Indian Ocean Territories Health Service

Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS)
Disclaimer

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Document Control

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Document Identification

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Linked / Associated Documentation

Document

IOTHS Clinical Services Capability Framework

Review Date

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2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the IOTHS PATS is to assist residents of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) to access health related specialist and acute care services in Perth which cannot be provided on the islands. The scheme provides a financial subsidy to cover a portion of the ‘out of pocket’ expenses incurred when residents need to travel to access specialist services; however the scheme cannot address all circumstances or situations and is not intended to fully fund travel.

3. Scope

This policy, although based on the WA Country Health Service PATS Guidelines, affords additional provisions based on the unique nature of the IOT.

This policy is intended for residents of the Indian Ocean Territories.

4. Out of Scope

This policy does not include provisions for subsidies covered by other programs or processes that may include but are not limited to:

- Workers compensation claims
- Motor Vehicle Accidents
- Emergency medical evacuations (except for repatriation)
- Veterans Affairs
5. Overview of PATS process

Eligibility for PATS, and the nature of services supported, escorts and travel subsidies is dependent on individual circumstances. A high level process diagram below summaries the PATS eligibility requirements.

- Consumer requests PATS assistance
- Consumer is eligible for PATS?
  - Yes: Service is available on Island through Telehealth or by visiting specialist (in appropriate time frame)?
    - Yes: Book Telehealth or appointment with visiting specialist
    - No: Consumer to fund their own travel and expenses
  - No: Treatment is covered under Medicare and is able to be delivered by Medical Specialist approved by Medicare
    - Yes: Travel subsidy request is for Birthing?
      - Yes: Consumer to fund their own travel and expenses
      - No: Eligible in 35th week of pregnancy for flights, accommodation subsidy and 1 escort
    - No: Consumer is eligible/approved for Escort?
      - Yes/No
- Flights booked for appointment by PATS office.
- Consumer travels for treatment/appointment and returns to island
- Process accommodation expense claim within 8 weeks of return (Blue form signed by specialist, boarding passes, receipt)
6. PATS Eligibility

6.2 Consumer eligibility for PATS

To be eligible for PATS subsidies the following requirements must be met:

- An Australian citizen, permanent resident or humanitarian visa holder (subclass 200-204)
- A resident of a Christmas Island or Cocos (Keeling) Islands (evidenced through documents such as drivers licence, electoral roll, utility bill or lease agreement)
- Hold or be eligible for a current Medicare card or a Reciprocal Health Care Agreement Medicare card
- Receiving specialist medical treatment from a medical practitioner who is registered with Medicare Australia as a specialist in a particular specialty.
- Need to travel to the mainland to receive treatment

6.3 Consumer ineligibility for PATS

PATS subsidies are not available for the following consumers:

- Not a resident of Christmas or Cocos (Keeling) Islands
- Tourists to the islands
- Family visitors who maintain a residence on the mainland
- Consumers on a bridging visa
- Travelling for treatment outside Australia
- Claiming damages or other payment for the injury or illness being treated
- Claiming travel or accommodation assistance from any other organisation, such as payments from Veteran’s Affairs or health fund
- Injured in a motor vehicle accident and covered by insurance
- Injured at work and covered by a work related insurance scheme, such as workers’ compensation
- Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) workers
- School or university boarders on the mainland
- In custody (in jail)
- Not eligible for Medicare
7. PATS Services eligible for subsidy

7.1 Services covered by PATS

Services that are eligible for PATS subsidies include:

- All Medicare-eligible specialist medical services
- Dental services that require general anaesthetic services
- Radiological services not available on islands (if Medicare-approved)
- Peritoneal or Haemodialysis training
- For birthing of an expectant mother during the 35th week of pregnancy

7.2 Services not covered by PATS

Services that are not eligible for PATS subsidies include:

- Treatment that is available on islands
- Service is available by a visiting specialist (in an appropriate time frame)
- Service is available via Telehealth
- Treatment not covered by a Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item number
- Second opinions unless requested by the treating medical specialist
- Radiological procedures if the procedure is available on islands
- Non-specialist medical treatment, including treatment by a general practitioner
- Research and clinical trials (unless prior approval received)
- Experimental treatment
- Consultations required for legal purposes
- Consultations required for educational support services
- General dental or orthodontic services
- Allied health and other health services including:
  - cosmetic surgery
  - complementary health treatments, such as acupuncture or herbal therapy
  - physiotherapy
  - occupational therapy
  - speech pathology
  - clinical psychology
  - podiatry
  - dietary and nutrition services
  - respiratory therapy
  - Audiology
- Nursing services or residential care services
- Diagnostic pathology and radiology pre-appointment tests (if available locally)
- Services related to surrogacy arrangements
- Procedures that are excluded under the WA Department of Health policy, including liposuction, gender reassignment surgery, varicose vein procedures, and tattoo removal
- Services provided by a general practitioner at a skin clinic
- Medical advice consultations
- Workplace medical assessments
- Travel by ambulance
- Treatment in an emergency department, unless you have been referred by your doctor and you see a specialist in the emergency department.
8. PATS Escorts

An escort is a person who travels with a consumer to a medical appointment to assist you travel. An escort needs to be considered medically necessary by a doctor or treating specialist to be approved for the PATS subsidy.

