



BALLARAT HEALTH COMPANION PROJECT (HCP)

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Anyone living in the Grampians Region (or anyone living in Victoria) and travelling to a health appointment in Ballarat can use the service as long as they are able to adhere to the following:

- Must be arriving and departing from Ballarat Railway Station
- Able to travel independently
- Able to walk unassisted or negotiate at least a few steps with the help of a walking frame
- Able to comfortably enter and exit a taxi or bus
- If travelling by taxi, able to safely secure themselves via a seatbelt (exemptions apply, certificate is required)
- Must be over 16 years of age unless accompanied by a parent or guardian
- Will not require assistance with medical treatment, intravenous therapy, oxygen or monitoring whilst using the service. Please note, if a client requires oxygen it must be self managed and the Health Companion is not required to assist.

Q2. DO WE ACCOMPANY TRAVELLERS TO NON-HEALTH APPOINTMENTS?

No, health appointments only (includes healthcare, dental, specialists). We can however take clients to nearby accommodation to their health appointment.

Q3. WHO CAN MAKE A BOOKING?

Clients (i.e. self referral), family members, friends or referring agencies can make a booking.

Q4. HOW DO YOU MAKE A BOOKING?

You make a booking by calling Ballarat Community Health (BCH) on 1800 054 172 between 9.00am – 5.00pm (Mon-Fri). You can also leave a message on the BHC answering machine with your name and contact number, stating that you would like to book a health companion. A staff member will return the call to arrange your booking.

Q5. HOW MUCH NOTICE IS NEEDED?

Bookings must be made at least 5 business days in advance.

Q6. DOES THE HCP PROVIDE QUALIFIED CARERS?

No, our health companions are volunteers, not trained carers. Health companions will *accompany* travellers only.

Q7. DOES THE PROGRAM PROVIDE FREE TRANSPORT FOR TRAVELLERS IN BALLARAT?

No, the traveller must pay their own transport costs. Travellers must pay for their own travel in Ballarat (bus or taxi), using a V Line Ticket or the MYKI system. A regional V Line paper ticket will cover your fare on a local bus for the day. For transport reimbursement information, regional travellers can be referred to The Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme (VPTAS).

Q8. DO HEALTH COMPANIONS ACCOMPANY CHILDREN?

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

Q9. DO HEALTH COMPANIONS ASSIST TRAVELLERS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS?

While the HCP does not provide a specialist service targeted at travellers with mental health needs, we do accompany travellers with mental health needs provided they are stable and are able to travel in a domestic passenger vehicle (taxi) with other passengers (health companion) or on public transport (bus) and without medical personnel on board.

Q10. IS THERE A LIMIT TO THE NUMBER OF TIMES YOU CAN USE THE SERVICE?

No, a traveller can use the service as many times as they wish.

Q11. DO THE HEALTH COMPANIONS ACCOMPANY TRAVELLERS IN WHEELCHAIRS?

Yes, as long as the traveller has a support person who is responsible for loading, unloading and pushing the wheelchair when travelling. Health companions are not required to push wheelchairs or conduct any "heavy" manual handling.

Q12. CAN BCH REFUSE TO ACCOMPANY A TRAVELLER?

Yes, BCH can refuse the service to a traveller when:

1. There are no health companions available to accompany the client. BCH will notify the client at the earliest time possible if this occurs.
2. Clients may require assistance with medical treatment, intravenous therapy, oxygen or monitoring while using the service.
3. If the client has put a previous BCH volunteer at risk.

Q13. DO THE HEALTH COMPANIONS CARRY LUGGAGE FOR TRAVELLERS?

Health companions will only assist with light hand luggage. Travellers with luggage that they cannot manage alone may be required to travel to the appointment in a taxi.

Q14. WHICH CLINICS OR HOSPITALS DO WE TRAVEL TO?

All hospitals, specialists and health/medical clinics in Ballarat.

Q15. HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The service is free of charge to travellers. The service is funded by the State Government of Victoria as part of the Transport Connections Program (TCP) 2010-2013.

Q16. WHAT ARE THE HOURS OF OPERATION?

Monday to Friday 8.30am - 6.00pm

Q17. WHERE ARE TRAVELLERS MET BY HEALTH COMPANIONS?

If travelling by train, the health companions will meet you on the platform. If travelling by bus, they will meet you at the bus bay. Alternatively travellers will be met at a designated meeting place at the Ballarat Railway Station or as arranged when the booking is confirmed.

We can also meet travellers at their appointment to return them to the station.

Q18. WHAT IF MY TRAIN IS DELAYED OR I CANNOT FIND THE HEALTH COMPANION ON ARRIVAL?

If possible call the 1800 054 172 number to advise us of the delay or ask the V Line conductor to contact us.

Q19. CAN I BRING A CARER OR FAMILY MEMBER WITH ME?

Yes, family members and carers are welcome to accompany the traveller and health companion. Children under 16 are the responsibility of the parent/guardian/carer, not the health companion.

Q20. WHAT IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY?

Health companions are trained in First Aid and will be able to respond to medical emergencies that may occur while you are using the service, i.e. only during transit to and from the health appointment.

Ballarat Community Health acknowledges that some information in this document was provided by Travellers Aid Australia.