

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

7.105 That the next Australian Health Care Agreement recognise the fundamental importance of patient assisted travel schemes and include:

- a clear commitment to improvement of services;
- a clear allocation of funding for the schemes;
- a clear articulation of the services and supports that people using transport schemes can access; and
- a commitment to regular monitoring of access and service provision.

Recommendation 2

7.110 That as a matter of urgency, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council establish a taskforce comprised of government, consumer and practitioner representatives to develop a set of national standards for patient assisted travel schemes that ensure equity of access to medical services for people living in rural, regional and remote Australia.

7.111 That, in establishing national standards, the taskforce:

- identify relevant legislative, geographic, demographic and health service variables of the States and Territories impacting on access;
- identify barriers to access including costs of travel and accommodation, restrictions on escort eligibility and access to transport;
- assess the impact of co-payments;
- identify mechanisms to improve access for patients travelling between jurisdictions;
- identify, as a matter of priority, core, minimum standards that are relevant to all jurisdictions particularly in relation to eligibility criteria and subsidy levels; and
- give consideration to the development of optimal, outcomes-based standards that support consistent, quality outcomes for consumers, whilst enabling different State/Territory approaches that are responsive to local need.

7.112 Development of the national standards should include (but not be limited by) consideration of the following areas:

- patient escorts including approval for:
 - psycho-social support;

- approval for more than one caregiver to accompany a child; and
- approval for a caregiver to accompany a pregnant woman.
- eligibility:
 - identify a means other than the distance threshold to determine eligibility that takes into account a broader range of factors such as public transport access and road conditions; and
 - referral on the basis of the nearest appropriate specialists where an appointment can be secured within a clinically acceptable timeframe.
- appeals processes.

Recommendation 3

7.114 That the taskforce report to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council expeditiously so that national standards can be formulated and instituted within twelve months of tabling of the Committee's report.

Recommendation 4

7.116 That the taskforce develop a performance monitoring framework, which enables ongoing assessment of State/Territory travel schemes against the national standards and relevant goals set out in the (revised) *Healthy Horizons* Framework, and facilitates continuous quality improvement.

Recommendation 5

7.117 That the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council establish a mechanism to monitor performance, identify areas for improvement and review the standards as required.

Recommendation 6

7.119 That the taskforce review existing administrative arrangements to make them less complex, including development of a simplified generic application form; consideration of an on-line application process; and revision of the authorisation processes.

Recommendation 7

7.123 That the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council determine transport and accommodation subsidy rates that better reflect a reasonable proportion of actual travel costs and encourage people to access treatment early.

Recommendation 8

7.124 That the taskforce identify appropriate mechanisms against which to review subsidy levels on a regular basis to keep pace with changes in living costs.

Recommendation 9

7.125 That all States and Territories adopt a pre-payment system, whether by vouchers, tickets or advance bookings, for patients experiencing financial difficulty with the initial outlay.

Recommendation 10

7.126 That the Commonwealth Government initiate negotiations with the private health insurance sector to encourage insurers to offer products that include transport and accommodation assistance.

Recommendation 11

7.127 That State and Territory Governments develop memoranda of understanding that underpin clear, workable reciprocal arrangements for cross-border travel.

Recommendation 12

7.129 That State and Territory Governments expand travel schemes to cover items on the Medical Benefits Schedule – Enhanced Primary Care and live organ donor transplants (with assistance to the donor and recipient) and access to clinical trials.

Recommendation 13

7.131 That the taskforce develop a marketing and communication strategy that targets consumers and health practitioners. Consideration should be given to the role of the Divisions of General Practice in educating GPs about the scheme.

Recommendation 14

7.133 That appropriate, on-site (or nearby) accommodation facilities be incorporated into the planning and design of new hospitals/treatment centres.

Recommendation 15

7.134 That State and Territory Governments work proactively with charities and not-for-profit organisations to provide affordable patient accommodation and services. This should include:

- developing administrative arrangements that facilitate organisations' access to PATS funding;
- establishing memoranda of understanding with charitable organisations, which set out commitments to quality service delivery; and
- developing partnerships with the non-government sector to provide suitable patient accommodation.

Recommendation 16

7.138 That State and Territory Governments, in consultation with Indigenous representatives and Indigenous Health Services, identify and adopt best practice standards and develop programs to improve Indigenous patients' access to medical services by:

- ensuring continuity of care for Indigenous patients by establishing liaison services and improving coordination in, and between, remote communities and treatment centres;
- accommodating the cultural and language needs of Indigenous patients from remote communities, particularly in respect to the provision of escorts and translators; and
- expanding access to appropriate accommodation services.

7.139 In establishing these best practice standards and programs government and Indigenous representatives should:

- identify and build on existing examples of good practice by health services in Indigenous communities and State and Territory programs; and
- establish clear governance and administrative arrangements for the delivery of programs, including consideration of the most appropriate bodies to provide day-to-day administration of services (for example, a government body or community-managed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services).