

Queensland Health Policy

Management of Papua New Guinea Nationals presenting to Queensland Health facilities in the Torres Strait

Policy Statement

This policy confirms that Papua New Guinea (PNG) nationals presenting at Queensland Health services in the Torres Strait can and should be treated under certain conditions specified below.

Context

A treaty, which covers issues of sovereignty and maritime boundaries, allows traditional inhabitants from Australia and PNG who reside in the Torres Strait Protected Zone or coastal villages in and adjacent to the Torres Strait, free movement to pursue traditional activities. The treaty states that parties should “*act in a spirit of mutual friendship and good-neighbourliness*”.

The only reference to health in the treaty is the statement that health procedures should not prevent free movement. The treaty does not require the automatic provision of health services to visitors.

Free movement inevitably results in PNG nationals accessing health services within the Torres Strait Protected Zone whilst in the course of conducting traditional activities. While travel for the purposes of seeking health care is not defined as a traditional activity under the Treaty this also occurs. PNG people who declare that they are travelling for health purposes may not be excluded by the Department of Immigration because of concerns about their fitness to travel. It is probable that in spite of the best efforts of Commonwealth officials that a small number of PNG nationals not covered by the treaty provisions will also present at health clinics.

Rationale

Treatment and care is provided in the interests of PNG people for humanitarian reasons given the serious nature and immediacy of their presenting health needs and the unlikelihood of arranging timely and appropriate care at PNG health facilities. It is also, in some instances, provided in the interests of Torres Strait Islanders to control the risk of the spread of communicable diseases within the local community.

PNG nationals are not eligible for free healthcare services in health clinics or for free public hospital services in line with Medicare eligibility provisions. The need to regularly provide services to PNG nationals arises as a result of a treaty negotiated by the Australian Government, therefore funding these services is a Commonwealth responsibility.

The Australian, Papua New Guinea and Queensland governments have been meeting since 2003 to consider the health issues resulting from the treaty arrangements. The long term goal is for the PNG government, with some assistance from Australia, to enhance services in the thirteen treaty villages in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea and supporting health networks. Overtime this should reduce the demand from PNG residents for health services in the Torres Strait. Therefore, although the need is likely to be long lasting, this policy should be considered as an interim arrangement and subject to regular review and adjustment as changing conditions require.

Intent of this policy

To support Queensland Health staff in decision-making for the management of PNG nationals who present to Queensland Health facilities in the Torres Strait.

Scope

This policy covers decisions about access to treatment for PNG nationals at outer-island clinics in the Torres Strait and transfer to inpatient services on Thursday Island or other Queensland public hospitals.

Principles

- PNG should be viewed as the primary source of healthcare for PNG nationals entering the Torres Strait. The application of this policy should not undermine PNG health service responsibilities.
- PNG nationals can be provided with medical assistance, under the conditions described below, despite being ineligible to receive free health care in Australia.
- PNG health services should be informed of healthcare provided to PNG nationals.
- All patients should be treated with equal respect and consideration, regardless of their country of origin or Medicare eligibility.
- It is not Queensland Health's responsibility to determine whether a presenting PNG national is travelling in accordance with the treaty provisions.
- Funding for the treatment of PNG nationals in Queensland Health facilities is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government.

Principles: Application

Emergency care

- PNG nationals with a medical emergency should be treated immediately.

Non-emergency care

- Where clinically appropriate, PNG nationals should be referred back to PNG for treatment, particularly for minor conditions.
- PNG nationals with conditions amenable to short term treatment that can improve their functional capacity to return to a productive role in their community should be considered for treatment if this treatment can not reasonably be expected to be available to the patient through PNG health services.
- Where treatment of PNG nationals with non-emergency and/or chronic conditions occurs it should take into account the capacity of PNG health services to provide any ongoing care that may be required and the impact on the capacity of the Torres Strait health services to provide care to the local community.

Preventive clinical care

- Appropriate screening and preventive care should be offered where there are presentations that involve diseases of public health significance.
- The decision to perform tests should take into account the capacity of the Health Service District to provide appropriate care and ability to follow up results.

