

**Policy of Financial Assistance to Support Travel to and from Hospital**

Finance Department

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# Policy of financial assistance to support travel to and from hospital

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Some patients and their carers/escorts attending hospital for an inpatient stay, outpatient appointment or daycase are entitled to help with the cost of travel to attend hospital. This policy sets out NHS Highland's responsibilities in relation to providing financial assistance for patients travelling to and from hospital. It is based on Scottish Government guidance contained in MEL 1996 (70) "Patients' Travelling Expenses Schemes".

1.2 The policy is for use by those who may be involved in authorising, and/or administering patient travel, patients, their carer/escorts, GPs and staff of NHS Highland.

1.3 There are two schemes in operation in NHS Scotland to assist patients with travel costs associated with these attendances:

**a. Patient Travel Scheme** - all NHS Scotland patients are entitled to help with travel costs if they are in receipt of certain income based benefits. This assistance is not dependent on distance travelled. The benefits which currently apply can be found in Appendix 1

**b. Highlands and Islands Patient Travel Scheme** - This scheme recognises that patients who are resident in the Highlands and Islands may be required to travel significant distances to attend hospital appointments given the geography of the area. Under this scheme all patients from the former Highlands and Islands Development Board areas are entitled to financial assistance with their travel costs if they live more than 30 miles from the hospital they are attending.

All other residents in NHS Highland not included in 1 or 2 above must pay their own travel expenses to get to hospital.

1.4 Patients who have NHS Ambulance Service transport arranged, private patients, or patients visiting primary care services such as their GP, dentist or pharmacist are not entitled to financial assistance.

1.5 Acting outside these guidelines is considered to be Ultra Vires

## 2. Principles

The following principles will be applied when reimbursing travel expenses claims. The rates of reimbursement can be found in Appendix 2

- a. The Patient travel schemes are not designed to fully reimburse patients for the full cost of travelling to attend an appointment but to provide a contribution towards the cost.
- b. Patients qualifying for financial assistance towards travel expenses under the Highlands and Islands Travel Scheme (i.e. as per section 1.3b above) are required to pay the first £10 of any claim. This will be deducted from the claim received.
- c. Patients and their carers/escorts (hereafter referred to as escorts) are expected to use the most cost effective means of transport suitable to their needs, taking into account the overall cost of the trip.

- d. Relatives who accompany a patient on an air ambulance and do not fit the definition of an escort (see appendix 5), will be responsible for their own accommodation and return journey. Travel on the air ambulance does not make an individual an escort.
- e. Flights will only be authorised by the patient's GP or hospital consultant if the patient's health condition or disability warrants this or the overall cost of the trip is less than if bus, ferry, car, train and necessary overnight accommodation is used.
- f. Final judgement as to the cheapest and reasonable means rests with NHS Highland. It is the patient's responsibility to check in advance of travel if they are in any doubt.
- g. NHS Highland has the facility to book air, rail and ferry travel. See Appendix 3 for contact details. However should a patient wish to arrange their travel and claim back the cost, this is also acceptable.
- h. Should a patient use their own car mileage expenses can be reclaimed.
- i. Travel for private treatment is not refunded
- j. Only journeys actually completed should be claimed. Claiming journeys that have not been made is fraud, and action will be taken against anyone submitting fraudulent claims.
- k. Patients and escorts are encouraged to stay with family and friends where possible.

### **3. Who can claim expenses**

The following people may be able to claim reimbursement of travel expenses:

- a. Patients who are permanent residents of the NHS Highland area.
- b. Authorised escorts - These are suitable adults who do not suffer from a medical condition that will restrict their ability to support the patient during their travel between the home address and hospital. Escort must be able to drive, if the method of transport is by car. Further guidance on eligibility of escorts is provided in appendix

Students studying and living outside the NHS Highland area are **not** eligible to claim expenses from NHS Highland as they are considered to be ordinarily resident at the location of the academic institution and not at their parents' address.

There is no provision within NHS Highland for reimbursement of visiting expenses. However those in receipt of income based benefits may be able to obtain some help with visiting costs. Enquiries should be directed to your local DWP office.

## **4. What Expenses Can Be Claimed**

### **4.1 Transport**

**4.1.1 Patients travelling by car** - Patients travelling by car are entitled to be reimbursed for fuel expenses at the prevailing mileage rate subject to the following:

- a. Only fuel expenses where a patient is in the vehicle is refundable, unless an authorised escort is travelling home following the patient's admission or travelling to hospital to collect the patient on discharge.
- b. Should two patients who live at the same address have appointments on the same day in hospital, generally only one car journey will be refunded but exceptional circumstances will be considered. Where exceptional circumstances exist the patients must obtain approval from the patient travel administrator before the date of the appointments.

