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Your Ref:
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9 May 2014

Ms Lauren Mesiti
Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Administration
Legislative Council
Parliament House Perth WA 600

Dear Ms Mesiti,

PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

Firstly, Council would like to commend the Standing Committee on Public Administration in undertaking this inquiry into the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS).

Residents, particularly those on a low income/aged benefits/disabled are significantly disadvantaged in the Shire of Chittering when they need to attend specialised medical appointments outside of the Shire under the current provision of the PATS.

Our submission focuses on one area of the Terms of Reference of this inquiry, being *"Eligibility for PATS funding"*.

There is no public transport available from Bindoon. Muchea (30kms south of Bindoon) being the next nearest town has two morning and two evening buses (Transperth) to and from Muchea to Midland. Transwa services are available (Twice a week) but the timetable means it would result in the person requiring an overnight stay as they leave from Bindoon at 3:26 arriving in East Perth Terminal at 4:45pm (Tuesday & Thursday only).

It is understood that currently the following groups of people are eligible for the PATS:

- Permanent residents in a WA Country Health Service region needing to travel more than 100 km to the nearest eligible medical specialist services including a Telehealth service
- Country patients needing to travel more than 70km (each way) to access specialist medical treatment for cancer or dialysis, where the health service is unable to provide a transport service

Bindoon is just inside 100km from the CBD, so PATS is not available for metro appointments. Some residents can get assistance to travel to Northam, but that is further away than Midland or Joondalup, where most residents are referred to.

Silver Chain have an office in Bindoon and have the means to assist eligible clients with travel, but because most have appointments in the Perth Metro area and the funding arrangements (HAAC or CACP) only allow Silver Chain to take clients to appointments within the region, they are unable to assist. This condition of travel to the nearest regional centre is considered impractical, and needs to be reviewed.

Surgery aftercare is also a problem in relation to dressing of wounds as the Shire has been informed that a number of residents have had difficulty in attending the appropriate service due to transport issues.

To demonstrate inequities of the current scheme we have provided details of a local family below that are not eligible for assistance simply because they do not live more 100kms from Perth, they fall short by approximately 12kms. It seems crazy that had they lived just up the road in the next town (Wannamal) within in our Shire they would be eligible.

There is a young family in Bindoon, single Mum with three children (two very disabled girls as well as both being diagnosed with autism, currently aged 5 and 7 years and a son, 9 years of age, who also has autism). The children, particularly the girls, have to be taken to a lot of medical appointments and also require regular procedures at Princess Margaret Hospital. Following procedures requiring anaesthetic they are discharged, but must stay close to the hospital even if it is a day procedure. As the children do not have cancer they are unable to stay at Ronald MacDonald house unless the family is willing to pay full rates which is a similar cost to staying at nearby hotels (and the hotels are more spacious), placing significant financial hardship on the family.

The cost of fuel to ferry the children to their appointments also places the family in financial hardship as the mother's sole source of income is the carer pension from Centrelink. Appointments can be as frequent as once per fortnight.

They currently receive no assistance towards the cost of travel or accommodation.

Council respectfully requests that the criteria for *Eligibility for PATS funding* be reviewed to accommodate special needs families, whether young or old. Perhaps means/income testing could be introduced as an additional eligibility criterion if you live within the set eligibility distances from Perth.

We look forward to reading the outcomes of this review in due course.

Should you require any further information in support of our submission, please do not hesitate to contact me on 9576 4600.

Yours sincerely



Gary Tuffin
Chief Executive Officer

cc Hon Martin Aldridge MLC