations. Mothers reported that the National Jet baggage allowance for new mothers is inadequate, given that prams, baby furniture and other maternal needs are not able to be purchased on the islands and need to be purchased off island.**
- **Mothers who traveled to Asia to bear children reported trained staff willing to offer support and assistance to families traveling with newborns.**

APPENDIX A

PATS GUIDELINES AS PROVIDED BY THE MANAGER INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES SERVICE (ENGLISH VERSION)

What is PATS?

The purpose of the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service (IOTHS) Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) is to assist residents of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) to access health specialist and acute care in Perth which cannot be provided on the islands. This reflects the policy of the Australian Government of endeavouring to provide services to the IOT communities broadly equivalent to those provided by the WA Government to remote communities in that state. These guidelines are based on the WA Dept of Health PATS guidelines.

The following information is provided for:

- guidance;
- to promote consistency in PATS decisions;
- to assist residents to understand what PATS can and cannot provide; and
- to reiterate the personal responsibilities of patients in relation to PATS.

Please read it carefully and keep it handy so that you can refer to it when necessary.

Amendments to these guidelines will be issued by the IOTHS as and when required.

NOTE PATS is provided only for cases which require urgent medical treatment or investigations into certain medical conditions or situations, as is considered necessary by the treating medical practitioner.

PATS provides assistance in respect of the cost of travel to and from Perth and the cost of accommodation in Perth, but only where these costs are directly related to PATS travel.

NOTE It does not apply to the cost of the actual medical services accessed by the patient, regardless of whether such services are public or private. The cost of medical services is

a matter for the patient to resolve with Medicare and, if appropriate a private health insurance fund.

Routine specialist and preventative healthcare appointments should be arranged to coincide with private visits to Perth. PATS does not subsidise travel for these purposes.

Approval for PATS Travel

All PATS travel must be approved in writing by the IOTHS PATS Coordinator.

Who is the PATS Coordinator?

The PATS Coordinator is a member of the IOTHS staff who works at the Health Centre on Christmas Island. The Coordinator handles all PATS for the IOT, including the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, under the supervision of the Medical Director.

The Coordinator's contact details are
phone 08 9164 8333

Fax 08 9164 8338

email patscoordinator@dotars.gov.au .

NOTE Other staff at the Health Centres are unable to assist patients with PATS Arrangements.

What type of assistance does PATS provide?

PATS provide a contribution towards the costs of travel and accommodation but it does not meet the full costs of travel and accommodation.

What doesn't PATS provide?

PATS does not cover the cost of meals or other expenses.

Does the patient have to make any personal contribution?

NO contribution is required from a patient who holds a current Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card.

A patient who does not have a current Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card is required to contribute \$50.00 per return trip, up to a maximum of \$200.00 per family per year (the year period commences on the date the patient first travels to Perth).

Does an escort have to make any personal contribution?

Escorts approved by the IOTHS must also pay the \$50.00 contribution, up to a maximum of \$200.00 per family per year (the year period commences on the date the patient first travels to Perth).

NOTE The contributions from the patient and/or escort must be paid to the IOTHS PRIOR to the planned departure from the IOT.

Does PATS pay cash up front?

No.

What Conditions apply to PATS?

To be eligible for assistance under PATS, the patient must be a usual full-time resident of the IOT.

For the purposes of these guidelines, the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of ‘usual full-time resident’ is used and it states that

”if the resident spends more than 6 months of the year in the area, they are considered a usual resident’

Who is NOT eligible for PATS?

The following categories of people cannot access PATS:

1. the patient who is already in Perth for another purpose and subsequently requires specialist medical attention;

2. students who are living in Perth and studying at secondary or tertiary institutions;
3. parents of students who are living in Perth and studying at secondary or tertiary institutions and whom the parents wish to visit because the student is ill;
4. patients whose treatment and associated costs is covered by workers compensation or motor vehicle accident insurance; or
5. relatives or anyone who has previously acted as an escort for the patient who want to travel to and from Perth to visit patients receiving ongoing treatment.

