

Patients Travel Expenses – Guidance for Patients

Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board is required to follow the NHS Travel Scheme detailed in NHS MEL(1996)70 to ensure that patients receive appropriate help with travel costs if they are entitled to help.

The Travel Scheme states:

1. All patients who are on low income or benefits as defined by the regulations are entitled to reimbursement of necessary travelling expenses and are refunded at the agreed local mileage rate or public transport costs.

Patients should take proof of entitlement to the cash office at the hospital attended along with evidence of your appointment/treatment. If evidence is not provided, the patient will be given an HC5 form to complete and submit. Payment will be made by cheque thereafter.

2. Patients, who are on low income but not on benefits defined in the regulations, might be entitled to help and should apply for assessment using an HC1 form - assessment for help with travel costs. Forms are available at the general office or information desk at local hospitals. Confirmation will be sent determining the level of support entitled to.
3. Patients who are not entitled to help via the scheme can apply to be considered for an ex-gratia payment. The Board can exercise discretion to reimburse travelling expenses for residents who are undertaking or receiving planned treatment and care within an NHS facility in the UK, and who do not qualify for reimbursement of travel costs under the scheme regulations.

It is important to note that this is a discretionary scheme and Scottish Health Boards are not obliged to implement payment under these circumstances. The Board can exercise this discretion and reimburse reasonable expenses where either the distance or the frequency of travel means the patient is experiencing financial hardship because of meeting the expense of multiple out of region trips or where the referral is outside our normal tertiary referral route.

A request to be considered for an ex-gratia payment should be sent in writing to the Director of Finance. The request should include details of the journeys made, mileage or public transport receipts, evidence of low family income or circumstances. The Director of Finance will consider an ex-gratia payment, however it is not automatic.

Retrospective claims - Patients may claim help with travel costs for up to 3 months retrospectively.

Visitors - The scheme is for travel by the patient and does not cover expenses for visitors.

Accommodation - is not covered by the scheme but may be provided in some ex-gratia cases. The cost of meals will not be met as part of accommodation costs.

Escort - If it is considered medically necessary for a patient to be accompanied by an escort and the patient (not the escort) is eligible to have his or her travel costs reimbursed, the travel costs of the escort may also be reimbursed. The claim for reimbursement of the escort's expenses should be included by the patient in the claim for reimbursement of their own expenses. Eligibility for an escort may be determined by the patient's GP or by a consultant.

Guidance on reasonable expenses for all schemes

The Board will reimburse the costs of travel to an NHS facility on the basis of the most appropriate and cost effective mode of transport for the patient. The main anticipated modes of transport will be an appropriate form of public transport (bus or train) or the use of a private car. Assistance with travel costs will be made available by the Board on the following basis:

Rail fares - travel by standard class using APEX fares is considered to be the most cost effective option. Where available, claimants should take advantage of any "saver" options.

Bus fares - travel by standard class on a recognised public transport carrier. Citylink fares are considered to be the most cost effective option when travelling longer distances.

Private car - where a private car is used, a mileage allowance of 14p per mile will be paid. The mileage claimed for the journey distance will be reviewed and verified by the Board using appropriate route planning information software. This rate will be reviewed annually by the Director of Finance.

Air fares - the use of air travel to travel to an NHS facility would only be anticipated and supported by the Board in very exceptional circumstances. The age, health status and mobility of the patient would be taken into account when determining if air travel was the most appropriate form of transport for the patient. Where air travel is necessary, the cheapest available economy or tourist rates should be used.

Taxis - In a few cases where there is no alternative (for example, in cases where patients have restricted mobility or in cases where there is little or no public transport), patients may have to use a taxi for the whole or a part of their journey. In such exceptional cases these costs may be reimbursed.

Taxis may be provided by the hospital for patients being discharged home or transferred to another hospital. This will be the decision of the General/Capacity Manager on duty.

For any general enquiries please contact:

General Office, DGRl on 01387 241764

For ex-gratia payments, application should be made in writing to:

Director of Finance, Finance Dept, Ground North, Mountainhall Treatment Centre, Bankend Road, Dumfries, DG1 4AP