

PTSS

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

Information for patients and their carers

Expectations

What is the purpose of the Scheme?

The Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme has been put in place to help Queenslanders access specialist medical services, which are not available in their local area. When these specialist services are not available within 50 kilometres of the nearest public hospital, the Scheme offers assistance by providing a contribution towards the cost of transport and accommodation.

When a patient requires assistance with either the demands of treatment, or the demands of living away from home, the Scheme can sometimes also provide a contribution towards the cost of transport and accommodation for an escort.

You should be aware that the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme provides a subsidy only, and does not cover all of the costs associated with travel.

Queensland Health administers the Scheme through its network of public hospitals. These hospitals are in turn responsible to Health Service Districts that are managed by Chief Executive Officers.

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Eligibility

Can I be considered for a subsidy if I need to travel?

If you have a Medicare Card (or are eligible to hold a Medicare Card) and you are a Queensland resident you can be considered for assistance under this Scheme¹.

However, if your transport and accommodation costs are covered in other ways (such as through workers' compensation or the Department of Veterans' Affairs) you will be required to claim assistance through those avenues first.

What if I won't be able to get as much assistance from another source when I need it?

Sometimes patients qualify for assistance from other sources such as through a damages claim. However, when treatment is needed, the level of assistance may not be known or the assistance may not be available for a long time. Under these circumstances you may be eligible for assistance under this Scheme.

This can only be arranged if your alternative source can directly reimburse Queensland Health if and when you receive a payment.

What sorts of services can I be assisted to attend?

Transport and accommodation subsidies can only be provided for travel to and return from certain eligible services. Generally speaking, this Scheme is concerned with improving access to services provided by medical specialists.

With some exceptions, eligible services are those which satisfy all of the following criteria:

- The type of service is listed in Schedule I as "essential" and is not listed in Schedule II as "excluded".
- The service must be recommended by a medical practitioner as necessary for your health (that is, you must have a medical referral to the service).

- The service is not available within 50 kilometres of your nearest public hospital². (For the purposes of this Scheme it is your responsibility to be able to get to your nearest public hospital. Please also note the exception listed below in relation to accommodation subsidies only).
- The service must be the closest service of its type.

Exceptions

Exception can be made to the above criteria in the following circumstances:

Accommodation only

- If your treatment requires that you be accommodated closer to the treatment facility than you normally live, you can be provided with a subsidy towards your accommodation costs.

Alternative medical staff for recommending treatment

- In remote areas a "remote area nurse" can recommend that attending a service is necessary for your health
- Dental service listed in Schedule I can be recommended by a dentist.
- The services of an eye specialist (ophthalmologist) can be recommended by an optometrist.

Emergency travel to a service

- If you have been taken to a medical service in an emergency situation you can be assisted to return home so long as the service is more than 50 kilometres from your nearest public hospital. In this case you may also be provided with accommodation assistance even though the service may not be the closest of its kind.

This applies within Queensland only. If you have travelled interstate for work or holiday purposes, you will not be able to claim travel or accommodation assistance for emergency medical care, or to return home to Queensland. It is strongly recommended that you take out insurance to cover emergency situations if you are travelling outside Queensland.

¹ You may be required to produce up to two of the forms of identification listed in Schedule III that show your address.

² In this case distance is calculated as the distance by road from the post office in the locality of your nearest hospital to the post office in the locality of the health facility to which you are travelling.

Seeing your regular specialist

- You may have been visiting a particular specialist but another similar service has been established closer to your nearest public hospital. If this is the case, transport and accommodation subsidies can still be approved for one additional visit to your original specialist. This is only allowed if your doctor believes it is necessary so that a transfer from your previous specialist to your new service can be arranged.

Availability of support

- Sometimes travelling to a medical service that is further away can be less expensive because an escort may not be required or you may be able to stay in private accommodation. If this is the case, it is possible for you to be provided with assistance to travel to a more distant medical service so that you can make use of the support of family and friends that may live there but not at a closer location.