Students who return to the IOT during holidays will only be eligible for PATS if the treating medical practitioner considers that the student cannot delay receiving urgent medical treatment or investigations into certain medical conditions or situations until their scheduled return to Perth.

Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) patients holding a Gold DVA card are eligible for travel and accommodation assistance through the DVA. They should call the DVA on 1300 550 454 to claim assistance.

Who arranges and pays for the air fares?

The PATS Coordinator will arrange for the booking, purchase and issue of the air tickets for the patient.

The travel dates cannot be changed without the written permission of the IOTHS. If the patient does not travel on the booked flight they may be required to meet the cost of the airfare.

When does the patient have to return to the IOT?

Patients travelling on PATS are required to return to the IOT on the first available NJS flight out of Perth.

If the date for the patient's return to the IOT cannot be decided at the time of the travel to Perth PATS may only provide a one-way ticket to Perth.

Patients who are issued with a one-way ticket to Perth will need to contact the PATS Coordinator within three days of completion of their treatment and discharge from the specialist's care.

These patients will need to obtain a letter from their treating specialist confirming the date on which they consider the patient will be fit to return. This letter will need to be faxed to the Coordinator, who will then make arrangements for their return on the next available flight.

If the patient is issued with a return ticket before leaving the IOT and their return date changes for medical reasons the patient will need to obtain a letter from their treating specialist confirming the date on which they consider the patient will be fit to return. This letter will need to be faxed to the Coordinator, who will then make arrangements for the return flights to be changed.

NOTE The PATS Coordinator cannot contact the specialist on behalf of the patient.

Within twenty one days of returning to the IOT the patient must return the blue PATS form and any letters from the specialist to the Coordinator. The form must be:

- properly completed;
- show the actual travel dates; and
- be signed off by the treating specialist

If the blue PATS form and the other documents are not returned to the IOTHS, the patient may be ineligible for PATS assistance.

Will PATS pay for family members to accompany the patient?

If the patient is less than 18 years of age or the IOTHS considers that an escort is necessary for the medical well-being of the patient approval will be given for payment under PATS in respect of the travel and accommodation costs of an appropriate escort.

Approval for an escort cannot be applied for retrospectively and assistance shall be applied to only one escort in each situation.

For the purposes of PATS, an escort is regarded as a responsible person of at least 18 years of age, nominated by the patient and certified to be suitable by the IOTHS to accompany the patient on journeys to and from the arranged healthcare appointments.

NOTE: Children under 18 years of age cannot be an approved escort.

Escorts need to be aware of their role and responsibility. They must be able and willing to undertake this role. It is preferable that an escort has reasonable English-language skills.

Sometimes it will be necessary for the well being of the patient for them to be escorted by an attendant.

An attendant must be a doctor, registered or enrolled nurse, designated by the IOTHS to be the appropriate person to accompany the patient.

NOTE If the IOTHS decides an attendant is required for the patient then an escort for that patient cannot be also approved, unless the patient is a child younger than 18 years of age.

Will PATS provide assistance towards the cost of short-term accommodation?

Short-term accommodation costs will be reimbursed as follows:

- in respect of the patient who has a current Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card
 - \$35.00 per night for commercial accommodation, or
 - \$10.00 per night for private accommodation
- in respect of the patient who does NOT have a current Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card
 - the first three nights will not attract payment of the allowance.
 - from the fourth night onwards;
 - \$35.00 per night for commercial accommodation, or
 - \$10.00 per night for private accommodation

Assistance with the cost of accommodation will only be paid for the period during which the medical specialist confirms that the patient is required to stay for treatment and follow-up.

This confirmation must be provided by the specialist on the blue PATS form.

Approved escort will usually need to stay overnight in Perth while an eligible patient is hospitalised or awaiting transport home or receiving outpatient treatment.