Medical Evacuations (Medivacs)

- The decision to Medivac a patient who is a PNG National from the outer islands to Thursday Island is the responsibility of the Thursday Island Hospital Medical Superintendent or delegated Medical Officer (eg out of hours).

Principles: Guidance for decision-making

- Treatment and/or preventive clinical care and management should:
 - take in to account the need to control risk to Australians from communicable diseases or to minimise emergency evacuations
 - consider the capacity of Torres Strait health services to provide appropriate care
 - be provided in accordance with treatment protocols where available, and/or based on advice from a Medical Officer.
- Decisions to medivac PNG nationals should occur when:
 - all reasonable clinical assistance has been provided at the outer island clinic
 - the patient's clinical condition requires transfer to Thursday Island Hospital for best practice management
 - there is a reasonable expectation that bringing the patient to Thursday Island for treatment will either cure or significantly benefit the patient.
 - best practice suggests that the patient needs referral to a tertiary facility such as Cairns, Townsville or Brisbane. Clinical advice should be sought from the relevant specialist clinicians. The receiving medical team should gain approval to admit from the Medical Superintendent/Director of Medical Service of the facility concerned.
- The Health Service District should advise PNG health services when healthcare is provided to PNG nationals by Queensland Health.
- Relevant Commonwealth Agencies must be informed of patient movements while out of the Treaty Zone.
 - The Australian Customs and Border Protection Services (ACBPS) on Thursday Island must be notified immediately following a decision to move a patient to Thursday Island. ACBPS will notify the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service of the move and the expected time of arrival onto Thursday Island.
 - The Department of Immigration and Citizenship must be notified prior to any transfer to a southern centre for further treatment and on a patient's return to Thursday Island following treatment.
- All occasions of service provided to PNG nationals should be recorded, including in-patient, out-patient and medical evacuation services, to assist with assessment of the demand and of cost of services.

Legislative or other Authority

- *Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea concerning sovereignty and maritime boundaries in the area between the two countries, including the area known as Torres Strait, and related matters, 18 December 1978. (The treaty was signed in 1978, then ratified and enforced in 1985.)*

Related Policy or Documents

- Management Protocol for Tuberculosis Disease (TB) - Policy number QTBCCPoI024/v5/04/2008
- Determining a Patient's Eligibility - Own Source Revenue Executive Network Policy Document
- Queensland Health Fees and Charges Register – accessible on the Revenue Strategy and Policy Unit website
- Primary Clinical Care Manual
- Strategic Directions for HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and Sexual Health 2008-2011
- Australian Antibiotic e-Guidelines
- Queensland Health control of communicable disease protocol manual

Supporting Documents

- Nil

Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years.

Date of Last Review: March 2010

Supersedes:

Draft Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District Policy “*Management of Papua New Guinean Nationals presenting to Torres NPA Health Service Facilities*”

