



NSW Liberals & Nationals

Improving Treatment Access for Country Patients

Boosting the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme



THE NATIONALS
for Regional NSW

Improving Treatment Access for Country Patients

The NSW Liberals & Nationals Plan to boost the Isolated Patient Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)

The NSW Liberals & Nationals are committed to providing equitable access to quality health care regardless of financial status, background or place of residence.

For people living in regional and rural areas distant from needed treatment, equitable access often relies on travelling to treatment.

That is why in Government the NSW Liberals & Nationals will boost IPTAAS by 50% increasing the travel and accommodation rate for the average claim by approximately \$100.

Our commitment, providing an additional \$28 million over four years, will bring NSW more into line with other states like Western Australia which provides 16 cents per kilometre travelled and up to \$60 per night accommodation.

We will also review the charging of an administration fee, distance eligibility criteria (especially for patients with a chronic disease), parking arrangements and form complexity. We will also consider implementation of the recommendations from the Senate review of Patient Assisted Travel Schemes.

IPTAAS, which subsidises transport and accommodation costs for eligible patients who must travel at least 100km for treatment, but the scheme has been widely criticised for its meagre allowances and burdensome paperwork.

As Peter Garling SC indicates in the report following his 2008 review of public hospitals:

‘Once one accepts that we cannot take medical services to all of the population of NSW, then the only alternative is to take the people to the medical services and return them home.’¹

As was indicated in the 2007 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs:

‘there is ample evidence that a greater commitment to patient travel schemes will not only improve health outcomes for people living in rural, regional and remote areas but will also ease the healthcare burden in the longer term’².

¹ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals, page 170

² *Highway to health: better access for rural, regional and remote patients.* Standing Committee on Community Affairs. 7.100. 09/2007. p. 144

IPTAAS is currently inadequate

Under the current IPTAAS provisions, an allowance of 15cents per kilometre is provided and a motel room subsidy of \$33 for a single and \$46 for a double per night.³ The accommodation rate has hardly changed since 1987.

Much criticism has been made of the inadequate allowances and the fact that, despite being the most expensive state, the NSW scheme is less generous than that of other states.

Data in the Senate report shows that the NSW IPTAAS subsidy for fuel is less than SA and ACT; it is less than WA and ACT for accommodation despite the higher cost of staying in Sydney and patients pay a heftier administrative fee.

Garling found that:

*'The limited assistance available for accommodation can cause serious financial and logistical problems, particularly for rural and remote families who travel to a regional or metropolitan centre, often in emergency circumstances, for their relative's medical treatment.'*⁴

Despite removing a patient fee for pensioners and health care card holders after extensive protest by patients and NSW Liberal & National Members of Parliament, other patients are still charged \$40 for each return journey or for a block of treatments.⁵

This means that at 15 cents per km for a minimum allowable 100km journey, a patient will be eligible for \$30 for the round trip - less than the \$40 administration fee!

As Garling noted:

*'I was told by many, including NSW Health, that this fee often negates any benefit derived from applying for IPTAAS.'*⁶

As the Senate inquiry into access to health for remote and rural patients heard, '*... in some instances the financial burden is such that treatment decisions and health outcomes are compromised.*'⁷

In March 2009 the NSW Health Minister claimed that the NSW Government was: '*Working with the national Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) Taskforce to draft agreed principles for providing patient transport.*'⁸

So far there has been no evidence of this.

³ http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/Initiatives/iptaas/pdf/iptaas_form_new.pdf

⁴ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals, page 173

⁵ http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2009/pdf/information_guide_for_patients_and_their_carers.pdf

⁶ Special Commission of Inquiry into Acute Care Services in NSW Public Hospitals, page 171

⁷ *Highway to health: better access for rural, regional and remote patients.* Standing Committee on Community Affairs. 7.100. 09/2007. p. 69

⁸ http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2009/pdf/20090325_00.pdf

What Key Organisations are saying about the NSW Liberals & Nationals IPTAAS announcement

Cancer Council NSW welcomes the Coalition's commitment to improving the financial assistance for country patients who need to travel for specialist treatment. For too long, cancer patients, and others, have faced extraordinary additional costs and administrative hurdles when they need to travel and live away from home in order to access life saving treatment.

Increasing the funding for travel and accommodation is long overdue. Changes to the IPTAAS will make an enormous difference to patients and carers who are already going through a very stressful time, and will help make access to treatment fairer and more equitable.

Dr Andrew Penman AM

CEO, Cancer Council NSW

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NCOSS welcomes the Coalition's commitment to increase funding for the Isolated Patient Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS). For people on low incomes, particularly in rural and remote areas, transport is a major barrier to accessing specialist health services such as radiotherapy.

High travel and accommodation costs can mean that many people on low incomes are unable to pay essential bills or are simply unable to attend their health appointment.

NCOSS has been seeking improvements to the funding and administration of IPTAAS for some time. The current scheme is inadequate due to low levels of reimbursement and complex paperwork requirements. There have been ongoing reforms of the health system in NSW but there has been little attention paid to the needs of patients to access health-related services, such as transport.

The substantial funding boost to the IPTAAS budget and review of administrative requirements would make a big difference in the lives of thousands of people with acute or chronic illness by improving their access to health care.

Alison Peters

Director, NCOSS - Council of Social Service of New South Wales

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Cancer Voices NSW welcomes the NSW Coalition's policy to improve the Isolated Patients Transport Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS).

Cancer Voices NSW provides the voice of peoples affected by cancer in NSW – wherever decisions are about us made. We are very glad that the NSW Opposition plans to address a number of the issues which are so problematic for rural and remote cancer patients as they try to access the treatment they need.

Improvements to this scheme are necessary and most welcome. Faced with the costs of extensive travel, adverse financial challenges can result in a decision to give up treatment.

Access for cancer patients to treatment like radiotherapy should be available to all.

Cancer Voices NSW welcomes the Coalition's intention to provide substantial additional funds for IPTAAS; to review the administrative charge imposed, the distance criteria eligibility, parking problems and the maddening complexity of IPTAAS claim forms.

Cancer Voices NSW looks forward to working as a partner in this review where we can add value to the negotiations regarding these and other IPTAAS related issues.

Sally Crossing AM

Chair, Cancer Voices NSW