



Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (PTAS) Medical Practitioners' Guidelines

Department of Health

February 2023

TASMANIAN
HEALTH
SERVICE



Table of contents

What is the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme?.....	3
Who is eligible for PTAS?.....	3
Who is not eligible?	3
Who is an approved clinical provider?	5
Eligible clinical services.....	5
Ineligible services.....	6
Clinical trials.....	6
Nearest eligible clinical service	6
Exceptions to nearest eligible clinical service.....	6
Patient escort.....	7
Modified eligibility criteria for residents of King Island and Furneaux Group Islands	7
How much is the subsidy?.....	7
Transport subsidy	7
Accommodation assistance	8
What is an exceptional ruling?	9
Compliments, complaints and feedback.....	9
More information and contact details	9
PTAS Offices.....	9

In Tasmania, all medical practitioners who have a fellowship from a specialist medical college (accredited by the Australian Medical Council), qualify for specialist registration and are eligible to use the title specialist. Examples include specialist general practitioner, specialist paediatrician, specialist physician, specialist surgeon and so forth.

This document and others available from www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas have been developed to assist the general public and other stakeholders to understand and navigate the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme.

For clarity and to adopt usual community usage, the term General Practitioner or GP is used to refer to 'specialist general practitioners' in publicly available PTAS documentation. 'Specialist' or 'Specialist Medical Practitioner' is used to describe all other specialist registered medical practitioners.

What is the Patient Travel Assistance Scheme?

The Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (PTAS) provides subsidies to help patients with some of their travel costs if they need to travel long distances to access specialised health care.

PTAS provides financial assistance in three ways:

1. Travel assistance.
2. Accommodation assistance.
3. Assistance if a patient escort is required.

This document is a summary of the PTAS Operational Framework. For further information or details, please refer to www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas to download the PTAS Operational Framework.

The referring medical practitioner is often the first point of contact for patients who may be eligible for PTAS assistance. As such, referring medical practitioners are encouraged to routinely provide information about the PTAS scheme to their patients as appropriate.

Who is eligible for PTAS?

To be eligible for financial assistance under PTAS, patients must meet **all** the following criteria. They must:

- be a Tasmanian resident and an Australian resident eligible for Medicare.
- be receiving eligible clinical services from an approved clinical provider
- need to travel more than 75 kilometres one-way by the shortest practical route to access the nearest eligible clinical service OR more than 50 kilometres for the nearest appropriate oncology or renal dialysis treatment centre.

Patients eligible for a PTAS subsidy may also be eligible for a subsidy for a patient escort. Eligibility for the escort is determined according to the patient escort eligibility criteria.

Modified eligibility criteria apply to residents of King Island and the Furneaux Group Islands.

Who is not eligible?

PTAS does not provide a subsidy for:

- patients seeking specialist medical treatment outside of Australia
- travel costs associated with interhospital patient transfer, including medical escorts; these costs are the responsibility of the transferring hospital
- patients away from their residence when the treatment begins, such as on business, holidays, or visiting friends or family within Tasmania or interstate.

Patients who are eligible to claim assistance under another scheme including:

- Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Motor Accident Insurance Board (MAIB)
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- workers' compensation
- private health insurance.

How do I make a referral?

The referring medical practitioner may be a general practitioner (for intrastate travel only), a medical specialist, or an oral/maxillofacial surgeon who has assessed the patient.

PTAS application forms are available from www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas

Referral templates for Medical Director and Best Practice software are available from the Primary Health Tasmania website at www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/templates/patient-travel-assistance-scheme-ptas-application/.

Referring medical practitioners are responsible for completing Section 2 of the PTAS application form.

When completing Section 2 of the PTAS application form:

- clearly state the reason for referral and provide enough detail so that the PTAS Medical Authoriser (a medical practitioner) can assess the patient's eligibility for PTAS subsidies
- refer to the nearest eligible clinical service. If your referral is not for the nearest eligible clinical service, please provide the medical reasons for your decision
- do not refer to yourself, self-referrals are only considered where no other suitable provider is available
- indicate if patient requires an escort, refer to the accepted medical reasons for requesting an escort

Once you have completed Section 2 of the PTAS application form it can be returned to the patient or forwarded directly to the patient's nearest PTAS office.

