

## **Rural patients left behind by outdated Travel Subsidy Scheme**

The Rural Doctors Association of Queensland (RDAQ) is joining calls for urgent reform of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme (PTSS), adamant rural and remote Queenslanders are not being adequately supported when forced to travel for essential medical care.

"The PTSS was designed to help reimburse some of the costs for patients who must travel to access specialist care," said RDAQ Acting President Dr Danielle Allan.

"But the reality is, it hasn't kept pace with the rising cost of living and the unique challenges faced by rural communities."

Currently, patients receive a \$70 per night accommodation subsidy and 34 cents per kilometre for travel, calculated from their nearest public hospital—not their actual place of residence.

Dr Allan said the scheme disproportionately affected the 35% of Queenslanders living in rural and remote areas.

"If you live 100 kilometres from your closest hospital, you won't be reimbursed for that distance and, good luck finding accommodation in Brisbane for \$70 a night," she said.

"These are often the people least able to afford out-of-pocket costs. Any contribution is appreciated, but the financial burden, on top of illness, can be devastating."

RDAQ has joined consumer groups raising concerns about inconsistencies in how the scheme is applied across different health services, delays in reimbursements, and the complexity of paperwork and pre-approvals, especially in urgent cases.

"It doesn't stand up to the pub test when compared to travel allowances for politicians," Dr Allan said.

"Politicians choose this as their career path and are well compensated for the job they do. They know the expectations and travel requirements of their role and receive generous allowances for travel and accommodation.

"Rural patients don't choose to be sick. They're forced to travel and forced to pay. It's time we had an independent tribunal review PTSS reimbursements the same way parliamentary allowances are reviewed. It isn't acceptable for a review to be delayed to 2026 as proposed by the Government."

Beyond PTSS, RDAQ stressed workforce shortages remained the biggest challenge for rural patients.

"Until we address shortages in medical, nursing, midwifery, and allied health staff, rural communities will not have equitable access to healthcare and will continue travel for care," Dr Allan said.

"Public services are being reduced or bypassed due to lack of staff, and general practice is suffering. Without strong primary care, the health of individuals and entire communities is at risk."

RDAQ continues to advocate for fairer systems and stronger support for Queenslanders living outside metropolitan centres, because every Queenslanders has a right to see a doctor, no matter their postcode.

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