

The NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme: Guide for Professionals

The NHS operates a Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS) to enable patients to claim back reasonable costs for attending secondary care appointments, or in some instances receive help upfront.

Patients may not be aware of the scheme and may find the process too complex to navigate. This guide aims to inform professionals of the process of reclaiming travel costs through the HTCS, to support patients to have equitable access to healthcare.

Who can access the HTCS?

Patients or their partner must be in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits:

- Income support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- A valid NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate – if no certificate patients can show an award notice qualifying for Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits with a disability element (or both) and have an income for Tax Credit purposes of £15,276 or less.
- People in receipt of support from the NHS Low Income Scheme with HC2 or HC3 certificates

What is the NHS Low Income Scheme (LIS)?

People with low incomes can apply for help with their NHS costs through the LIS. This assessment considers housing costs and council tax, so people may be awarded the NHS LIS even if their income is too high for a means-tested benefit. The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) operate the NHS LIS.

The scheme covers:

- Prescription costs
- Dental costs
- Eyecare costs
- Healthcare travel costs via the HTCS
- Wigs and fabric supports.

People can apply to this scheme if they have savings, investments or additional properties not exceeding £16,000 or £23,250 for people permanently resident in a care home. Any help awarded through the LIS is also available for partners and young people in the family. Help is awarded on an individual basis and people may receive full help to cover NHS costs (HC2 certificate) or partial help (HC3 certificate).

How to access the HTCS?

1. Patients must retain travel tickets/ receipts as proof of travel costs and take these along with proof of qualifying benefit/ certificate and hospital appointment letter to the Cashier's office at Hospital sites. They'll assess the claim and make the payment directly to the patient.

Confirm the location of your Foundation Trust's Cashier's Office and opening times (there may not be signage at the Cashier's office displaying opening times, in this instance ensure you are able to provide opening time information to patients) and guide patients through the reclaiming process. To prevent people having to repeatedly explain their financial situation keep this information on their health record and update regularly.

2. If the patient is unable to claim travel costs when they attend their appointment they can access a form online [HC5\(T\) Refund Claim Form](#), the form will then need to be posted to NHSBSA. To prevent digital exclusion, have paper forms accessible for patients. Signpost patients to the NHS BSA on 0300 330 1343 for support completing the form or alternatively familiarise yourself with the form or give contact details for your Trust's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).
3. Travels costs can be reimbursed up to 3 months after the appointment. Remind patients of this and to keep travel tickets/ receipts as proof of travel.
4. If it would be difficult to pay for travel costs upfront provide the telephone number for the Cashier's office to enable patients to gain access to payment in advance or offer support to make the phone call on behalf of the patient, as many people may lack the confidence or ability to advocate for themselves.

Additional support available for Care Leavers

18-25 year old Care leavers in Durham, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear can access a free Pop Smart Travel Card with an Annual Network One Season Ticket, providing free travel on public transport in Tyne and Wear for further information see the North East and North Cumbria ICS website - <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/news/posts/free-travel-for-1500-more-care-leavers-as-scheme-expands/>

Nexus Pop card information - <https://www.nexus.org.uk/ticket-information/pop>

Resources:

HC5(T) Refund Claim form: travel costs to receive NHS Treatment

https://assets.nhs.uk/nhsuk-cms/documents/HC5T_V9_online_-_07.2022.pdf

CQC/ Healthwatch- There and back: what people tell us about their experiences of travelling to and from NHS services (2019)

https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/CM101908_item8_HWE_appii_patient_transport.pdf

Useful Organisations

NHS Business Services Authority - Help with Health Costs

www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme

Telephone: 0300 330 1343

The NHS BSA administers the Help with Health Costs scheme.

NHS BSA – check what help you could get to pay for NHS costs

<https://check-for-help-paying-nhs-costs.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/start>

Healthwatch England

www.healthwatch.co.uk

Telephone 03000 683 000

NHS England

www.england.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0300 311 22 33

NHS website

www.nhs.uk

Nexus

<https://www.nexus.org.uk/>

Telephone: 0191 2020 747

Points to consider:

- Consider the ability of the patient to navigate the HTCS and whether they have language/ reading skills or telephone/ digital/ financial means to access the scheme. Tailor the level of support to individual circumstances.
- Don't assume everyone can afford travel costs for hospital appointments.
- Prevent stigmatising people by asking **all patients** sensitive questions gaining an understanding of how they plan to travel to hospital appointments and whether they can afford travel costs.
- Reclaiming travel costs through the HTCS is a complex process and may prevent people accessing healthcare appointments.
- The average reading age for the North East and North Cumbria Region is 9 to 11 years old (National Literacy Trust). Not being able to understand or complete the HC5(T) may prevent eligible people from receiving the support they are entitled to.
- You don't need to have in depth knowledge of benefits and what people are entitled to but do provide the opportunity for people to gain an understanding about the HTCS and how to claim money to support their travel costs.
- Know your local process to support patients with upfront travel costs for hospital appointments.
- The HTCS has been designed to support the cheapest means of transport for the time the patient needs to travel, considering the distance of the journey, how long the journey has taken to complete, frequency of the journey, availability, suitability and accessibility of public transport medical condition of the patient and age. Taxis are usually an exception, if this seems the only option request the patient speaks to the hospital or Maternity professional prior to travel.
- Patients can be reimbursed for any form of transport including using a car. Travel costs for private car use will be calculated per mile on locally agreed prices.