Policy Custodian

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Approval and Implementation

Approving Officer

Director-General

Approval Date 8 March 2010

Implementation Date 8 March 2010

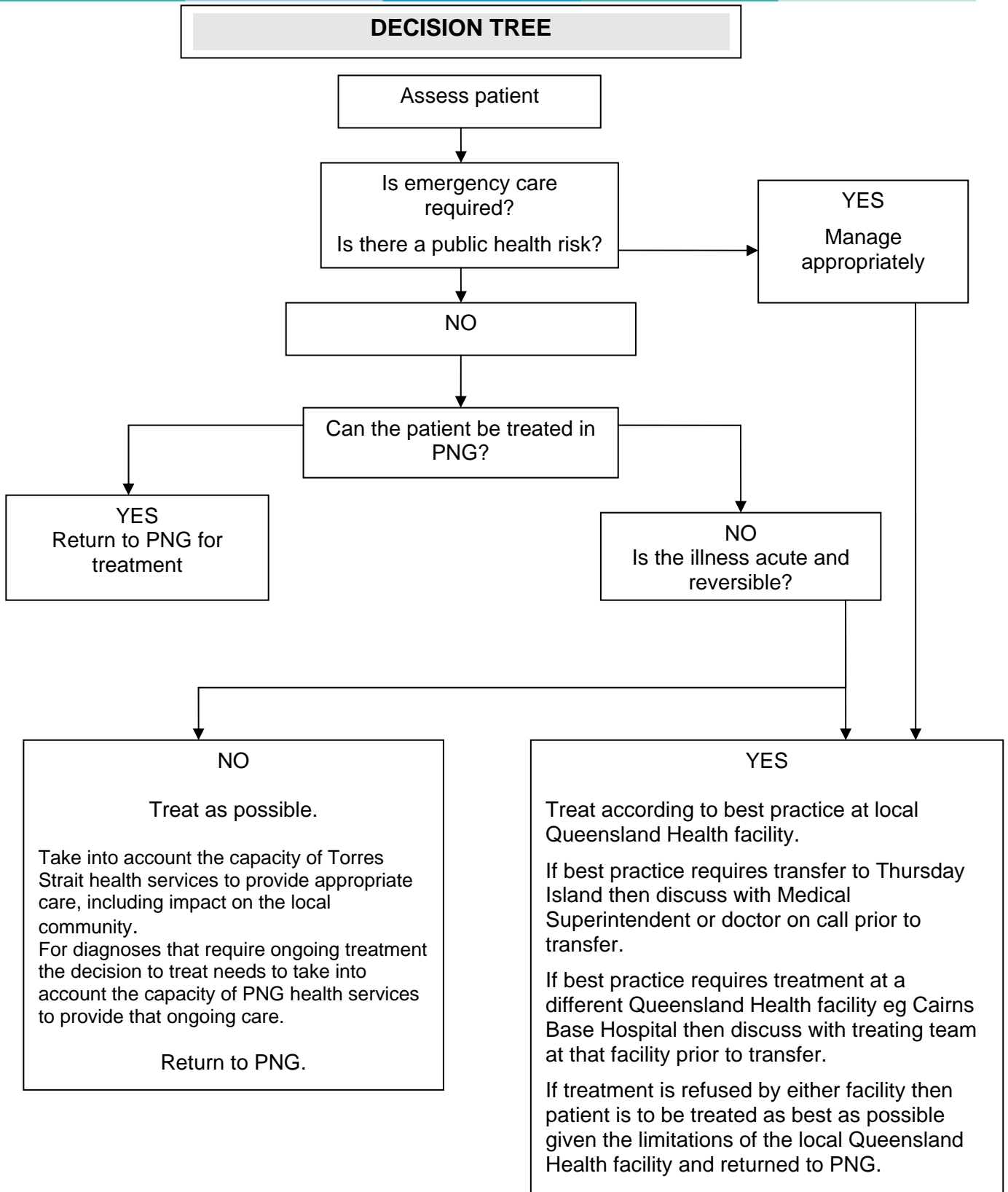
Glossary of Terms used in this policy and supporting documents

Term	Definition	Source
Australian Health Care Agreement (AHCA)	Australian Health Care Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Queensland 2003-2008; including extension of the agreement to 30 June 2009.	AHCA Document
Medicare Eligibility	People who reside in Australia - excluding Norfolk Island - are eligible for Medicare if they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold Australian citizenship • have been issued with a permanent visa • hold New Zealand citizenship • have applied for a permanent visa (excludes an application for a parent visa)—other requirements apply. 	Medicare Australia
National Healthcare Agreement (NHA)	An agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the States and Territories. The objective of the Agreement is to improve health outcomes for all Australians and the sustainability of the Australian health system. The Agreement commenced 1 July 2009.	NHA Document
PNG National	A citizen of Papua New Guinea. It should be noted that some individuals will have dual Australian and PNG citizenship; only Australian citizens who currently reside in Australia (Torres Strait) or who have not resided outside Australia for more than five (5) years are Medicare eligible.	Medicare Australia
Treaty Zone	Applies to the Torres Strait Protected Zone and coastal villages in and adjacent to the Torres Strait.	Treaty

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Appendix 1

Decision Tree and Clinical Management Resources



For situations when you are unsure – discuss with the Medical Superintendent or doctor on call at Thursday Island hospital. Treatment decisions will be made considering the capacity of the health system at that time.