In some circumstances you will need to travel to your initial treatment but follow up services (such as checking your progress or checking the condition of surgical wounds) can be provided locally. Requests to travel for follow up services will be considered in their own right and will not be approved if they can be provided locally.

Provided you have a referral from a medical practitioner you can attend any specialist medical service you wish. However, transport and accommodation subsidies can only be paid if you are attending a service that is eligible under the Scheme guidelines. If you choose to attend a service that is not eligible under these guidelines, then no subsidies can be provided.

Procedures

How can I go about getting assistance?

When you have been referred to a specialist medical service you will need to ask your doctor to apply to your local hospital for transport and accommodation subsidies on your behalf.³

Your doctor will fill out an application form for you to take to your local hospital. This form will provide the hospital with the information necessary to make a decision about the subsidies for which you may qualify.

You will then have to take the form to the travel clerk (or other nominated person) at your local hospital. This will enable the travel clerk to check all the details on your form and ask for any other information that might be necessary. Presenting the form in person will avoid delays that might result from the form being filled out incorrectly. However, if you live a long way from your hospital you may be able to arrange to send the form by mail or fax and talk to the travel clerk by phone.

A medical officer at the hospital will be responsible for reviewing your application and deciding what subsidies are available to you. When you make your application to the hospital, you are also giving consent for the medical officer to obtain any relevant medical information to assist them to make a decision about your claim.

If you have provided enough information, you can expect the hospital to give you a decision within two working days (Monday to Friday) after they receive your application. If more information is required by the hospital before they can make a decision you will be informed of this within two working days after your application has been received.

Your local hospital will decide to pay your transport and accommodation subsidies by either booking and paying for your transport and accommodation directly, or by reimbursing the relevant amount of your costs when you can provide them with receipts. You can expect payments to be made and accounts to be settled within 30 days.

³ If your doctor expects you to be making a number of visits you can request assistance for a series of trips up to four weeks in advance.

Can I apply for transport and accommodation subsidies after I have travelled?

Except in very extraordinary circumstances subsidies can only be paid when you have applied for them and have had your application approved before you travel.

Exceptions

1. If your doctor did not inform you that you were required to apply for the Scheme before you travelled, you can ask for your application to be assessed retrospectively.

 - You must do this within one month after travelling and such a request will only be considered once. In these circumstances the hospital will contact your doctor to confirm that you were not informed.
 - Unfortunately, under these circumstances, you can only be provided with the amount of assistance you would have received if the application had been made in the correct way.

If you have asked for a decision to be reviewed, and you have been unable to wait for the outcome of the review before you started your trip, in this case, if the review returns a decision in your favour your application will then be approved retrospectively.

What if I travel alone and then find that I need help after I arrive?

If your specialist finds that you need help after you arrive for treatment, they can request assistance for someone to join you. In this case, all of the usual conditions and procedures for requesting subsidies will still apply (ie. the request must be approved by your local hospital before travel).

Amount of assistance

How much assistance can I receive?

Accommodation

Your local hospital will decide whether to arrange your accommodation for you or to reimburse you for your accommodation expenses. If the hospital reimburses your expenses, they will contribute up to \$30 per person per night, for you and your approved escort, if you stay in commercial accommodation. If you choose to stay with friends or relatives your hospital will contribute \$10 per person per night.

Your contribution

- Unless you qualify under Schedule IV, you are required to contribute the first four (4) nights of accommodation per financial year.
- If you choose to stay at accommodation that costs more than \$30 per person per night you will have to pay the difference.
- You will have to cover the cost of meals and any other expenses such as telephone calls.

Accommodation subsidies will only be paid for the minimum period you are required to be away from home for medical reasons.

Unless otherwise approved on medical grounds, one night's accommodation can be subsidised while you are travelling if you are required to drive more than 600 kilometres or eight hours.

If you are away from home for a long time, your need for accommodation subsidies will be reviewed every month.

