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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response into the Economics and Industry Standing Committee - *Inquiry into Regional Airfares in Western Australia.*

The Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service (PAMS) provides medical services to four communities on the 13.6 million hectares of the Martu Native Title Determination Area. This is located in the East Pilbara and the main regional centre is Newman. Due to the distance from Perth PAMS utilises the local commercial air services a number of times a week to transport patients and also PAMS staff.

The air services are used to transport patients to and from Newman who require medical or specialist treatment. The Patient Assisted Transport Program subsidises travel and will attempt to use the cheapest option when booking flights for patient travel. This is usually very early morning flights or weekend flights. This has implications for patients who arrive in Perth at unsociable hours and with limited options to refer to for a meet and greet service. Patients then get lost in the "big smoke". If a mechanism for reduced cost of flights for residents of the East Pilbara was made the ability to coordinate travel for Aboriginal Patients would be more streamlined and assist the patient journey. On return flights to Newman it means that patients are required to catch flights very early in the morning or arrive out of hours requiring overnight accommodation in Newman before they return to communities. By being able to utilise flights at more sociable times would result in more efficient transfer of patients to and from Perth.

For families that have to travel and require to take additional family members other than the patient and escort means additional expenses. Choice is not readily available due to the airfare costs meaning that often people have to travel long distances when they are most at risk.

In addition PAMS relies on a fly in fly out model for its health workforce. Recruitment and retention issues for appropriately skilled and qualified staff has resulted in organisations such as PAMS being able to offer incentives such as travel and regular rotational leave. PAMS utilises staff from across Australia (preferred Perth or WA based) to maintain services and the most expensive route is Newman to Perth and return. Rostering for Medical staff results in the Friday night return to Perth and this can often cost as much as \$1000 one way for a seat. This can be compared to a flight Newman – Adelaide costing as little as \$450 one way

PAMS provides employment for 30 staff across the East Pilbara and this is a combination of fly in fly out employment or residential. PAMS contributes to the economy of the East Pilbara through the service it provides and the attempt to support local businesses.

PAMS is a not for profit organisation and reliant on Government funding. The costs for airfares impacts on the PAMS budget and clinical services are compromised by reducing funding. Currently PAMS has to review all flights to source the cheapest flight but then will incur other costs associated with accommodation/road transport and



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For staff who reside in Newman the cost for family and friends to visit is prohibitive and staff will drive to Perth as they are unable to afford to fly a family to Perth.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry and happy to provide any further clarification.

Kate Clarke
CEO
Puntukurnu Medical Service

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