

PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

Statement by Minister for Health

MR KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Health) [12.18 pm]: The Gallop Government has a commitment to restore the effectiveness of the patient assisted travel scheme. Already, one of our election commitments to improve the PAT scheme was to provide it with additional funding. This we have done by providing an extra \$1 million to the scheme in last week's state budget. We will continue to support this scheme by providing \$4 million worth of additional funding over four years. The review of the PAT scheme is another of our election commitments we are undertaking. The review of the scheme will consult widely around rural and regional Western Australia, seeking to stimulate discussion and community debate about the future direction of the PAT scheme - something I know that is dear to your own heart, Mr Speaker.

The PAT scheme currently provides assistance to country residents who are required to travel more than 100 kilometres to attend specialist appointments. The scheme is administered through the network of country hospitals in accordance with set guidelines. The PAT scheme is highly valued by rural and regional Western Australia and there is an ongoing demand to extend the scope of the PAT scheme to cover additional specialist and other health services, and to increase the levels of assistance provided.

The review of the scheme will include dealing with issues relating to the adequacy of its funding and the way it is administered in order to foster a more flexible approach in the application of its guidelines. Its overall aim is to identify the community's priorities and preferred options for the future directions of the scheme. The review is conducting a public consultation process that will be twofold. First, a request for written submissions will appear in *The West Australian* on Saturday, 29 September, with written submissions closing on 31 October 2001. Secondly, seven community forums will be facilitated around Western Australia, starting with Collie on Wednesday, 10 October and then at additional venues in Albany, Karratha, Kalgoorlie, Derby, Newman and Mandurah. These community forums will be conducted by the Department of Health's rural health unit and facilitated by their local member of Parliament. The purpose of the public forums is to provide participants with an overview of the PAT scheme as well as present an overview of the internal review of the scheme. Another reason for presenting this review to the people of Western Australia is to gain valuable community input on the priorities and future directions of the scheme, including the eligibility criteria, the scope of services covered and how access to specialist appointments can be better coordinated. The Department of Health's rural health unit will deliver its findings of the review process to me at the end of November. Once the revision of the guidelines has been completed, an improved PAT scheme will commence in July 2002. Improvements to the scheme will be implemented earlier than July 2002 where possible. We are committed to ensuring that rural and regional Western Australians receive a vastly improved PATS service than that which they have had in the past.