



**Deputy Premier of Western Australia
Minister for Health; Tourism**

Our Ref: 25-46997

Mr Grant Hitchcock
Acting Usher of the Black Rod
Legislative Council
Parliament House
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Hitchcock

Thank you for your e-mail of 16 June 2015 providing a copy of the Standing Committee on Public Administration's – Report 25 – Report on the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme in Western Australia (WA).

As the Minister for Health, I am the responsible Minister for the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) in WA and I welcome the Standing Committee on Public Administration's report. My response to the Report's 21 recommendations is attached.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and commend the Standing Committee on Public Administration for their extensive community consultation and comprehensive review of the PATS program. The findings and recommendations will provide a vital and valuable reference in considering future reforms and enhancements to the scheme to ensure it meets the needs of country residents in WA.

As noted in the Report, PATS is a valued government policy by country residents that provides much needed travel and accommodation assistance to ensure that the general standards of health services in the regions and access to services is comparable to that available in the metropolitan area. It is acknowledged that further reforms can be made to the scheme that will make the scheme more accessible and reduce the financial cost for patients in accessing specialist medical services that are not available locally.

The Report's recommendations raise a number of complex and challenging issues that will need to be worked through in some detail to clearly identify the policy changes necessary to achieve the best outcomes. The financial implications of these changes will also need to be determined.

A number of the recommendations will require the development of detailed business cases for future budget consideration. Therefore, at this point I have provided general responses to each of the recommendations.

Once again I thank the Standing Committee on Public Administration for their work in preparing this comprehensive report and for providing a solid foundation for future reforms to the PATS program.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KH', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Kim Hames MLA
DEPUTY PREMIER
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

17 AUG 2015
Att

**Standing Committee on Public Administration – Report 25 on Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) -
Recommendations.**

Recommendation	Response
Subsidies	
<p>Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the current fuel subsidy provided by the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be increased to reflect a more realistic proportion of fuel costs incurred by patients.</p>	<p>Noted. The Committee should be aware that the current petrol subsidy of 16 cents per kilometre is greater than the cost of fuel for the majority of vehicles.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the fuel subsidy provided by the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Supported</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that the accommodation subsidies provided by the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be increased to ensure they reflect a realistic proportion of accommodation costs incurred by patients.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the accommodation subsidies provided by the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Supported</p>

<p>Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended to include an annual escalation adjustment to subsidy rates to reflect changes to fuel and accommodation costs.</p>	<p>Escalation adjustments will be considered as part of the annual reviews (refer recommendations 2 and 4)</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the current Patient Assisted Travel Scheme arrangements applicable to patients with treatment modalities greater than six months in duration be reviewed.</p>	<p>Supported</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended to include additional subsidies for return to home visits during long-term treatment.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>
<p>Service Eligibility (Allied Health and Dental)</p>	
<p>Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended to make allied health services eligible for Patient Assisted Travel Scheme funding where they are provided as an essential component of an integrated health care plan.</p>	<p>Noted – Recommendation raises a number of complex service delivery and service impact challenges. The recommendation has been referred to WA Country Health Services to consult with the Chief Health Professions Officer to identify and analyse the allied health service models that may be supported by PATS and will achieve the best health outcomes.</p>

<p>Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme eligibility criteria be reviewed every two years to ensure that advances in medical technologies are taken into account for the purposes of Patient Assisted Travel Scheme eligibility.</p>	<p>Supported</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended to expand the scope of dental services eligible for funding.</p>	<p>Noted – Recommendation raises a number of complex service delivery and service impact challenges. The recommendation has been referred to the Chief Dental Officer for further industry consultation and analysis of dental and oral health service models that may be supported by PATS and will achieve the best health outcomes</p>
<p>Maternity and Child Birth</p>	
<p>Recommendation 11: The Committee recommends that <i>Schedule 6: Special Rulings</i> of the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended in relation to child birth to provide accommodation assistance for three weeks prior to their due date for applicants who live in remote areas where no birthing facilities exist.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>

<p>Recommendation 12: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme eligibility criteria be amended to provide funding assistance for a patient escort for all pregnant women travelling to their nearest birthing centre for delivery.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>
Distance Thresholds	
<p>Recommendation 13: The Committee recommends that a means other than the distance threshold be identified to determine eligibility for the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme.</p>	<p>Not supported – PATS currently covers all WA Country Health Service regions and the Peel region. Distance is considered to be the most consistent and equitable means for determining eligibility and will be retained until a more equitable definition is identified.</p> <p>However, WA Health will investigate a provision to be included for residents in country area to be eligible to claim PATS, where they have accumulative travel of more than 200 kms for two or more trips per week to access an eligible medical specialist service.</p>
<p>Recommendation 14: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended giving consideration to adhering to the provisions of the <i>National Healthcare Agreement 2012</i> with regard to the definition of regional Western Australia.</p>	<p>Not supported – as per Recommendation 13.</p>

<p>Recommendation 15: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme be amended to replace the requirement for 16 hours surface travel for eligibility for automatic air travel to bring it in line with current Western Australian Country Health Service policy.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>
<p>Public - Private Referral</p>	
<p>Recommendation 16: The Committee recommends that the first option for the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme should be to give patients access to the public health system even if that access is further away than the closest private specialist.</p>	<p>Not supported – It is important to retain a primary focus on the delivery of services as close as possible to where people live. Therefore the closest available medical specialist service shall be retained as an underlying principle for PATS eligibility.</p>
<p>Administration and Forms</p>	
<p>Recommendation 17: The Committee recommends that the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme Application Form be amended to provide clear notification of the required time frame for lodgement.</p>	<p>Supported.</p>

<p>Recommendation 18: The Committee recommends the implementation of an electronic Patient Assisted Travel Scheme application and claims form system to support the Share online data system.</p>	<p>It is recognised that additional funding would enhance the Scheme, but any additional funding needs to be considered in the context of all other competing demands for Government funding.</p>
<p>Recommendation 19: The Committee recommends that the appeals process be clearly defined on the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme Application Form.</p>	<p>Supported.</p>
<p>Recommendation 20: The Committee recommends that information regarding claiming for exceptional circumstances be clearly set out on the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme Application Form.</p>	<p>Supported.</p>
<p>Suitable Accommodation</p>	
<p>Recommendation 21: The Committee recommends that there needs to be further suitable accommodation facilities provided for Patient Assisted Travel Scheme patients.</p>	<p>Supported. Note that WACHS is already working to increase affordable accommodation available for PATS patients both in the urban and regional environment.</p>