



Hon Stephen Wade MLC Minister for Health and Wellbeing

Thursday 3 June 2021

Extra Support for Aboriginal Patients

Aboriginal patients travelling long distances for specialist medical treatment will be entitled to advanced subsidies and automatically have travel partners approved for reimbursements, as part of a range of improvements being introduced to the Patient Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS).

Announcing the changes on National Reconciliation Week, Minister for Health and Wellbeing Stephen Wade said the changes are part of a new PATS Aboriginal Engagement Strategy which has been developed to engage more Aboriginal patients in the scheme.

“A review found that despite Aboriginal South Australians in regional areas having relatively low health status, only one percent of Aboriginal patients applied for subsidies through PATS, which clearly shows we are missing opportunities to reimburse patients,” said Minister Wade.

“The strategy has identified key areas to ensure the scheme is more accessible, more flexible, easier to understand and provides better support for Aboriginal patients travelling for medical treatment.

“We have listened to the feedback from Aboriginal patients, organisations, staff and the community about their needs, and these improvements will provide a more streamlined system to ensure Aboriginal patients have better access to PATS and the support they need.

“The strategy will play a key role in providing better health outcomes for Aboriginal clients by working with key Aboriginal organisations to reimburse patients for travel, and improving engagement with Aboriginal patients and their carers at all points of their journey.

“When there are unavoidable financial costs for Aboriginal patients who have no option but to travel long distances to receive a specialist medical service, we want to support them to get the health care they need.”

The changes build on the Marshall Liberal Government’s continuing reform of PATS, which has seen a range of improvements implemented to make the scheme more accessible to regional South Australians.

The changes for Aboriginal patients include:

- PROVIDING subsidies in advance
- GRANTS for advocacy agencies who support patients to complete online claims
- REMOVAL of concession card requirement for the first night of accommodation subsidy
- AUTOMATIC approval for travel partner subsidies.

Rural Support Service Executive Director, Debbie Martin, said the strategy was developed through consultation with staff, Aboriginal organisations and agencies.



“It is important that Aboriginal patients can access the care they need through services that are flexible and culturally appropriate. These improvements to PATS are another way we can ensure these types of services continue to be provided both now and into the future,” Ms Martin said.

“As part of the strategy, we will be recruiting an Aboriginal Project Officer to strengthen relationships with Aboriginal organisations and engage with the broader community about accessing PATS and sharing their feedback.

“These improvements will make it easier for Aboriginal patients to access PATS subsidies and we look forward to implementing this strategy and engaging with the community on these changes.”

The strategy will cost approximately \$264,000 annually.

For more information, visit www.pats.sa.gov.au