Transport

Your local hospital will decide whether to arrange your transport for you or to reimburse your travel expenses. Your local hospital will subsidise your approved transport costs. Unless otherwise approved on medical grounds, they will cover the cost of the cheapest form of public transport available. Transport costs will be covered from the transport terminal (airport, bus station or train station) in the town or city to which you are travelling.

Alternatively, if you wish to travel by car the cost of your trip will be subsidised at a rate of 15 cents per kilometre. This will be calculated by road from the post office nearest to your local hospital

to the post office (or general post office) nearest to the medical facility you will be attending. If your approved escort travels with you in the car, the subsidy remains unchanged (ie. 15 cents per kilometre).

If you wish, you may travel by a form of transport that is more expensive than what is approved, but your transport subsidy will not be increased.

In the unfortunate case of requiring return transport for a deceased person, relative will be provided with a subsidy equivalent to a full economy airfare, to the nearest airport to the deceased person's normal place of residence. Relatives can spend that subsidy on whatever form of transport is required.

Your contribution

- If you are travelling by public transport, you will need to cover the cost of travelling between the airport, train station or bus station and your accommodation or the health facility you will be attending.
- If you are travelling by private motor vehicle, subsidies will be calculated from post office to post office, so you will need to cover any additional costs associated with your motor vehicle.

Time limits

When will I have to return home?

When you travel to a medical service you will need to return as soon as practicable after the completion of your treatment (*eg. as soon as a flight is available*), unless prior approval is granted for special circumstances.

Otherwise, you will not be able to make use of your transport subsidy.

Escorts

What if I need to someone else to travel with me?

Your doctor will explain the details of your case to your local hospital. A medical officer at the hospital will be responsible for deciding whether you need to be accompanied by someone when you travel. They will look for the following conditions:

- Will you be unable to look after yourself where you are going? ⁴
- Will someone be needed to participate (or trained to participate) in your physical care or rehabilitation? ⁵
- Is there anyone where you are going that can assist you in these ways?

It is important that you are as comfortable as possible when you travel, but transport and accommodation subsidies for people to escort you can only be approved if they are absolutely necessary for your medical treatment. In many circumstances the person who travels with a patient will need to have medical or nursing qualifications.

You may take as many people with you as you wish, but transport and accommodation subsidies can only be provided for the minimum number of escorts that are absolutely necessary for your medical treatment to be effective. If escort assistance is approved, it will usually be for only one other person to travel with you.

⁴ A subsidy will always be provided for an escort to accompany a patient who has not yet reached their 17th birthday.

⁵ A subsidy will always be provided for an escort to accompany a patient who requires oxygen, sedation, or parenteral analgesia (pain killers given by injection).

Complaints

What should I do if I'm not satisfied with the way these guidelines have been applied to me?

Writing a complaint

The best way to have your complaint dealt with effectively is to make it in writing.

You should clearly describe the circumstances of the situation that has led you to make a complaint stating if you can, times, dates, locations, and the names of persons involved.

You should also be clear about identifying what aspects of the situation have caused you a problem and what you would see as a satisfactory resolution.

You should of course, be sure to include sufficient details about yourself so that your file can be located and you can be contacted easily.

If you are unsatisfied with a decision that has been made about your application for travel and accommodation subsidies or if you are unsatisfied with the manner in which service was provided, you should bring the matter to the attention of Queensland Health. This is the only way service can be improved. Feedback is encouraged. You will not be discriminated against in any way because you have made a complaint.

Stage 1: *The Medical Superintendent*

The first place to which you should bring your concerns is the health facility responsible for providing the service you require. In most cases this will be the Medical Superintendent of your local hospital.

If your complaint is an appeal to have your request for assistance reconsidered you should expect a response within two working days of it being received. Otherwise you should expect a response within one week.

Stage 2: *The Health Service District Chief Executive Officer*

If you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with to your satisfaction you should send it to the Chief Executive Officer of the Health Service District involved. Your local hospital can provide you with the name and address of the Chief Executive Officer.