The decision to perform tests should take into account the capacity of the Health Service District to provide appropriate care and ability to follow up results.

Clinical Management Resources

Clinical area	Resource	Source/Contact
Primary Care	Primary Clinical Care Manual (PCCM)	Queensland Health website at: http://www.health.qld.gov.au/pccm/guidelines.asp
Malaria	Australian e-Therapeutic Guidelines - Antibiotic 12: Malaria	All laboratory confirmed cases of malaria should be notified to the Public Health Nurse on Thursday Island on (07) 40690400.
Tuberculosis (TB) <i>(individuals with drug sensitive TB should be referred to Daru for management)</i>	Queensland Tuberculosis Control Centre Clinical Policy "Management Protocol for Tuberculosis Disease (TB)". (Policy number QTBCCPol024/v5/04/2008)	Cairns Regional Tuberculosis Control Unit can be contacted on (07) 40506240
HIV/AIDS/STIs		Tropical Public Health Services on (07) 40506205 or Cairns Sexual Health Service on (07) 40506205
Oral Health (emergencies only)		Senior Dentist Oral Health for Torres Strait – Northern Peninsula Health Service District (07) 4069 0400 (Office) or Fax: (07) 4069 2045
Public Health	Control of Communicable Diseases Protocol Manual	Tropical Public Health Services on (07) 40506205

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Appendix 2

Funding Arrangements

The Commonwealth government provides Queensland Health with “funding in recognition of the cost associated with the movement of Papua New Guinea citizens across the Torres Strait” under the Australian Health Care Agreements (AHCA) 1989-2003 and 2003-2009 and will continue as an element of the Health Services National Partnership payment under the National Healthcare Agreement (NHA).

A record of the costs associated with the treatment of PNG Nationals in Queensland Health facilities is necessary to support funding negotiations with the Commonwealth government.

PNG nationals presenting to Queensland Health services in the Torres Strait are not required to pay for services. Revenue issues are to be dealt with according to the Queensland Health Procedure “Revenue Treatment for Papua New Guinea Nationals presenting to Queensland Health facilities in the Torres Strait”.

Funding provided under the Australian Health Care Agreement for PNG Nationals:

Year	AHCA funding (\$M)
1998-99	2.0
1999-2000	2.14
2000-01	2.296
2001-02	2.47
2002-03	2.69
2003-04	2.83
2004-05	2.965
2005-06	3.10
2006-07	3.26
2007-08	3.415
2008-09	3.585

(Department of Health and Ageing)

Projected funding to be provided under the National Healthcare Agreement for PNG Nationals:

Year	NHA funding (\$M)
2009-10	3.8
2010-11	3.9
2011-12	4.1
2012-13	4.4

(Department of Health and Ageing)

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Appendix 3

Data Collection

Accurate data collection and analysis is necessary to enable Queensland Health to liaise with the Commonwealth government in relation to the services provided to PNG Nationals. In addition, Medical records are to be kept in line with District policy and procedures.

Queensland Health data systems are to be used for capturing in-patient and out-patient health services provided to PNG Nationals.

Inpatients:

All patients admitted to Thursday Island hospital, including PNG nationals, should be entered in the Hospital Based Corporate Information System (HBCIS). The country of origin/residence is required to identify PNG nationals.

Out-patient clinics:

PNG nationals presenting to Queensland Health out-patient facilities should be recorded as an attendance on the relevant electronic data capture system. These patients should be identified as PNG nationals.

Medical Evacuations:

Information relating to PNG nationals transferred / transported to and between Queensland Health facilities should be recorded to enable an accurate assessment of costs.