The 2013 Budget honours a Country Liberals election commitment to provide a long-overdue adjustment to the Northern Territory Patient Assistance Travel Scheme.

Health Minister, Robyn Lambley, said the Government is proud to have committed an additional $7.5 million to the scheme.

“In a tough Budget environment, the Government has shown it is prepared to make responsible decisions that benefit all Territorians, including those in rural and remote centres,” Mrs Lambley said.

“PATS was established to promote equity of access to specialist medical services for Territorians.

“PATS is a subsidy scheme which provides assistance for people to travel between their principal place of residence and the nearest available specialist service.

“This can involve a trip from a regional centre to medical facilities in Darwin or Alice Springs or a trip to an interstate hospital if the services are not available in the Northern Territory.

“Currently, the accommodation subsidy is $35 a night and assistance with the cost of transport is also provided.

“Between 2005-06 and 2011-12 the number of interstate PATS requests increased from 1969 to 2775 and intrastate requests from 15,003 to 20,464.

“It is a demand driven scheme and as the Territory’s population gets older, demand for the scheme is expected to grow.

“In the November Mini Budget, the Government committed $2 million to conduct a review of PATS.

“The Northern Territory has a relatively small population and on that basis is limited in the extent and scope of some of the more expensive health services it can provide.

“Despite this, the Government is committed to ensuring Territorians have access to the same health services as provided interstate.

“The outcome of the review, which is expected to be finalised in July, will guide how the additional money is spent.”

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