



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,  
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

## Indian Ocean Territories Health Service



## Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATs)

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## Linked / Associated Documentation

IOTHS Clinical Governance Framework  
IOTHS Clinical Services Capability

## Document Approval

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## 2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the IOTHS Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) is to reduce the cost of accessing specialist medical services that are not available locally by providing a subsidy towards the cost of flights and accommodation to the residents of the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT).

The PATS provides a financial subsidy to cover a portion of the 'out of pocket' expenses incurred when residents need to travel to access eligible specialist services, however, the scheme cannot address all circumstances or situations and is not intended to fully fund travel.

## 3. Scope

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

## 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. PATS Eligibility**

### **5.1 Eligibility for PATS**

To be eligible for the PATS subsidy, the following requirements must be met:

- An Australian citizen, permanent resident or humanitarian visa holder (subclass 200-204)
- A resident of Christmas Island or Cocos (Keeling) Islands with evidence of residency required (either a current IOT driver's license, power, or water 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.

### **5.2 Ineligibility for PATS**

PATS subsidies are not available for the following consumers:

- Not a resident of Christmas or Cocos (Keeling) Islands
- Tourists to the IOT
- Family visitors who maintain a residence outside of the IOT
- Consumers on a bridging visa
- Travelling for treatment outside Western Australia
- Claiming damages or receiving other payments for an injury or illness
- 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
- Students at boarding schools, or attending university outside the IOT.
- In custody (in jail)
- Not eligible for Medicare

## **6. Services eligible for subsidy**

### **6.1 Services covered by PATS**

Services that are eligible for PATS subsidies include:

- All Medicare-eligible specialist medical services
- Dental services that require general anaesthetic
- 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

## 6.2 Services not covered by PATS

Services that are not eligible for PATS subsidies include:

- Treatment that is available in IOT including services available by a visiting specialist (in an appropriate time frame) and services provided by 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 or nursing services
- 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 (except for dental services for adults and children that require a general anaesthetic or need hospital-based dental 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
- Liposuction, bariatric surgery, 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 the consumer has been referred by the treating doctor and the consumer sees a specialist in the emergency department.

## 7. Escorts

When the consumer has been approved for PATS, they may also qualify for one escort to assist them, subject to the conditions for approval outlined in section 8.1 (Except in circumstances where the consumer is a child with a life-threatening illness, in which two escorts can be approved).

An escort is a support person over 18 years of age who travels with the consumer to provide ongoing assistance and support. If the escort is eligible and approved, they are able to receive a PATS subsidy.

The escort must accompany the consumer during travel and when attending appointments. The exception to this is expectant mothers who may travel at an earlier time than their escort.

An escort is not required to be a resident of the IOT.

The escort must be deemed medically or culturally essential by either the IOTHS District Medical Officer (DMO), IOTHS Director Public Health and Medicine (DPHM) and/ or treating specialist to be approved for the PATS subsidy.

If the approved escort has to return home for reasons outside of their control, PATS will fund the journey for either the return of the escort, or for the replacement escort to travel in to support the consumer, but not both.

## 7.1 Eligibility for Escorts

Escorts are approved under the following circumstances:

- for children under the age of 18 years
- due to consumer cognitive impairment, including acquired brain injury, dementia, or confusion, physical or psychiatric impairment or where mobility is impaired
- if the consumer is undergoing chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- if the consumer is undergoing dialysis treatment (i.e. 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 35<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy
- if the consumer is attending an appointment that is likely to result in a significant diagnosis, be distressing, or require psychological support
- requirement for cultural or linguistic support

## 7.2 Ineligibility for Escorts

Escorts will not be approved according to the following criteria:

- Children under 18 years of age cannot be an approved escort
- When a medical escort (doctor or nurse) is required to travel with a consumer
- The escort is medically unfit to travel

## 8. PATS Subsidies

All claims for PATS subsidies must be submitted to the PATS Coordinator within 12 weeks of return to IOT and must include:

- An original tax invoice for commercial accommodation that identifies the consumer by name, and dates of stay.
- The Blue PATS Form signed by the treating specialist with dates of treatment
- The consumer and escort Flight boarding passes

## 8.1 Air Travel Subsidies for PATS

- The PATS subsidy covers economy return airfares from Cocos (Keeling) and Christmas Islands to and from Perth. The PATS Coordinator will schedule the closest available flight to the consumer's appointment and/or treatment and will book the first available flight following the completion of services.
- Flight dates are flexible and can take into consideration the consumer's choice in direct flights and extending arrival and departure dates. However, the accommodation subsidy will only be paid for the period between the closest available flight date to the consumer's appointment and treatment and closest available flights date following the completion of services.
- Medical certificates will only cover the period that the consumer is unfit for work and receiving treatment. Any extensions to travel dates made by the consumer will not be considered.
- If a consumer has more than two appointments/ treatment within a four-week period, they are encouraged to remain in Perth to attend the follow-up appointment rather than returning to IOT, however 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).
- If the consumer does not travel on the booked flight, they will be required to meet the full cost of the airfare.

