

Travel and Accommodation Support for Renal Patients

National Travel Assistance (NTA)

The National Travel Assistance Scheme helps people financially who are **referred by their specialist** to see **another specialist**, and need to **travel long distances** or **travel often**.

The specialists must either be part of a government-funded health and disability service, for example, a renal dialysis centre or a specialist disability service.

The scheme also provides assistance for people who regularly travel to and from a dialysis centre.

Your local District Health Board (DHB) is responsible for funding travel assistance so you can access specialist health and disability support services. Each DHB has a National Travel Assistance (NTA) coordinator who can help with your application; **your renal social worker may also be able to help you**.

Travelling to a specialist medical appointment can be a financial burden and cause a huge amount of stress. Don't be afraid to ask if you are eligible for financial assistance and how to go about receiving it.

What does travel assistance mean for me?

If you are eligible, you will receive assistance towards your travel and possibly your accommodation costs. Your specialist will need to approve accommodation and specialised transport needs, this includes taxi, mobility taxi, or air travel.

Travel by private vehicle or public transport is assessed when you register with the NTA coordinator.

When can I claim for assistance towards travelling costs and how much can I claim?

If you are referred for treatment by your publicly funded health and disability specialist (not GP) to another publicly funded specialist and can **answer “yes” to one or more of the following questions**, you may be eligible to claim assistance.

1. Do you travel more than:
 - 80 km one way per visit (for a child)?
 - 350 km one way per visit (for an adult)?
2. Do you visit a specialist (or haemodialysis unit) 22 or more times in two months?

3. Do you visit a specialist six or more times in six months and travel more than?
 - 25km one way per visit (for a child)?
 - 350km one way per visit (for an adult)?
4. Are you a Community Services Card holder and travel more than:
 - 25 km one way per visit (for a child)?
 - 80km one way per visit (for an adult)?

Please note that – a child is anyone younger than 18 years of age at the time of treatment.

High frequent users – Patients who need to visit a specialist **more than 22 times on separate days within a two-month period** are called High-frequent Users. This includes people who permanently dialyse at a haemodialysis centre three times a week. These patients (adults and children) are able to receive travel assistance no matter the travel distance and may be eligible for accommodation assistance if deemed necessary by the specialist. Accommodation will not usually be approved for clients travelling less than 100 kilometres.

Frequent users – Patients who need to visit a specialist **more than five times on separate days within a six-month period** are called frequent users. **Adult frequent users** who have to **travel more than 50 kilometres** from their home to the location of the specialist service are able to receive travel assistance. **Child frequent users** who have to travel **more than 25 kilometres from** their home to the location of the specialist service are also able to receive travel assistance.

If you receive, or are eligible for travel assistance from another provider such as ACC, Work and Income (WINZ), Ministry of Transport, or Ministry of Education, you may not be eligible for assistance under the National Travel Assistance Scheme.

How much can I claim for travel?

Mileage is calculated from the client's home address to the hospital treating department via the shortest practical route.

Costs of travel are paid at either the least expensive available transport rate that meets the patient's health and disability needs, or at 28 cents per kilometre (the current rate as at June 2011), where private transport is used.

Receipts are required with all claims for reimbursement of public transport costs. Where the claim is for more than the least expensive available transport rate (e.g., taxis), the specialist needs to write why this form of transport needed to be used.

Can I claim for accommodation costs?

If you are eligible and accommodation is approved by your specialist, you will be able to claim for some assistance for example, payment towards costs of a motel room, or an allowance when staying with friends and family.

Accommodation is not usually approved for travel less than 100 km one way. If accommodation is required when travelling under 100km one way an approval letter from your specialist must be supplied.

You can either ask your hospital NTA coordinator, or hospital social worker to book you into one of their DHB preferred accommodation providers, (they will have a list of the places they recommend), or make your own accommodation arrangements and claim financial assistance by completing an NTA form.

Funding for accommodation greater than 16 consecutive nights requires an approval letter from the specialist.

Financial assistance rates are subject to change, so check with your National Transport Coordinator

Accommodation – current as at June 30th 2011

Auckland - up to \$100 per night

Wellington - up to \$80 per night

Elsewhere - up to \$75 per night

Private Accommodation - up to \$25 per night

Please refer to NTA Policy for number of days available for accommodation for client and/or support people.

