



Medical Treatment Overseas Program

Considerations for Australian Treating Specialists

Under the Medical Treatment Overseas Program (MTO), applicants must be referred to the overseas treatment facility by their Australian treating specialist (ATS). If more than one overseas facility can provide the treatment to an acceptable standard and quality, the ATS is responsible for deciding which facility is most suitable for their patient.

If the proposed treatment can be provided at an alternative medical facility that offers a comparable quality of care and expected outcome at a lower cost, the MTO Delegate (decision-maker) may approve funding only up to the cost of the less expensive option. If a more expensive facility is chosen, the applicant will be responsible for paying the difference. This helps ensure the cost-effective use of taxpayer funds.

The MTO cannot recommend or endorse any treatment facility. However, the department encourages specialists to consider the factors below when choosing an overseas facility for their patient.

Wrap-Around Care

Travelling overseas for medical treatment can be very stressful for approved applicants and their families.

Some overseas facilities offer wrap-around services for international patients. These may include:

- accommodation arrangements
- airport transfers
- daily transport to and from the treatment facility

Some approved applicants have said these services helped reduce stress and anxiety when travelling to an unfamiliar place.

Specialists may wish to ask what extra services are available at the facilities they are considering, especially where these supports may help the patient.

Accommodation

The standard process is for approved applicants and carers to arrange and pay for their accommodation upfront, then seek reimbursement from the MTO. Because approved applicants and carer may need to stay overseas for some time, this can create large upfront costs and financial pressure.

In some cases, treatment facilities may be willing to arrange and pay for accommodation on behalf of the approved applicant and carer, and invoice the MTO directly. The availability of these services is determined by the overseas treatment facility.

Where available, this may reduce financial pressure and help families find suitable accommodation in an unfamiliar country.

Some treatment facilities also have relationships with Ronald McDonald House (RMH), which may provide accommodation for paediatric patients and their families. Previous approved applicants have said staying at RMH helped them connect with other families in similar situations and build support networks.

Daily Transport

The MTOP does not cover costs of daily transportation including:

- public transport
- taxi fares
- vehicle hire
- rideshare services

Organising transport between accommodation and the treatment facility can be difficult and expensive.

Some facilities may offer free or low-cost transport, such as shuttle buses, which applicants may be able to use to travel between the treatment centre and their accommodation.

Treatment Timeframes

International Payments

International payments can take some time to be processed through the Reserve Bank of Australia and received by international facilities.

Where an overseas facility has not previously engaged with the MTOP, additional time is required to establish the facility as a vendor before payment can be processed.

After an application is approved, the MTOP gives the overseas treatment facility a Letter of Guarantee (LoG) for the estimated cost of the approved treatment. It is important to note:

- acceptance of the LoG is at the discretion of the overseas facility
- some facilities may require payment to be made or received in full before commencing the applicant's treatment.

Before referring a patient, specialists should check the payment arrangements with the overseas facility. This can help prevent treatment delays if the application is approved, particularly when treatment is urgent or must happen by a certain date.

Please note that the Reserve Bank of Australia closes over the Christmas period. During this time, the MTOP is unable to process international payments. If treatment is planned during this period and the overseas facility does not accept the LoG, treatment timeframes may be impacted.

Overseas Proton Beam Therapy Planning Period

The time needed for overseas planning, including mask creation and related preparation, can vary widely between overseas treatment facilities.

For example:

- some facilities estimate planning to take approximately 2 weeks from the first consultation
- others estimate planning periods of 3-4 weeks.

The MTOP urges specialists to ask about expected planning timeframes, especially where radiation is urgent.

Treating Country

The location of the treatment facility can affect several practical factors.

Total travel time

The distance between the overseas treatment facility and the applicant's home state is likely to affect total travel time.

The MTOP tries to book the most direct flights available. However, options depend on flight schedules and seat availability. Flight options may be limited when travel needs to be arranged at short notice.

Passport and visa requirements

It is the responsibility of the approved applicant and carer to ensure they:

- hold valid passports
- identify any visa requirements
- arrange any necessary visas (or visa waivers) prior to travel

Entry requirements vary between countries and may depend on the passport held.

Specialists should consider how long it may take the applicant and carer to get travel documents ready when planning treatment timeframes.

Safety of travel

Global events, such as international conflicts and natural disasters, may affect travel safety and availability.

If these events are known before submitting an application, specialists are urged to consider referring patients to treatment facilities in places that are not affected, where possible.

The MTOP recommends specialists utilise the Smartraveller website (<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au>) to check Australian Government travel advice for the overseas country which they are referring their patient to.

Location of facility

It may be important to consider how close the treatment facility is to local amenities (such as accommodation, supermarkets and transport services) and the applicant's financial means.

The MTOP does not pay for daily living costs, such as food and local transport, and some countries are known to be particularly expensive.

Where treatment is needed at more than one facility, such as proton beam therapy and concurrent chemotherapy, the MTOP suggests specialists consider facilities co-located on the same hospital campus.

If this is not possible, regard to the distance between facilities may be valuable.

Additional Considerations

Fitness to Fly

Specialists should consider whether the applicant can safely manage international travel, especially long-haul flights or travel with multiple layovers.

Most airlines require medical clearance for passengers travelling with certain health conditions and illnesses. If these requirements are not met, the airline may refuse to let the passenger board the flight.

For example, under Qantas' medical clearance guidelines:

- passengers who have had cranial surgery within 9 days of their flight are not suitable for travel
- passengers who have had cranial surgery within 10-21 days of their flight are required to submit a *Travel Clearance Form* 5 days prior to travel.

These forms must be completed by the Australian treating specialist and submitted online by the passenger or their parent/guardian. The MTOP cannot complete or submit airline medical clearance or fitness-to-fly travel forms for a passenger.

Where an application is approved, it is the responsibility of the applicant's treating team to:

- confirm the patient's fitness to fly
- identify any airline medical clearance requirements
- complete and submit all required documentation prior to the patient's departure from Australia.

Airline fitness-to-travel forms are not an MTOP requirement. For this reason, the department does not need copies of completed forms or related documents.

If an applicant is travelling with prescription medication or medical devices or equipment, they may also need to contact the airline to check any requirements.