In this case you should expect a response to your

complaint within two weeks of it having been received.

Stage 3: *The Health Rights Commission*

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with to your satisfaction, you should contact the Health Right Commission (07) 323 40272 or freecall 1 800 077 308. The Health Rights Commission is an independent body that has been established for dealing with health-related complaints. They will see that your complaint is dealt with in the most effective manner.

Personal Support

Sometimes you may need to speak to someone in the health system in person. If you are not confident about doing this yourself you can take a friend or family member with you.

Alternatives

It is of course, your right to access a range of other dispute resolution mechanisms. You can write directly to the Minister for Health or the State Ombudsman. You can also seek the assistance of the Justice Department's Community Justice Program.

However, people involved with these systems will want to know whether you have first attempted to resolve the problem in the manner already outlined. In most cases, they will require that you go through normal channels before they will become involved.

Complaints about the Scheme guidelines

Hospitals and Health Service Districts are responsible for applying the Scheme guidelines in a fair and consistent manner. However, they are not in a position to change the guidelines. If you believe that the guidelines themselves need to be improved you should direct your views to:

The Director
Integrated Patient Transport Unit
PO Box 2368
Fortitude Valley BC Q 4006

Email: patienttravelreform@health.qld.gov.au

Schedules

Schedule I

Essential specialised medical services

Services offered by a medical specialist.
Medical specialties include the following:

- Anaesthetics
- Cardiology
- Cardio-Thoracic Surgery
- Clinical Haematology
- Clinical Immunology
- Dermatology
- Diagnostic Radiology
- Endocrinology
- Gastroenterology
- General Surgery
- Geriatrics
- Gynaecological Oncology
- Intensive Care - Anaesthetics
- Intensive Care - Internal Medicine
- Immunology
- Infectious Diseases
- Internal Medicine
- Medical Oncology
- Neurology
- Neurosurgery
- Nuclear Medicine
- Obstetrics and Gynaecology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopaedics
- Otorhinolaryngology (Ear Nose and Throat)
- Paediatrics
- Paediatric Surgery
- Pathology
- Plastic/Reconstructive Surgery
- Psychiatry
- Radiation Oncology
- Rehabilitation Medicine

- Renal Medicine
- Rheumatology
- Thoracic Medicine
- Urology
- Vascular Surgery

Dental services where there is a gross deformity including:

- Congenital abnormalities of the skull and facial structures (eg. cleft lip and palate);
- Syndromes of cranio-facial distortion;
- Surgical orthodontic cases where facial disfigurement is such that surgery is required.

Health services provided as an essential component of services listed above (eg. physiotherapy following orthopaedic surgery, psychological assessment in preparation for psychiatric treatment).

Schedule II

Excluded medical services

The following forms of treatment are not considered to be eligible:

- Plastic and reconstructive surgery not attracting a Medicare rebate
- Clinical trials and experimental procedures
- Laser refractive services

Schedule III

Acceptable forms of proof of residence

The following forms of documentation are acceptable as proof of residence:

- Rates notice
- Household utilities notice
- Rent bill
- Household lease agreement
- Union membership card
- Electoral enrolment
- Taxation return
- Driver's licence
- Social Security card
- Bank letter
- Passport
- Public service identification
- Tertiary education enrolment
- Letter from employer

Schedule IV

Persons qualifying for reduced contributions

The following persons qualify for reduced patient contributions:

- Health Benefits Card holders
- Health Care Card holders
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card holders
- All children under 17 years of age.

About this booklet

This booklet is the Revised Version of the patient and carers information guide for the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme (PTSS). Copies may be obtained from your local public hospital.

This booklet is intended as information source only and every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this booklet is accurate and up to date. Queensland Health, and its officers and staff do not accept responsibility for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies.

Information can also be obtained from The Queensland Health web site.

A copy of the PTSS application form can be downloaded from <http://www.health.qld.gov.au>

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