

National Travel Assistance scheme

Frequently asked questions

26 March, 2024

What is the National Travel Assistance (NTA) scheme?

The NTA scheme helps people access specialist health care who need to travel long distances or travel frequently by contributing to their travel and accommodation costs.

What are the current NTA eligibility criteria?

Eligibility is based on age (child/adult), distance needed to travel (kms), frequency of travel, and Community Service Card status. People must meet at least **one of** the following criteria:

1. Travelling more than:
 - 80 km one way per visit (for a child) or
 - 350 km one way per visit (for an adult)
2. Visit a specialist 22 or more times in two months.
3. Visit a specialist six or more times in six months, and travel more than:
 - 25 km one way per visit (for a child) or
 - 50 km one way per visit (for an adult)
4. A Community Services Card holder and travel more than:
 - 25 km one way per visit (for a child) or
 - 80 km one way per visit (for an adult)

What is the history of the NTA scheme?

The policy settings for the NTA were established by the Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora in 2005. The scheme has remained largely the same since. The mileage and accommodation reimbursement rates were last increased in 2009.

There have been increasing calls for changes to the scheme to make it more fit for purpose. The Ministry led a review in 2018, and improvements to the scheme have been recommended in Te Aho o Te Kahu's Clinical Service Plan (2022) and the recent Rural Health Strategy (2023). Several NGOs, coordinated by the Cancer Society, have also advocated for improvements.

Today's announcement is the start of a programme of modernisation which will be progressively implemented over the coming years.

What is the cost of the current scheme?

Health NZ currently spends \$33 - \$35M per year on the NTA scheme to support 28,000 – 33,000 people (19% are children and 81% adults). The changes will result in an additional spend of up to \$18 million per year and are estimated to benefit an additional 4,500 patients, as well as providing better support to whānau currently accessing it.

Which stakeholders contributed to the development of this initial set of changes?

The approach and initial set of changes were developed with Te Aho O Te Kahu, informed by the 2018 review and other research and reports, as well as input from NGOs and other stakeholders. Feedback from patients and HNZ districts has also informed the approach.

What is the email address that claims can be sent to?

NTA claims can now be emailed to: claimsmanagement@health.govt.nz

What changes to eligibility are proposed?

The specific changes to eligibility are yet to be confirmed and current criteria remain for now. The initial changes will be informed by the needs of whānau who require regular treatment for cancer and renal dialysis and those living rurally and provincially who travel long distances.

A more consistent approach to exceptions is also planned to address current variations across the country and be more responsive to individual family circumstances. Health NZ will work through the specific detail over the coming months and begin phasing in changes later this year.

How will the changes impact NGOs who support patients travelling for treatment?

These changes will provide increased support to charities and NGOs to continue the great work they do in supporting patients and whānau. Some charities such as Ronald McDonald House and the Cancer Society can claim the accommodation rate for families who are eligible. The new accommodation rates will help them cover their costs of providing this support directly to patients. Improved and easier processes and updated eligibility criteria will also enhance their ability to support the families they work with.