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HCCA Feedback on the IPTAS Information Poster

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Background

The Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA) of the ACT was formed over 30 years ago to provide a voice for consumers on local health issues and now provides opportunities for health care consumers in the ACT to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA involves consumers through:

- consumer representation
- consultations
- training in health rights and navigating the health system
- community forums
- information sessions about health services
- advocating for issues of concern to consumers

The HCCA is dedicated to the promotion of consumer-centred health care, which we believe can be successfully achieved through the application of these five key principles:

1. Respect
2. Choice and empowerment
3. Consumer involvement in health policy
4. Access and support
5. Information

Our submission is based on these principles and was developed in consultation with our members.

Introduction

HCCA welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the new IPTAS information poster. We strongly support this scheme and are keen to continue to work closely with the ACT Health Directorate to ensure consumers derive maximum benefit from the services provided.

We believe the poster should provide a clearer explanation of the services provided by IPTAS and more details about eligibility to access the services. It is also important to say that the scheme only covers partial reimbursement.

The title, 'Are you an ACT resident?', fails to deliver the main message. It needs to be clear that this poster provides information to health care consumers needing to travel interstate to access specialty health services. ACT residency is a secondary issue. Perhaps a better main title is simply:

"Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme", which is generally self-explanatory.

The second subtitle might be:

"Do you have to travel interstate for medical procedures or consultations not available in the ACT?"

There needs to be a general description explaining what IPTAS provides. We suggest:

"The Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (IPTAS) provides financial assistance towards travel and accommodation costs to permanent residents of the ACT (and their carer(s)) who need to travel interstate to obtain specialist medical treatment or oral surgical health care that is not available in the ACT"

Consulting a GP

According to the IPTAS Guidelines, GPs will determine the severity of a patient's medical condition and decide whether it is necessary to make a referral to a specialist or oral surgeon outside the ACT. As eligibility to access IPTAS is dependent on the GP, consumers should be advised to speak with their GP before applying to IPTAS. The next point/sentence might therefore read:

"You must have a referral for this treatment from your GP"

Who is the service for?

HCCA suggests that the poster explicitly state that the IPTAS is for ACT residents who *need* to access specialist or oral surgical health care interstate. Otherwise it is not clear what type of health care IPTAS applies to. For instance, the guidelines state that consumers seeking second opinions, allied health services or any other services not requiring a referral are not covered under IPTAS. We suggest the following point should read:

"IPTAS does cover costs relating to visits seeking second opinions, allied health services or any other services not requiring a GP referral"

Escorts/Carers

This is an aspect of IPTAS that is not mentioned at all in the poster, despite being highly relevant to consumers. Many consumers requiring specialist care are likely to meet the criteria for having their escort reimbursed, but may not be aware of this. Parents of children requiring interstate specialist care also need to know that IPTAS can reimburse up to two escorts for all children under 17 years. We have therefore included carers in the points suggested above.

Application Form

We suggest the poster should include the next step in the process for consumers who decide that they would like to apply for support from IPTAS. It is worth stating that the eligibility guidelines apply and that these and an application form can be downloaded from the website. Eg:

“To find out if you (and your carer(s)) are eligible for our help, and to obtain an application form, please contact us

Telephone: 6205 3299

Website: health.act.gov.au/consumer-information/interstate-patient-travel”

We understand that the Guidelines for IPTAS are also in the process of being reviewed and we look forward to providing consumer input to those as well. We also suggest working with Medicare Local as part of the reviewing process. As this scheme is specifically designed for consumers, it is essential that they are given the opportunity to comment.

Finally, the image used in the draft poster is not particularly representative of the topic and may need to be reconsidered to include a travel theme.

We would be more than happy to discuss any part of our submission with you further.

Authors

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Based on our comments, this is an example of an IPTAS information poster that conveys the key messages for consumers:

Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme

Do you have to travel interstate for medical procedures or consultations?

The Interstate Patient Travel Assistance Scheme (IPTAS) provides financial assistance towards travel and accommodation costs to permanent residents of the ACT (and their carer(s)) who need to travel interstate to obtain specialist medical treatment or oral surgical health care that is not available in the ACT

You must have a referral for this treatment from your GP

IPTAS does NOT cover costs relating to visits seeking second opinions, allied health services or any other services not requiring a GP referral

To find out if you (and your carer(s)) are eligible for our help, and to obtain an application form, please contact us

Telephone: 6205 3299

Website: health.act.gov.au/consumer-information/interstate-patient-travel