<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/3623>

Can I claim for the costs of a support person?

Under certain circumstances you may also be able to get assistance towards a support person's costs, for example, if your specialist recommends a support person to assist you with clinical decision-making, or to provide physical support.

When a child is eligible for travel and accommodation assistance, they will always be eligible for assistance towards a support person's costs.

For more information about claiming travel assistance please contact:

- a Hospital NTA Coordinator
- a Hospital social worker; or
- the Ministry of Health
National Travel Assistance
PO Box 1026
Wellington
<http://www.moh.govt.nz/travelassistance>
- 0800 281 222 (press 2). Hours are 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday with the exception of Wednesday 9.30am - 5pm

How do I claim for travel assistance?

1. Your hospital NTA coordinator or social worker will need to help you register for travel assistance. They will need to send the completed registration form to the Ministry of Health.
2. The Ministry of Health will assess and approve your registration for eligibility.
3. A confirmation letter, along with blank claim forms will be sent to you by the Ministry of Health.
4. Complete your claim form in full. Make sure to have your claim form signed and stamped by the attending facility/hospital or attach signed and stamped proof of attendance, for example, a hospital letterhead appointment discharge card/letter/note.
5. Attach original, itemised receipts for public transport and/or accommodation to your claim form.
6. If this is your first claim, or your bank account details have changed, please attach a printed deposit slip or the top of your bank statement or account verification from your bank.
7. Claiming for travel assistance must be made within 12 months of date of appointment.

A huge stress of an already stressful situation can be alleviated by getting this kind of help; don't be afraid to ask if you are eligible and how to go about receiving it.

Handy Hints

Once on the scheme remember to keep all documentation and receipts to claim eligible reimbursement.

Discounted Taxi – half price taxi fares are available in some centres, to qualify for this you will need to be assessed by an authorised agency, ask your social worker for a list of these.

National Transport Coordinator – Most hospitals have these advertised with their contact details. If you are unable to find this information ask your social worker or kidney doctor who should be able to help you.

Home haemodialysis machine are installed and paid for by your DHB, although if you move you may need to pay for it to be moved. You will need to check with your dialysis unit. If you are in a private rental you will need the permission of the landlord before a machine can be installed. If you are in a Housing NZ home Housing NZ needs to be approached for approval.

Useful information (not covered by NTA)

Live Organ donors

Live organ donors automatically qualify for travel assistance without meeting any other eligibility criteria. (NOTE that WINZ assistance for live organ donors is separate from NTA assistance for live donors.

Mobility Parking – you might qualify for parking in designated mobility parking spaces. Check out <http://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/Support/MobilityParking/tabid/75/Default.aspx>

Total Mobility Tax Scheme

The Total Mobility Scheme provides subsidised taxi service to people with serious mobility constraints by way of a personal Total Mobility Photo ID card or Total Mobility Taxi Vouchers that provides a discount of usually 50 per cent of the normal taxi fare.

Half price taxi fares are available in many places around New Zealand. Find out how the scheme works in your area by contacting your local council, or talk to your doctor. Your local Disability Information Centre may also be able to help.

To qualify for Total Mobility you will need to be assessed by an authorised agency. Ask your social worker for a list of these.

Going on Holiday on Dialysis

In New Zealand dialysis is free to all New Zealand residents and there is an agreement between units to dialyse patients providing the unit you want to go to has space to accommodate you. However dialysing in another unit for holiday, a family occasion or work are a major problem, although if you able to dialyse yourself it can be a little easier.

There is no national coordination for holiday dialysis and you are advised to talk to your dialysis unit if you are planning a trip away. The earlier you start planning the more chance you have that another unit may be able to assist you.

For a list of dialysis units and holiday accommodation ask you local dialysis unit or go to <http://www.kidneys.co.nz/Dialysis/Holiday-Dialysis/>

For overseas dialysis holidays, check out <http://www.globaldialysis.com/forum/index.html> A Directory of 15773 dialysis centers in 161 countries.

For dialysis in Australia, check out <http://www.kidney.org.au/ForPatients/DialysisandTravel/tabid/608/Default.aspx>