Complaints and Appeals

The Department of Health respects the rights of members of the community to appeal decisions and complain about services they find unsatisfactory. Patient feedback is important in identifying opportunities to improve services.

If you want to complain or appeal a PATS decision you should:

▪ Contact the relevant hospital’s PATS Manager for assistance
▪ Clearly identify points of concern and collect or prepare clear documentation of the complaint
▪ Provide details of a complaint in writing and include:
  - a concise summary of what happened including: names, dates and times
  - a clear outline of what event, action or inaction caused the complaint
  - the preferred outcome or remedy that the complainant is seeking
▪ Identify a support person for example a relative or close friend who accompanies you if you make a complaint in person
▪ Ask for a date when you can expect a response and ensure the provider has your current contact details.

If a response is received and you are unhappy with the outcome you can contact the independent Health and Community Services Complaints Commission, Northern Territory.

If you need an interpreter when requesting assistance, please ask a staff member.

Further information on the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme
PATS overview

The Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) is a subsidy program that provides financial help for travel and accommodation expenses if you need to travel a long distance to see an approved medical specialist.

PATS is utilised if telehealth is not available or the required visiting specialist service cannot visit the patients within an appropriate timeframe to provide the eligible specialist service required.

Patients must be referred by a medical professional to the nearest approved specialist to be eligible for PATS assistance.

PATS assists with travel and accommodation costs only. It is not intended to cover all costs associated with accessing specialist health services.

Eligibility

To be eligible for PATS, patients must meet the following criteria:

- Are an Australian citizen and permanent resident currently residing in the Northern Territory (NT)
- Are unable to utilise telehealth to access the required specialist medical service
- Are unable to utilise the required visiting specialist service within an appropriate timeframe
- Are eligible for Medicare
- Have a current referral to the nearest approved specialist
- Live more than 200km away from the nearest approved specialist
- Have to travel more than 400km in one week for renal or oncology treatment
- A patient who is approved for PATS assistance may be eligible for an escort if they have specific care requirements
- A patient under 18 who is approved for PATS assistance will automatically be approved for an escort to accompany them when they are required to travel for medical treatment.

How to access the PATS scheme

- The patient must attend a health centre or general practitioner for medical treatment
- The registered health professional or dental practitioner will identify if the patient requires specialist medical treatment
- If the patient does require specialist medical treatment, the registered health professional will explore options for telehealth (a specialist consult through video link) or a specialist service visit to the community in an adequate timeframe. If telehealth or specialist visit is not available within an adequate time frame, the health professional will complete a referral and arrange an appointment at the nearest specialist clinic for the patient
- Once the patient has received a letter confirming the specialist appointment, they are required to contact their referring health centre or doctor so a patient travel request can be created if eligible for PATS
- If PATS assistance is approved, a clerk will contact the patient to confirm travel and accommodation arrangements
- If the patient is unable to travel to the appointment, they MUST advise the health centre or PATS office prior to 48 hours before they are booked to travel
- If after attending a specialist appointment it is determined the treatment for your medical condition is not available in the Northern Territory within a clinically appropriate time frame, the specialist may refer you to a visiting specialist service or interstate to a specialist service
- A referral by a general practitioner or dental practitioner direct to an interstate specialist is not eligible for assistance.

For further information search: Patient Assistance Travel Scheme on www.nt.gov.au