**4.1.2 Patients travelling by Public Transport** - Standard class bus and train fares can be reclaimed upon production of receipts.

**4.1.3 Ferries** - Patients who live on an Island and are required to travel to hospital by ferry should refer to appendix 5 for specific arrangements as this depends on the island of residence.

Patients will be expected to travel as a foot passenger unless:

- a. The GP authorises a vehicle to be included in the booking if the patient requires this for medical reasons.
- b. A car is essential for the completion of the journey due to the distance to hospital.

**4.1.4 Patients transported to hospital by air ambulance** – these patients will be entitled to have their return journey funded, subject to fulfilment of the other requirements of the scheme.

## **4.2 Accommodation**

4.2.1 Patients and approved escorts will be entitled to have overnight stay costs refunded at the current rate per person per night, as detailed in Appendix 2, if the stay is unavoidable due to the time of the appointment, admission, or discharge.

4.2.2 Escorts who are authorised to travel to hospital with the patient must return home at the earliest opportunity, where possible undertaking the journey in one day. If they choose to stay they must do so at their own expense.

4.2.3 Escorts who are required to accompany a patient to and from hospital may either return home and travel back to the hospital on the patient's discharge, or remain near the hospital where the patient has been admitted (provided the cost of accommodation does not exceed that of the second return journey which would otherwise have been required)

4.2.4 Escorts accompanying children **under** 16 years will normally be provided with hospital accommodation free of charge. If this is not available, accommodation will be funded in accordance with the prevailing reimbursement rates.

4.2.5 Patients and escorts are encouraged to stay with family and friends where possible. Overnight expenses when staying with family and friends will be reimbursed at the family and friends overnight stay rate detailed in appendix 2.

4.2.6 The decision regarding reimbursement of overnight expenses rests with the Patient Travel Administrator who processes the form, taking into account the above rules.

### **4.3 Maternity Patients**

4.3.1 Maternity patients who are medically required to stay close to hospital from 38 weeks until birth, will be entitled to reimbursement of accommodation costs as per the overnight accommodation rates.

4.3.2 If the consultant or GP authorises an escort the two round trips can also be claimed, one to take patient to hospital and one to collect on the patients discharge. Alternatively bed and breakfast expenses can be claimed for the escort whilst the patient awaits delivery up to a maximum of the cost of the return journey that would have been claimed had the escort not remained near the hospital.

4.3.3 The Highlands & Islands Patient Travel Scheme is unable to reimburse the travel and accommodation costs of partners who wish to be present at the birth of their child.

### **4.4 Taxi Fares**

Due to the high cost of taxis all alternatives should be investigated – travel by taxi should be seen as the last resort. NHS Highland will consider reimbursement of taxi costs in certain circumstances, for example:

- a. There is no public transport available
- b. Time restraints prevent the use of public transport
- c. It has been approved by the patient's clinician due to mobility issues.

All taxi journeys must be approved prior to the taxi journey being undertaken either by:

- a. the patient travel administrator, or,
- b. for patients flying from Islay, Tiree and Campbeltown, the officer booking/authorising the flight.

### **4.5 Long-term treatment**

Return travel will be paid for patients on long term treatment (more than two weeks) within and out-with the Highlands, who are able to be discharged from hospital at weekends.

### **4.6 Continuous Treatment**

Patients claiming travel expenses under the Highlands and Islands travel scheme will not be required to pay the first £10 towards the cost of each return journey if they are undergoing Continuous Treatment. Continuous treatment only applies where patients are required to attend as an outpatient for a course of intensive treatment over a short period of time, i.e. more than one attendance per week for a course of treatment, e.g. a course of chemotherapy or radiotherapy or attendance for regular renal dialysis. Further information on what qualifies as continuous treatment and the procedure for claiming under this provision can be found in Appendix 6

## **5. What expenses cannot be claimed**

The following cannot be claimed:

- a. Loss of earnings
- b. Meals and refreshments

- c. Travel costs of patients who have become ill while abroad or away from their home address
- d. Parking fines
- e. Childcare Costs
- f. Car Hire

## **6. Making a Claim**

**6.1 Claim forms** – these are available from hospital wards, clinics and cash offices. The form should be completed by the patient or escort and signed and certified as detailed on the back of the form. This includes certification of attendance on the dates shown on the form. The forms should then be handed into the relevant cash office for reimbursement or posted to

Patient Travel Administrator (North Highland)  
NHS Highland  
Assynt House  
Beechwood Park  
Inverness  
IV2 3BW

Patient Travel Administrator (Argyll and Bute)  
Aros  
Blarbuie Road  
Lochgilphead  
PA31 8LB

**6.2 Proof of Entitlement** - In all cases where full expenses are claimed, the patient or the patient's parent will be asked to provide proof of entitlement before their expenses are reimbursed. The proof of entitlement must be dated within the previous 12 months. If the patient is unable to provide proof of entitlement to full expenses the patient contribution will be deducted from the claim. This will be refunded once proof has been provided of entitlement to full help with travel costs.