It is essential that the approved escort makes an application to the IOTHS for a subsidy towards the cost of accommodation before leaving the IOT.

If commercial accommodation is used the original receipts must be provided to the IOTHS when seeking reimbursement.

What if the patient or an escort has to wait in Perth for a flight back to IOT?

If the patient or an escort has to wait in Perth for the next available return flight to the IOT they are entitled to accommodation assistance through PATS.

If the patient or escort changes the dates of the flight for personal reasons s/he is liable for the additional airfare and accommodation costs.

What if the patient has to remain in Perth for an extended period?

If the treating specialist provides written confirmation to the IOTHS that the patient needs to remain in Perth for an extended period of time arrangements may be made for the patient to receive payment in advance for the accommodation allowance.

Any payment in advance will be for a maximum of one month's costs at a time.

Sometimes patients remain at a treatment centre away from their usual residence in the IOT for indefinite periods. This mainly applies to patients undergoing long courses of treatment.

Regardless of the reason, if the patient remains away from the IOT for more than six consecutive months the patient will be considered to have changed their permanent address to wherever they are living in Perth.

This is in line with the definition of "usual resident" used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, namely:

"if the resident spends more than 6 months of the year in the area, they are considered a usual resident"

NOTE If the patient lives away from the IOT for more than six months PATS assistance with accommodation costs will cease.

Will PATS reimburse taxi costs?

If the treating doctor in the IOT considers the patient cannot travel by public transport a note will be made on the patient's PATS application and reimbursement of taxi fares will be made in the following situations:

- a. from Perth Airport to the hospital/specialist's surgery or accommodation;
- b. to and from accommodation to hospital/specialist's surgery;
or
- c. from the hospital/specialist's surgery or accommodation to Perth Airport.

All travel must be by the shortest route and original receipts must be submitted to the PATS Coordinator.

Will PATS pay for hire of a motor vehicle?

No.

How do I claim my cost back from the IOTHS?

Within 21 days of returning to the IOT the patient should submit to the Coordinator all the paperwork associated with the travel to and from Perth, including:

- boarding passes and used airline tickets;
- letters about costs or travel written by the treating doctors or specialists;
- original receipts for accommodation and taxi fares (where approved by the IOTHS treating doctor); and
- the properly completed blue PATS form

When will PATS reimbursement be made?

Once all the necessary paperwork has been provided to the Coordinator reimbursements will be processed within two weeks.

What about women who are having babies?

In line with the current policy of the WA Department of Health for small rural and remote hospitals, the IOTHS no longer provides antenatal care beyond 36 weeks gestation or birthing services.

The IOTHS will assist pregnant women to make arrangements to book into a hospital in Perth and to make flight reservations, by no later than the 30th week of pregnancy.

Women should consider their needs in advance of this time so that adequate arrangements can be made.

Due to the remote location of the IOT PATS has been amended to pay for the partner/spouse/nominated escort of the pregnant woman to travel to Perth.

This arrangement only applies to the expectant mother's partner or nominated escort and will be processed under the guidelines for escorts above.

NOTE Under PATS there is no provision whatsoever for the payment of travel or accommodation costs for any other children the expectant mother may have, regardless of whether an escorts travels with the expectant mother.

If there are complications which put the mother's or baby's life at risk and it is necessary to arrange emergency evacuation in a special aircraft, the nominated escort will not be able to travel in that aircraft. The IOTHS will attempt to arrange for the approved escort to follow the patient to Perth on the next available commercial flight.

NOTE The community is asked to appreciate that, while National Jet Systems (NJS) will always endeavour to assist IOTHS in facilitating PATS travel, NJS is NOT legally obliged to assist. Despite this NJS always works closely with the IOTHS for the benefit of the patient.

Where shall I leave my car if being transferred to Perth?

Please do not leave your motor vehicle in the health centre or clinic car parks while you are away from the IOT on PATS. Cars which appear to have been abandoned in the car parks will be reported to the police and shire for removal.