

Red Cross Patient Transport Service Frequently Asked Questions for Referring Agencies in Victoria

Q1 – What is the Red Cross Eligibility Criteria?

Clients eligible for transport:

- are unable to access suitable public transport, and/or live in an area that is remote from public transport;
- do not have an escort or carer to accompany him or her on public transport to appointments, if accessible public transport exists;
- live independently (consisting of caravan parks, rooming houses or boarding houses, hostels without paid support services attached to the accommodation);
- are unable to drive or to be driven by family/friends to appointments;
- are not eligible for alternative transport schemes (e.g. Ambulance, TAC, Workcover, Department of Veteran Affairs Gold and other cards etc);
- must be referred by a referring agent stating that they are suitable to travel comfortably in a seated position in a domestic passenger vehicle with other passengers, for an extended period of time, and without medical personnel on board;
- able to safely secure themselves via a seatbelt (exemptions apply to those clients with medical conditions or physical disabilities certified by a registered medical practitioner that they are approved to travel without a seatbelt);
- do not require intervening treatment, intravenous therapy, oxygen or monitoring, whilst in transit;
- are able to walk unassisted, or negotiate at least two steps with the help of a walking frame or stick; and
- are able to comfortably enter and exit a domestic passenger vehicle with minimal assistance; and
- do not live in aged care facilities, nursing homes or supported residential services such as aged care hostels with paid support services attached to the facility.

Q2 - Does Red Cross transport clients for non-medical appointments?

No, Red Cross provides transport for people who have no other alternative transport arrangements to attend essential medical appointments.

Q3 - Does Red Cross accept self-referrals?

No, under no circumstances will Red Cross accept a referral direct from a client.

A request requires the submission of a “Patient Transport Service Client Referral Form.” The referral form must and can only be signed by a registered Medical Practitioner, Specialist, or Transport Coordinator from the referring agency or Hospital the client is attending.

Q4 - Does Red Cross provide carers to escort clients to appointments?

No, drivers are not trained as carers and under no circumstances should a volunteer assume the role of a carer whilst undertaking Red Cross duties.

The service provision is a door to door service from the client's home to the main reception of the medical facility. The driver is responsible for numerous clients at the same time and therefore do not escort clients to their individual appointment.

Q5 - Does Red Cross escort clients to or between different floors of the hospital for their appointment(s)?

No, the service is a door to door service. Patients are picked up and dropped off at the main entrance of the hospital. The car typically has other patients in it and cannot be left unattended. Drivers are not to assume the role of an escort or carer.

Q6 - Does Red Cross transport clients whom hold a Department of Veteran Affairs Card or have access to other transport schemes? Are they any exceptions?

No. Red Cross only provides transport for people who have no other alternative transport arrangements to attend essential medical appointments.

Q7 - Does Red Cross transport clients who are eligible to access the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme?

Yes. Clients accessing the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS) are able to utilise the Red Cross Patient Transport Service, provided they satisfy all of the Red Cross eligibility criteria. To be eligible for VPTAS assistance, patients must be a Victorian resident living in a rural region and need to travel more than 100km one way or travel more than 500km for a minimum of 5 consecutive weeks. Depending on a client's personal situation, they may use a combination of VPTAS and Red Cross assistance.

For example, cancer patients may be able to drive themselves in the early part of a treatment period, and then use Red Cross during the latter stages of treatment. Alternatively, a family member may be able to drive the patient on some, but not all, trips. Only the client can claim VPTAS, not Red Cross. Red Cross does not need to be aware of whether a VPTAS claim is made or not, but will gratefully accept any VPTAS reimbursement passed on to Red Cross, which will be receipted in the same manner as voluntary donations. Clients should contact their local Department of Human Services office to enquire about VPTAS eligibility.

Q8 - Does Red Cross allow clients to travel without wearing a seat belt?

All clients are required by law to wear a seatbelt while travelling in a vehicle and failure to do so will result in the driver being prosecuted.

Exemptions apply to individuals with medical conditions or physical disabilities and have been certified by a registered medical practitioner that they are approved to travel without a seatbelt e.g. mobility impaired, pregnant women and obese individuals.

Q9 - Does Red Cross supply restraint fittings (child car seats, seat belt extenders, animal restraints etc.)?

No, Red Cross does not supply these, as Red Cross drivers are not trained in the installation of restraints, nor is Red Cross responsible to purchase and maintain such equipment.

However, clients requiring restraint fittings may be transported, but they need to advise the service upon referral, and the client is responsible for the provision, safe fitting and removal of any additional restraint fittings required to meet their individual needs.

Q10 - Does Red Cross transport children?

Yes, as long as an adult guardian is present at all times.

In line with the Red Cross Protecting Children and Young People Policy a client under the age of 18 years must be at all times accompanied by an adult guardian.

Q11 - Does Red Cross assist clients with mental health needs?

While Red Cross does not provide a specialist service targeted at clients with mental health needs, we do transport a number of clients who may have mental health needs, subject to those clients fulfilling the Patient Transport Service Eligibility Criteria.