### **6.3 Suspected Fraudulent Claims**

In cases where it appears that a patient has deliberately applied for assistance with travel costs to which they are not entitled the matter will be referred to Counter Fraud Services. Cashiers may refuse to pay expenses in cash if they suspect a claim is fraudulent until further checks have been completed. This will result in delays in patients receiving their expenses

### **6.4 Advances**

Patients who are unable to pay the initial cost of their travel should contact their local patient travel administrator (see appendix 3) to request an advance of travelling expenses. Completed expense forms and receipts must be returned promptly to the patient travel administrator after attendance.

### **6.5 Retrospective Claims**

Claims must be submitted within three months of attendance at hospital. Claims outside this time will not be considered for reimbursement except in very exceptional circumstances.

## **7 Missed Appointments**

Patients should leave their home in sufficient time to ensure they arrive at the hospital in time for their appointment. If the patient arrives late, and cannot be seen they will not be entitled to reclaim their travel costs.

Any patient who has had travel tickets arranged for them by NHS Highland and is unable to attend their appointment should contact their Patient Travel office immediately. If it appears the appointment has been missed without good reason NHS Highland will invoice the patient, escort or guardian for any costs incurred

## **8. Queries or Complaints**

In the event of a query, this should be directed to the Cashier at the hospital where the claim is being made or to the relevant Patient Travel Office detailed in the useful contacts section. If necessary, should the patient not be satisfied with the decision, the query will be escalated according to Appendix 7



### **Appendix 1 - Qualifying Income-based Benefits**

Any patient in receipt of one of the following benefits is entitled to full help with their travel costs, irrespective of the 30 mile rule:

- Income Support
- Income Related Job Seekers Allowance
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- Working Tax Credit with a Disability Element included
- NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate
- HC2 Certificate
- Universal Credit

## Appendix 2 - Rates of Reimbursement and Deduction

Patient Contribution	£10
Mileage Rate	13 pence per mile*
Overnight bed and breakfast rate	Up to a maximum of £35 per person per night
Overnight friends and family rate	£10 per night

\*The rate of reimbursement is based on the HMRC fuel advisory rate for a petrol engine 1400cc to 2000cc. The reimbursement rate for each financial year will be determined by the advisory fuel rate from 1 March. The rates can go down as well as up.

## **Appendix 3 – Contact Details**

### **Patient Travel Department**

NHS Highland can book air, ferry and rail travel. All your specific travel needs should be discussed with NHS Highland's Patient Travel Department – please see contact details below. It would be appreciated if you could make your travel needs known to us in advance as the transport provider staff cannot anticipate or deal with problems if they have not been informed.

NHS Highland covers the council areas of Argyll & Bute and Highland. To book transport or for further information on your travel requirements, please contact your local Patient Travel Department on the telephone number below.

### **Argyll & Bute Council Area Contact Details**

Patient Travel Administrator (Argyll and Bute)

Aros

Blarbuie Road

Lochgilphead

PA31 8LB

For queries                      01546 605653

### **To make a flight booking or obtain a ferry warrant**

Campbeltown:                01586 552105

Islay and Jura:                01496 301031

Tiree:                              01879 220323

### **Highland Council Area Contact Details**

Patient Travel Administrator (North Highland)

NHS Highland

Assynt House

Beechwood Park

Inverness

IV2 3BW

For bookings and queries:    01463 704902

#### **Appendix 4 – Ferry Travel**

Patients who live on the Islands of Gigha, Mull, Colonsay, Lismore, Coll & Tiree should contact their GP practice and a travel warrant for ferry travel will be issued

Patients who live on Islay and Jura should contact the Travel Co-Ordinator on 01496 301031 to make their ferry bookings

Patients who live on any other Island should make their own arrangements and reclaim the cost through the usual procedure.

## **Appendix 5 - Escort Definition**

### **What is an escort?**

An escort paid for by the Highlands and Islands Travel Scheme is for a patient who needs assistance to ensure the safe completion of the journey to or from hospital.

### **Who can be an escort?**

Any person that the patient wishes to nominate to travel with them on their journey. This can be a family member, carer or friend. Escorts must be aged 16 years or older.

