



MEDIA RELEASE

No local school. A \$40,000 education bill: Australia's most isolated families meet to fight for change

Media invited to hear firsthand from Australia's most geographically isolated families at ICPA Australia Federal Conference

Gold Coast 21.07.26: For some Australian families, accessing compulsory secondary education means paying tens of thousands of dollars every year simply because there is no local school for their children to attend.

From boarding fees and distance education to travel, internet connectivity and home classrooms, these are the realities facing geographically isolated families across Australia, issues that will be at the centre of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) Australia Federal Conference on the Gold Coast later this month.

More than 180 delegates representing rural and remote families from every state and territory will come together to debate the policy priorities that will shape ICPA Australia's national advocacy, with motions spanning boarding, telecommunications, early childhood education, distance education, student travel and tertiary access.

ICPA Australia Federal President Louise Martin said while education was often considered free in Australia, geography continued to create significant financial and practical barriers for many families.

"For many of our members, boarding school isn't a choice, it's the only way their children can access compulsory secondary education," Ms Martin said.

"Families are making extraordinary financial sacrifices simply because there is no local school available. They shouldn't be disadvantaged because of where they choose to live, work and raise their families."

When the Federal Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme was introduced in 1973, it was intended to cover 55 per cent of the average cost of boarding for geographically isolated students. Today, however, boarding costs continue to increase while government assistance has failed to keep pace, leaving families to shoulder an increasing share of the cost.



"The conference is an opportunity for families from across Australia to come together, share their lived experiences and identify practical solutions that will help ensure every Australian child has equitable access to education, regardless of where they live," Ms Martin said.

Throughout the two-day conference, delegates will debate issues including:

- Rising boarding, travel and distance education costs
- Equitable financial assistance for geographically isolated families
- Reliable telecommunications and internet connectivity for education and safety
- Early childhood and distance education
- Student travel and equitable access to education
- Tertiary education pathways for rural and remote students

Media attending the conference will have the opportunity to hear directly from families about the realities of educating children in some of Australia's most isolated communities and the practical solutions they believe are needed.

Case studies available include families paying tens of thousands of dollars out of pocket each year for boarding, parents educating children through distance education from home, and families navigating unreliable telecommunications while accessing education from remote Australia.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

- Interviews with ICPA Australia Federal President Louise Martin
- A family paying more than \$40,000 a year out of pocket for boarding because there is no local secondary school (and many more families paying extraordinary amounts)
- Families from some of Australia's most geographically isolated communities
- Education advocates and policy spokespersons
- Daily conference announcements and policy outcomes
- Vision and photography opportunities

EVENT DETAILS

What: ICPA Australia Federal Conference 2026

When: Wednesday 29 – Thursday 30 July 2026

Where: St Hilda's School, Southport, Queensland