## 8.2 Accommodation Subsidy for PATS

- The private accommodation subsidy is \$20 per night, or \$40 per night if the consumer is accompanied by an approved escort (no receipt required).
- The commercial accommodation subsidy is \$106.10 per night, or \$121.10 per night if the consumer is accompanied by an approved escort.
- An original tax invoice is required for commercial accommodation that identifies the consumer by name, and dates of stay.
- Commercial accommodation includes motels, hotels, Airbnb, inns, hostels, and caravan parks.
- Private accommodation includes private dwellings occupied by a friend or family member.
- The accommodation subsidy covers the period during which the medical specialist confirms that the consumer is required to stay for treatment.
- The accommodation subsidy is calculated on the number of nights the consumer stays in Perth, commencing at the closest available flight date to their treatment and closest available flight date at the end of treatment.
- Medical certificates will only cover the period that the consumer is unfit for work and any extensions to accommodation and flights made by the consumer will not be considered.
- The accommodation subsidy does not cover the consumer on the days/ nights they are in hospital.
- PATS accommodation subsidy will not be paid after 6 months and if the consumer requires ongoing treatment, they will need to consider relocating to Perth.

### 8.3 Travel Subsidies not covered by PATS

Travel subsidies are not available for the following;

- Meals
- Parking fees
- Ambulance call-out while in Perth
- Taxi, bus, Uber, train or other transportation fares (except for radiation therapy, chemotherapy or dialysis)
- Costs associated with appointments (Medicare gap fees, private consultation fees)

## 9. Exceptional Rulings

If the consumer does not meet the PATS eligibility criteria, the PATS coordinator may consider applications under exceptional ruling, meaning that subsidies may be granted in some circumstances. Exceptional rulings are made when the consumer meets the intent of the PATS scheme, which is equitable access to specialist medical services for people living in the IOT, but does not clearly meet the criteria of the PATS policy.

Exceptional rulings do not form a precedent. They enable fair and equitable decisions to be made, based upon individual circumstances. An exceptional ruling is valid per episode, and reviewed for subsequent episodes.

## 10.Repatriation

PATS covers the base costs of repatriating a consumer who died within Western Australia while on inter-hospital patient transfer or during PATS approved travel, or who was a PATS approved escort.



## 11. Application Process

- IOTHS General Practitioner refers the consumer to specialist for treatment.
- The specialist accepts the referral and provides the consumer with a confirmed appointment date.
- The consumer provides the appointment letter to the PATS Coordinator and completes a PATS Travel Form
- The PATS Travel Form and appointment letter are reviewed by IOTHS Director of Public Health and Medicine and eligibility for assistance and/ or escort are assessed and a recommendation is made
- The PATS Travel Form is reviewed and approved by the Health Service Manager
- If approved, the PATS coordinator books flights for the consumer. If not approved, the consumer is informed and if not satisfied can lodge an appeal through the PATS Coordinator to the Health Service Manager. An outcome is provided within 10 days.
- The consumer is notified of flight details and signs an Acceptance of IOTHS PATS Travel Conditions Form.
- Consumer books own accommodation.
- Consumer travels to specialist appointment/ treatment. The specialist signs the Blue PATS Certification Form.
- Consumer lodges request for accommodation reimbursement with accommodation receipts, Blue PATS Certification Form, and boarding passes within 12 weeks.
- Subsidy is deposited in an account notified by the consumer.

## **12. Appeals and Complaints**

In the first instance, complaints and appeals are reviewed by the Health Service Manager. The complaint will be acknowledged and investigated in a timely manner that is fair and equitable, without prejudice or assumption, with the emphasis on providing a just and objective outcome. All complaints and appeals will be investigated within 10 working days of time of lodgment.

Should the consumer be dissatisfied with the Health Service Manager's determination, they can request a formal review by the Indian Ocean Territories Administration (IOTA) Director for consideration.

Appeals will be conducted through a fair, impartial and transparent process by the IOTA Director and an outcome provided within 10 working days of lodgment.

Consumers can also lodge a complaint with the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office. <https://www.hadscow.gov.au/Make-a-Complaint>

### **13. References**

1. WACHS Patient Assisted Travel Scheme Policy (2023)

<https://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/~media/WACHS/Documents/About-us/Policies/Patient-Assisted-Travel-Scheme-Policy.pdf>

2. WACHS Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) Guidelines (2022)

<https://www.wacountry.health.wa.gov.au/~media/WACHS/Documents/PATS/Subsidies/eDoc---CO---PATS-Guidelines---Update-2022.pdf>