

**Media release**  
**20th June 2022**

## **“The relief is palpable”: grassroots cancer support network applauds IPTAAS changes**

The NSW Government’s overhaul of the IPTAAS (the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation) scheme, announced today, is a “massive win” for cancer patients and those seeking specialist treatment across rural and regional NSW, says [Can Assist](#), the largest cancer support network for country patients across the state.

“We applaud Minister Bronnie Taylor and the Government for these changes; the improvements will ease the financial burden placed on people affected by cancer living in country NSW, ensuring they can access the care and treatment they need,” says Can Assist Executive Director Emma Phillips.

Within country NSW, Can Assist helps families needing to travel up to 50,000km a year over the course of a treatment cycle, and it delivers more than \$2 million annually across around 10,000 separate instances of assistance, of which almost half is for travel and accommodation costs. “These are middle class Australians who have considered selling their homes or skipping their treatment altogether because they could not afford to get to treatment. The new IPTAAS rebates will change that reality,” says Ms Phillips.

Can Assist has been working closely with other key stakeholders, including members of the Regional Accommodation Providers Group (RAPG\*), its community network of volunteers and health professionals across the state to shine a spotlight on the issues. “We have canvassed the insights and feedback from our network of volunteers, not-for-profit accommodation facilities, healthcare professionals and patients about the challenges, and provided this feedback with recommendations to Government. We are thrilled that Minister Taylor has recognised the problems and is doing something about it. There’s a collective sigh of relief she has listened to all the stakeholders that have been collaborating to effect change.” Ms Phillips says.

Can Assist and the RAPG were calling on the NSW Government to:

1. Increase the accommodation and travel rebates.
2. Stop single guest ‘discrimination’ and provide rebates per room
3. Simplify the IPTAAS application process.

“They’ve listened to our concerns and gone several steps further,” says Ms Phillips.

### **Key changes:**

- **Travel rebates:** NSW will now have the most generous scheme in the country for patients who must travel long distances for specialist treatment. “This is a great result,” says Ms Phillips. “Notwithstanding the recent spike in petrol prices, the near-doubling of the private car travel rebate will not only fund the petrol, but it will also leave extra for families to assist with the inevitable maintenance costs that come with the extra kilometres travelled. A 12-

month cancer treatment cycle would typically see rural cancer patients travelling between 5,000km and 10,000km a year – a burden metro residents just don't need to consider.”

- **Accommodation rebates:**
  - the Government has addressed the unfair treatment of single patients/travellers by allocating rebates on a per room (rather than per person basis)
  - the rebate for a one-week stay has been increased by 75%, from \$43 to \$75 a night, and the 8-nights+ rate has risen by as much as 85%
  - the inequitable distinction in rebates for guests of commercial vs not-for-profit accommodation facilities has also been abolished. “The not-for-profit sector operates in every major regional location across the state and provides a critical gateway to the local health infrastructure. This change will reduce this sector’s increasing and unstable reliance on the charity sector and prevent guest out-of-pocket expenses rising,” Ms Phillips explains.
- **Making the application process easier:** “As one of our volunteers said recently, these forms are really daunting at a time when you’re fighting for your life. Simplifying them will make a huge difference,” says Ms Phillips.
- **Targeted IPTAAS awareness campaign,** designed to help reach more people who need the support. “Patients often tell us they had no idea the scheme existed, so greater awareness is very welcome,” adds Ms Phillips.
- **Eligibility:** this has been widened across the treatment spectrum, correcting a long-standing inequity for rural cancer patients.

Vicki Meyer, Can Assist President and Chair says Can Assist will continue to advocate for its communities by taking part in the working group to deliver on these proposed changes. “We represent the views and experiences of our network stakeholders – that is, our community of volunteers, our recipients, and the primary and secondary healthcare network. We will collaborate to ensure the grassroot communities are engaged and that changes made are effective and helpful,” she concludes.

*\* The RAPG provides accommodation for patients and carers across regional and rural NSW*

**-ends-**

#### **INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES**

Emma Phillips, Executive Director, Can Assist

Margaret Dalmau, Manager, Lillier Lodge

Leonie James, case study

#### **About Can Assist – [www.canassist.org.au](http://www.canassist.org.au)**

Since 1955, [Can Assist](http://www.canassist.org.au) has been helping people living in rural and regional NSW access cancer treatment and care. The community-based grassroots organisation is funded entirely by community fundraising events, donations and corporate sponsorships, and with 55 branches and around 3000 volunteers, it is the largest cancer support network in rural, regional and remote NSW. Can Assist provides financial assistance for accommodation, travel-related costs, pharmaceuticals and other expenses to individuals and families across NSW, who are affected by cancer. On average, Can Assist provides up to \$2.5 million in financial aid, and approximately 50% of this aid is for travel and accommodation. In addition to fundraising activities, member

volunteers raise awareness of the organisation and collaborate with health professionals to understand how they can ease the burden of cancer. With Can Assist, 100% of funds raised local is spent in that community.

Can Assist also funds [Lilier Lodge](#), a purpose-built accommodation facility it co-owns with Cancer Council NSW, which assists over 1400 people each year.

*We Can Assist.*