



# Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)

## FEDERAL COUNCIL

### "Access to Education"

#### **Specific Learning Needs Position Paper**

Children with specific education needs necessitate access to educational opportunities that are appropriate and specific to their learning requirements. Access to such opportunities should not be disadvantaged by living in a rural or remote location. Distance limits the choice of schools to students in rural and remote areas, but for students with specific learning needs, this choice can be further limited.

All students have a right to participate in education on the same basis as their peers through rigorous, meaningful and dignified learning programs, regardless of geographical position. ICPA members have highlighted issues impacting access to an equitable education for students with specific learning needs. These have been summarised below, together with recommendations for implementation that will improve educational opportunities and learning outcomes for children residing in rural and remote Australia with specific learning needs.

#### **PROVISION OF MEDICARE REBATE FOR TELEHEALTH SERVICES**

Utilisation of telehealth services can be of great benefit to families in geographically isolated locations who would otherwise have to travel considerable distances or encounter lengthy delays to access face-to-face consultations with relevant health professionals. Students with developmental difficulties require frequent and timely consultations, and these can be enabled via telehealth services for many families otherwise unable to access allied health professionals due to geographical location. Different types of specialist consultations can be satisfactorily performed in locations where the technology is available, which is providing improved and more equitable access to health services for some children in geographically isolated areas. The cost to families to access such services should also be equitable.

#### **Recommendation:**

That an equivalent Medicare rebate be provided to families in rural and remote locations who need to use telehealth clinicians for children with development difficulties under the 'Chronic Diseases Management Scheme' and similar item numbers, to those who have in-person consultations.

## **PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO BOARDING SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY**

The question of whether boarding facilities are well enough equipped to be able to cater for boarding students with special needs due to a lack of resources has been raised by ICPA (Aust) members.

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) provides all Australian schools, education authorities and the community with a clear picture of the number of students with disability in schools and the adjustments they require to enable them to partake in education on the same basis as other students. When the significant role of boarding schools is taken into consideration, it is reasonable to expect that additional resources are provided to facilities where student requirements have been clearly identified on the NCCD database.

### **Recommendation:**

That additional resources are provided to facilities, including boarding schools, where student requirements have been clearly identified on the NCCD database.

## **IMPROVED STAFF TRAINING FOR TEACHERS IN RURAL AND REMOTE LOCATIONS**

For distance education students, who have no daily face to face access to appropriately qualified teachers and are reliant on often untrained distance education tutors, it is essential that professional development and support opportunities are provided to ensure that specific learning needs are catered for. Similarly, teachers and support staff in small schools in geographically isolated locations require training and support for students with specific learning needs such as dyslexia.

ICPA (Aust) acknowledges the “*Good to Great Schools*” initiative which will benefit the 33 remote schools located in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia. However, funding for this initiative does not extend to students studying via distance education, or to the many other rural and remote schools in Australia.

### **Recommendation:**

That teachers in rural and remote schools, including distance education teachers and distance education supervisors are provided training to recognise and cater for specific learning needs, including dyslexia.

**ICPA Federal Council's submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment on the current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support can be accessed on the ICPA webpage: <http://www.icpa.com.au/documents/browse/96/federal-submissions>**