### **Can a patient have more than one escort?**

This scheme reimburses the costs of only one escort per patient, unless the patient's medical condition requires a second escort for the safe completion of the journey. A second escort will not be authorised to provide emotional support to either the patient or escort.

Should you wish an additional parent/relative/friend to travel with you, or you do not qualify for an escort under this Scheme, this will be at your own expense. However there may be financial assistance available through the Scottish Welfare Fund. Please contact your local authority for further information.

### **What is the role of the GP or hospital consultant?**

Your family doctor (GP) or hospital Consultant will usually be the person referring you/family member/relative to hospital. They will decide whether or not an escort is necessary.

### **When can a patient be accompanied by an escort?**

A patient under 16 years will automatically qualify for an escort. In all other cases the criterion for authorising an escort is that it should be medically necessary for the patient to be escorted.

You will be entitled to an escort if you have severe mobility restrictions; severe visual or hearing impairment; learning or behavioural difficulties and mental incapacity; if you are not normally independent; and where assistance during the journey is needed beyond the usual help that the airlines and public transport providers can provide.

There are 3 elements to be taken into account when deciding whether or not an escort can be supported through the Highlands and Islands Travel Scheme:

1. Is it necessary that you be accompanied on the journey?

There has to be a necessity to be accompanied by an escort, not that it is desirable to be accompanied.

2. Is the necessity of a medical nature?

Social or emotional grounds are not sufficient to be supported through the Highlands and Islands Travel Scheme.

3. Is the medical necessity only for the safe completion of the journey?

If you are medically fit to complete the journey unescorted, an escort will not be authorised in order to allow a relative, partner or friend to be present during treatment or other forms of hospital management.

It is not possible though this Scheme to fund an escort's travel for such reasons as to allow partners to be present at the birth of their children or to allow relatives to be present during serious surgical procedures.

**If a patient has previously had an escort, will an escort always be approved?**

No, each individual case has to be dealt with on its own merit and in accordance with the criteria above.

If you have an escort on one return journey this will not necessarily lead to the automatic authorisation of an escort in subsequent journeys where your physical or mental condition may have changed.

**What about fear of flying?**

Fear of flying is not in itself a reason for asking for an escort. The airline companies are accustomed and experienced in dealing with passengers who have anxieties or fears around flying, and they will deal with this as required.

## **Appendix 6 - Continuous Treatment**

### **Introduction**

When a patient is undergoing Continuous Treatment whereby they are required to attend as an outpatient for a course of intensive treatment over a short period of time, i.e. more than one attendance per week for treatment for the same condition, e.g. a course of chemotherapy or radiotherapy or attendance for regular renal dialysis.

In these circumstances the deduction of £10 from each return journey claimed will not apply.

### **Definition**

Continuous Treatment is defined as one course of intensive treatment over a short period of time, i.e. more than one treatment per week for example a course of chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Rather than being admitted to hospital, the patient is treated on an outpatient basis.

NB Due to the large geographical area that NHS Highland covers it may be practical for some patients to be treated on an inpatient basis during the week and then to travel to their home address for the weekend. These journeys would be classed as Continuous Treatment for the course of their intensive treatment only.

### **Procedure**

Where the above has been established, staff only should clearly mark "continuous treatment" when authorising a travel claim form. Patients should submit these on a regular daily or weekly basis to the cashier for payment. It must be remembered that claims over 3 months old will not be paid. Finance staff may contact wards to confirm that they have certified that the claimant is, in fact, receiving continuous treatment. Please ensure that the staff member authorising the claim has clearly printed their name on the form.

### **Example**

A renal patient can claim travel expenses under Continuous Treatment for attending dialysis appointments three times a week. Any other travel for scans, x rays etc would not constitute Continuous Treatment and a claim could be made under the normal patient travel scheme. Therefore any additional appointments before, during or after the actual course of intensive treatment cannot be claimed under Continuous Treatment. A claim could be made only under the Highlands and Islands Patient Travel Scheme for these additional appointments.

### **Requirements of Staff**

Medical, Nursing and Reception staff are asked to ensure that the above rules are followed and not to assign "continuous treatment" to a claim form inappropriately.

### **Requirements of Patients**

Patients are asked to note the above regulations and not to expect or request additional expenses where the requirements are not fulfilled.

For further information or advice please call Raigmore Cash Office on 01463 705401 or the Patient Travel Department on 01463 704902 (Inverness) or 01546 605653 (Lochgilphead)

**Appendix 7**

**COMPLAINT ESCALATION CHART**

**Local Patient Travel Officers/Hospital Cashier**



**Patient Travel Administrator**



**Director of Finance**



**Complaints Department**