- Please advise your patient that they are required to complete Section 1
- Submit Sections 1 and 2 to their nearest PTAS office
- Retain Section 3 and take it to their appointment to be completed.

If patients are required to travel urgently (within 7 days), please advise them to contact their local PTAS office immediately. Referring medical practitioners, or their reception staff can help by forwarding documents directly to the nearest PTAS office or calling the local PTAS office on the patient's behalf.

PTAS referrals remain valid for 12 months.

Who is an approved clinical provider?

To be eligible for a PTAS subsidy, patients must be referred to an approved clinical provider.

Approved clinical providers include:

- medical specialists who are registered with Medicare Australia as a specialist in the field for which the referral is made
- registered medical practitioners providing specialist services in a hospital under the supervision of an approved medical specialist
- registered dental practitioners providing eligible dental services
- registered allied health or nursing professionals providing lymphoedema treatment as part of a cancer-related treatment plan, or allied health services referred by a specialist as an essential component of an eligible service treatment plan
- registered midwives providing independent midwifery services for women assessed as having a low-risk or uncomplicated pregnancy.

Eligible clinical services

The following clinical services are eligible for PTAS subsidies:

- specialist medical services provided by the Tasmanian public hospital system
- specialist medical services covered by an item in the Australian Government Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), except for Ineligible services
- oncology or dialysis treatment
- Jack Jumper Allergy Program
- allied health services, including lymphoedema treatment, referred by a specialist as an essential component of an eligible service treatment plan
- independent midwifery services for women assessed as having a low-risk or uncomplicated pregnancy
- Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) where there is a known genetic disorder in a family and for which PGD is available.

Eligible dental services

Some dental services are eligible for PTAS subsidies including dental services for patients:

- requiring emergency hospital-based management of severe dental or oral/facial trauma, infections, or oral malignancy
- requiring hospital-based management due to a significant co-morbidity or other serious condition
- requiring dental treatment under general anaesthetic.

Ineligible services

The following services are not eligible for PTAS subsidies:

- general practice medical services
- private clinical services located outside of Tasmania
- general dental, orthodontic and periodontic services
- procedures not included on the MBS
- cosmetic procedures
- experimental treatments.

Clinical trials

Treatment as part of a clinical trial is not eligible for a PTAS subsidy without an exceptional ruling.

Nearest eligible clinical service

A PTAS subsidy is provided to the nearest eligible clinical service in Tasmania. If a service is not available in Tasmania, a PTAS subsidy will be provided to travel to the nearest eligible public clinical service interstate.

If a patient chooses to access eligible services in Tasmania that are further away than the nearest eligible clinical service, the PTAS subsidy will be equal to the amount for travel to the nearest eligible clinical service.

Exceptions to nearest eligible clinical service

Patients may request an exceptional ruling to attend a specialist health treatment at a facility which is not the nearest for:

- a clinical reason: there is a valid clinical reason to attend. This may include timeliness of treatment at the nearest location
- practicality: transport to the closest specialist service is not available, or it is more cost effective to refer the patient to another specialist.

Patient escort

A patient escort is a person who travels with the patient to their appointment or treatment and provides physical assistance. Cultural, emotional, or social support are not sufficient reasons for an escort.

An escort should be requested for:

- all patients under the age of 18 years
- when an escort is legally required to make health decisions on a patient's behalf
- patients requiring translation services to communicate when no translator service is available at the service.

An escort can be requested for the following reasons:

- **patient impairment:** such as cognitive impairment, visual impairment, mobility impairment, severe and complex mental illness, or frailty
- **active role of carer:** a carer is responsible for the patient's medical treatment, such as dialysis, catheterisation, administering medical treatment, or needs to assist with personal care requirements due to physical disability (this includes escorts who accompany the patient to receive training to assist with the patient's medical care), or needs to provide supervision during transport
- **a life-threatening condition or serious morbidity:** such as when a patient's condition or treatment has a high mortality risk score, or a patient is admitted to an intensive care unit.