An escort must be aged 18 years or over. An escort is responsible for transport and accommodation needs during treatment.

An escort must accompany the consumer during travel and when attending appointments, and must be able to take care of the consumer (ie. To carry bags and source meals). Only in the instance of an expectant mother may the escort travel at different times.

Only one escort will be approved when a consumer is eligible.

An escort does not need to be a resident of Christmas Island or Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

8.1 Consumer eligibility for Escorts

Criteria for approval of an escort are automatically approved under the following circumstances:

- for children under the age of 18
- if Centrelink considers the escort a principal carer (evidence required)
- an escort is deemed necessary by a doctor due to consumer cognitive, visual, physical or psychiatric impairment
- if the consumer is undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- if the consumer is undergoing dialysis treatment (ie. Home dialysis training)
- if an escort is legally required to make decisions on behalf of the consumer
- if a consumer is in or past the 35th week of pregnancy (An escort for an expectant mother may travel at a different times)

8.2 Consumer ineligibility for Escorts

Escorts will not be approved according to the following criteria:

- Children under 18 years of age cannot be an approved escort
- Cultural, emotional or social comfort cannot be the main reason for an escort to accompany a consumer.
- When a clinical escort (ie. Doctor of Nurse) is required to travel with a consumer then a family escort will not be approved
9. PATS Subsidies

All claims for PATS subsidies must be made within 8 weeks of return to Christmas or Cocos (Keeling) Islands. All claims for subsidy reimbursement must include; accommodation receipts, blue form signed by a specialist, and flight boarding passes. Payment of approved claims will be made within 30 working days (six weeks) of all receipts and specialist certifications being received.

PATS support cannot extend past 6 months.

9.1 Travel Subsidies for PATS

Flights

- Consumers will be booked to fly to Perth on the closest available flight to their appointment date and will be booked on the first available flight following the completion of their appointment/treatment.
- Due to the infrequent flight schedule (bi-weekly), if a consumer would like to travel on a direct flight (ie. Not via another island) then the accommodation subsidy can only be claimed from and/or to the closest available flight to their appointment date.
- Travel dates under PATS are not flexible and cannot be extended unless there is a requirement for further treatment or medical reviews.
- The travel dates cannot be changed without the written agreement of the IOTHS. If the consumer does not travel on the booked flight they will be required to meet the cost of the full airfare. If a consumer chooses to delay their return to the islands for non-medical reasons they will be responsible for payment of the full airfare.
- If a consumer has 2 appointments within a 4-week period, they will be required to remain in Perth to attend the follow up appointment rather than returning to the islands between these appointments (consumers accessing chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or dialysis are exempt from this requirement).
- Birthing mothers are required to return within 4 weeks after the birth of their baby (unless specialist treatment is required).

Accommodation

Accommodation subsidies are available at the following rates:

- Private accommodation (no receipt required): $20 per night for a patient or $40 per night for a patient travelling with an approved escort.
- Commercial accommodation (receipt required): up to $60 per night for a patient or $75 per night for a patient travelling with an approved escort. If the escort is accompanying a patient who is to be hospitalised then the subsidy will be up to $60 per night for the escort for the nights the patient is hospitalised.

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. If commercial accommodation is used, the original receipts must be provided to the IOTHS when seeking reimbursement.
9.2 Travel Subsidies not covered by PATS

Travel subsidies are not available for the following:

- Meals
- Parking fees
- Ambulance call out whilst on the mainland
- Taxi, bus, train or other transportation fares (except for radiation therapy, chemotherapy or dialysis)
- Costs associated with appointments (Medicare gap fees, private consultation fees)
10. Application Process

General Practitioner refers patient to Specialist for treatment/appointment

Specialist accepts referral and provides appointment letter to consumer

Consumer provides letter to PATS Coordinator and PATS request form completed

PATS request form and specialist letter reviewed by IOTHS Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and eligibility assessed

PATS Coordinator to notify Consumer of subsidy request denial

PATS Coordinator books flights for consumer +/- Escort

Consumer notified of flight details. Consumer to book own accommodation

Consumer +/- Escort travel for appointment/treatment. Specialist to sign Blue PATS Certification Form

Consumer +/- Escort travel for appointment/treatment. Specialist to sign Blue PATS Certification Form

Consumer lodges request for accommodation reimbursement with accommodation receipts, Blue Specialist Form, Flight Boarding Passes

Reimbursement deposited in account nominated by Consumer

Consumer can lodge appeal through PATS Coordinator to IOTHS Health Services Manager (HSM)

HSM to communicate appeals decision to consumer
11. Appeals

All information provided will be verified or clarified before claims are approved or not approved.

Where a claim is not approved the consumer will be provided with an explanation of why the claim has not been supported, as well as an opportunity to seek a review of the claim by the IOTHS Health Services Manager.

Reviews will be conducted through a fair, impartial and transparent process and claims will be assessed within 10 working days of all information being submitted.

Complaints and requests for review will be dealt with promptly and consumers will be advised of the outcome in writing, as well as verbally if this is needed.