Mental health needs, together with other health conditions, do not need to be disclosed to the service; by signing the stated declaration on the Patient Transport Service Referral Form the referring agent is confirming that the client meets the eligibility criteria, and is able to travel in a domestic passenger vehicle with other passengers, and without medical personnel on board.

In line with Red Cross' fundamental principle of impartiality, and in accordance with equal opportunity law, access to the service is based on the referral alone, and without any consideration to any specific health condition (e.g. disability, mental health, infectious diseases etc).

Q12 - Does Red Cross transport assistance animals (guide dogs)?

Yes, with appropriate details noted on the referral form.

An assistance animal can be a guide dog, hearing dog or other animal trained to alleviate the effects of a person's disability, a companion animal is not within this definition.

It is recommended that the client be transported solely with the assistance animal, in order to maintain Red Cross Duty of Care to other volunteers and clients (who may be allergic to dogs etc).

Assistance animals are trained to sit quietly at their handler's feet, and will not disturb or lick the driver. Clients travelling with assistance animals are solely responsible for the conduct, care, feeding and toileting of their animals while in the Red Cross vehicle.

Q13 - Does Red Cross transport clients with oxygen bottles?

No, oxygen bottles cannot be carried in Red Cross vehicles at any time, as Red Cross does not have secure storage systems to enable their safe carriage. Clients requiring intervening treatment, intravenous therapy, oxygen or monitoring whilst in transit, are not suitable for transport.

Q14 - Does Red Cross transport Dialysis clients?

The Red Cross service is not intended to provide a permanent service to Dialysis clients who usually require transport three times a week for a lengthy appointment for the remainder of their lives. Red Cross reserves the right to assess transport requests on an individual basis, taking into consideration the monopolisation of resources and availability of transport. Subject to capacity, Red Cross is willing to assist with some short-term requests of a dialysis client, as this may offer respite to the client and family. Dialysis clients requiring intervening treatment or monitoring whilst in transit are not suitable for transport.

Q15 - Does Red Cross transport clients in wheelchairs?

Red Cross vehicles do not have the capacity or the hoisting facility to transport motorised wheelchairs. For those clients who use a portable wheelchair, Red Cross maybe able to assist in one of two ways.

Wheelchair users can only be transported if they are accompanied by a carer or family member who assumes responsibility for loading and unloading the wheelchair into and out of the Red Cross vehicle, and assuming that there is capacity in the vehicle to fit the wheelchair.

Alternatively if the client is able to take two to three steps unassisted from a wheelchair and transfer themselves to and from the vehicle, the client may be transported to their appointment leaving their wheelchair at home and using a hospital wheelchair upon arrival.

Drivers are not trained by Red Cross in manual handling procedures including the loading and unloading of wheelchairs. Permission may be granted to carry ultra-light weight wheelchairs which are except from manual handling provisions.

Q16 - Can Red Cross refuse to transport a client?

Yes. A driver has the right to refuse to transport a client who they reasonably believe to pose a threat to themselves, the driver or other passengers due to threatening behaviour or the perceived influence of drugs or alcohol – the driver is to inform their allocated staff member and Convenor immediately in this instance.

Q17 – Does Red Cross provide hospital to hospital transfers?

No. Hospitals are responsible to provide transport when a hospital decision is made to transfer a patient to another hospital.

Q18 – Does Red Cross provide transport to people living in aged care facilities or nursing homes?

No. Red Cross' transport is aimed at assisting isolated people who are living independently. Red Cross does not transport residents living in aged care facilities, nursing homes or supported residential services such as aged care hostels with staff support services attached to the facility. Support services include providing or arranging medical care, activities and transport. If the only staff service provided is to respond to an emergency buzzer and/or attend to basic maintenance issues, then this is not considered to be a support service.

Q19 – Does Red Cross provide transport to people living in caravan parks, rooming houses or boarding houses or hostels?

Yes. Red Cross' transport is aimed at assisting isolated people who are living independently. People who live in caravan parks, rooming houses or boarding houses or hostels without staff support services attached to the accommodation are eligible to be transported. If the only staff service provided is to collect rent, issue keys and attend to basic maintenance issues, then this is not considered to be a support service.

Q20 – Does Red Cross provide out of hours transport?

No. Red Cross' operates during business hours on Mondays through Fridays. Office operating hours differ depending on the size and location of the service, but are typically between 10.00 am and 3.00 pm Monday to Friday. At a minimum, all services have a facility for faxes and phone messages to be received during business hours, and all enquiries are responded to within 24 hours of receipt. The potential driving hours of the service are between 7.00 am to 7.00 pm Monday to Friday, Referring agencies scheduling appointments for regional clients in Melbourne are required to schedule appointments between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm unless otherwise specified by the individual service. Where a patient's discharge time is delayed beyond the expected departure time and/or the operating hours of the service, the driver is not expected to remain waiting at the hospital; rather s/he is to inform the hospital s/he is departing and that the hospital will need to make alternative arrangements. The driver should also inform the Convenor of the change in transportation arrangements.