Two escorts can be requested for

- newborn infants (birth to 6 months)
- children (over six months and under 18 years) when the child requires admission to a hospital for surgery or complex medical care.

All other requests for more than one escort require an exceptional ruling approval.

Modified eligibility criteria for residents of King Island and Furneaux Group Islands

In recognition of the geographical remoteness of these islands, and the increased need for residents to travel to access specialist health services, modified eligibility criteria apply.

Please see the [PTAS Operational Framework](http://www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas) (www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas) for further information.

How much is the subsidy?

Transport subsidy

PTAS provides financial assistance with travel costs. PTAS will subsidise the most appropriate and cost-effective form of transport available.

The following amounts apply to patients who hold an approved concession card.

Travel type	Subsidy amount
Private vehicle or hire car	\$0.24 per km
Taxi – only when you are required to fly or take the Spirit of Tasmania	Taxi voucher from airport or terminal to treatment centre (or accommodation if arriving prior to the day of treatment) and return
Public transport	Economy fare
Airfare	Best available economy fare
Spirit of Tasmania	Best available fare
Commercial Accommodation	Up to \$76/night within Tasmania Up to \$98/night on the mainland

Patients who do not hold an approved concession card are required to contribute towards their travel. Contribution rates are detailed in the following table.

Subsidy type	Contribution amount
Travel subsidies	Patients contribute the first \$82.50 towards the cost of each patient return journey. Patient contributions are capped at \$330 per financial year.
Accommodation subsidies	The patient and approved escorts meet the total cost of the first 2 nights' accommodation per travel journey.

Accommodation assistance

PTAS will provide accommodation assistance if the patient is eligible for a travel subsidy and is unable to stay with family or friends. One of the following reasons must apply:

- the referring medical practitioner writes that accommodation is required on the application form
- the appointment time is such that the patient would have to leave home before 7am or return home after 7pm
- flight availability means they need to arrive early for their appointment or stay later
- the patient has two or more PTAS-eligible appointments within 48 hours
- the patient needs to stay nearby the treatment facility for medical reasons to prepare for their appointment (such as requiring pre-medication prior to a procedure)
- the patient, due to the remote geographical location of their place of residence, requires obstetric confinement as determined by an obstetrician.

A list of suggested accommodation options is provided on the PTAS website.

What is an exceptional ruling?

Exceptional rulings are made on a case-by-case basis by the PTAS Advisory and Approvals Committee. The Committee considers the individual circumstances of a patient when assessing their PTAS application. Exceptional ruling approval is granted if an application can demonstrate the intent of the PTAS scheme is met, even if the strict parameters of the eligibility criteria or financial assistance rules may not have been. Exceptional ruling decisions do not form precedent.

Patients can request an exceptional ruling if their PTAS claim has been declined, and they believe they have special circumstances or additional information to support their claim.

Sometimes PTAS staff will initiate an exceptional ruling if they believe a patient has special circumstances that may warrant consideration.

Compliments, complaints and feedback

Patients and medical practitioners can lodge their compliments, complaints, or feedback with their local PTAS office or via the 'compliments, complaints and feedback' process at their local public hospital.

North

- Phone: [1800 008 001](tel:1800008001)
- Email: north.feedback@ths.tas.gov.au

North West

- Phone: [1800 062 322](tel:1800062322)
- Email: northwest.feedback@ths.tas.gov.au

South

- Phone: [1800 811 911](tel:1800811911)
- Email: south.feedback@ths.tas.gov.au

More information

More information about PTAS is available online (www.health.tas.gov.au/ptas) including the full PTAS Operational Framework and Application Form for patients.

PTAS offices

Royal Hobart Hospital
Phone: (03) 6166 8225
ptasrhh@ths.tas.gov.au

Launceston General Hospital
Phone: (03) 6777 6249
lgh.patient.travel@ths.tas.gov.au

North-West Regional Hospital
c/- Parkside Building
Strahan Street Burnie 7320
Phone: (03) 6477 7734
nw.ptas@ths.tas.gov.au