



MEDIA RELEASE



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NTCOSS PATS Review on the back

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) and Bosom Buddies (NT) welcome the outcome of the Northern Territory Government's review of the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS)

"This Review brings about the most significant reform to the PATS scheme since its inception" said Executive Director of NTCOSS, Ms Wendy Morton. "The \$7.5M funding to make the scheme more generous and simpler, in order to benefit all Territorians, is very welcome."

Increases to the daily allowance for accommodation and fuel subsidies will ensure that more people are able to afford the medical care they desperately need.

"Patients in the NT currently suffer due to issues of lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation, lack of transport services and linkages, appalling road conditions, a lack of specialists and stringent guidelines around the assessment of escorts", said Ms Lesley Reilly from Bosom Buddies. Coupled with the size and remoteness of the NT, all of these factors exacerbate health conditions for many patients – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

"In addition, the NT has the harshest zone eligibility in the country, with its requirement that patients must travel more than 200 km to the nearest specialist medical treatment. No other state has a kilometre threshold greater than 100 km"¹, said Ms Reilly.

A number of key areas must still be prioritised by the Government.

- Allow greater flexibility in assessment of eligibility for escorts, on an individual basis - including practical and emotional needs, not just physical and language needs;
- Increase in provision of 'meet and greet' services – especially for remote patients;
- Reduce the 200 km zone for eligibility to 50 km from the nearest specialist; to facilitate more people receiving treatment in a timely fashion, and reduce missed appointments.
- Explore options for specialists to visit more regional and remote locations to reduce the need for patients to travel so far.

"Such changes are fundamental to assisting all Territorians to access appropriate health services in a timely, affordable and equitable fashion", said Ms Morton.

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¹ The exception is the ACT, who make their scheme available to permanent residents of the ACT who are required to travel interstate for specialist medical treatment which is not available in the ACT.

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