



Briefing Paper

Boarding Schools, School Term Hostels and Second Home 2025-2026

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical, national parent organisation advocating on behalf of our members for equity of access to appropriate education for children living in rural and remote areas.

ICPA (Aust) has more than fifty years' experience advocating for educational issues on behalf of families living in rural and remote Australia. Our organisation is well positioned to contribute to discussion with a unified and collaborative approach to the education of rural and remote students.

It is every Australian's right to provide their children with equitable educational opportunities and outcomes regardless of their postcode or geographical location.

All levels of Government need to be united in their pledge to give agency to families from regional, rural and remote locations, especially those with students who must live away from home to access an appropriate education, because there is simply no other access to education in their home location.

SUMMARY

1. Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme - Access to Compulsory Education

- **Restore the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA)** to fulfil its original intent of covering at least 55% of average cost of boarding and alignment to the CPI Education Sub Index.
- **Address the gap** between the actual costs of boarding and the AIC BBA.
The gap between the amount the AIC BBA increases and the actual cost of educating geographically isolated children continues to widen.
Implement solutions:
 - Immediate increase of the AIC BBA of \$4000,
 - Ensure the BBA maintains 55% 'cover' of the cost of boarding (calculated as Australian boarding average OR individual family boarding actual costs)
 - Align AIC BBA with CPI education sub-index.
 - Honour annual increase in the AIC BBA to reflect the increasing cost in boarding fees and CPI in an ongoing timeline.
- **AIC Second Home Allowance (SHA)** should be paid at the same rate as the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance.
- **AIC criteria expanded** to allow more rural and remote students to be eligible for assistance.
- **Display separate categories within the AIC** for:
 - Geographically Isolated (GI) students; The unique needs of GI students should be recognised by categorising them separately under the AIC BBA to identify the needs of these geographically isolated boarding students. E.g. they do NOT have the luxury of choice, attending boarding school is their only option to secondary education.
 - Special Needs (SN) students; The unique needs of SN students should be identified separately to GI students to ensure they receive the appropriate support.



- GI/SN students with special needs who reside in geographically isolated areas should be afforded their own category to ensure appropriate support is afforded to them.
- **Support and Implement an Online AIC Application/Renewal Process.**
- **Review of the AIC Scheme:** A review of the AIC Scheme is called for to ensure the allowance is meeting the needs of those it was established to help. While ICPA (Aust) would certainly not like to see any of the current eligibility criteria for the AIC removed or diminished, ICPA (Aust) believe a review is timely to ensure the Scheme is adequately meeting the needs of all geographically isolated students and not being taken advantage of by other groups within the community.

2. School funding model/s and impacts on boarding schools

- **Safeguards are needed** to ensure educational equity is not reduced for rural and remote students as the Direct Measure of Income school funding methodology is implemented so that these students are still able to access appropriate schooling.
- The **Recurrent School Funding Model Includes provision for Boarding Schools** to receive a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption, on accommodation provided to staff where the school accommodates students from remote and very remote areas as defined by the Accessibility Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) score.

3. Resources for mental health programs in boarding schools

The provision of resources for mental health programs in boarding schools is vital.

Support mechanisms and 'coping tools' should be available and offered to students within boarding schools including processes to help children navigate through times of hardship.

4. Fringe Benefits Tax

- **FBT 1:** Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for schools/boarding facilities providing on site living facilities for essential supervisory staff on that accommodation.
- **FBT 2:** Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding schools.

The cost of accessing compulsory education for geographically isolated children should not be taxed irrespective of who is bearing the cost. Affordable access to boarding schools for employees who work in remote areas provide their children with equitable access to school facilities as those in urban areas.

5. Students with disability from rural and remote areas

- Financial support to boarding facilities/schools for students with disabilities from rural and remote areas.
- Financial support to families from rural and remote areas with students identified through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) who reside in a boarding facility for secondary education.
- An amendment to the 2025 review of the "Disability Standards for Education 2005".



6. Continue and expand the 'Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program' pilot

The intended outcomes (as stated on the Australian Government – Department of Education webpage) of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program are to:

- Assist students from rural, regional and remote areas with boarding fees, in order to provide a quality education option where local alternatives may not exist or be suitable.
- Provide additional financial support to families who are unable to afford boarding school fees and associated costs, even with existing government support, with the intention to reduce family's financial contribution towards boarding school fees.
- Provide a supported boarding experience for students and families from low socioeconomic status backgrounds or experiencing financial hardship.

7. Permanent establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF)

The development and establishment of a permanent RHEF would provide emergency financial relief to families with students eligible for the AIC allowance who are located in disaster-stricken regions.

In the wake of catastrophic flooding families lose their homes and schoolrooms where distance education takes place.

Timely financial assistance, administered through the RHEF and linked to the AIC, can minimise the disruption to the education of disaster affected students ensuring they have the ability to access education during times of significant disruption caused by unforeseen disasters.

ISSUE 1 - Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance - Access to Compulsory Education

An urgent increase to the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance of at least \$4000 to cover at least 55% of the average boarding fee followed by indexation to the CPI Sub Index: Education, to truly reflect the costs of education.

The AIC Scheme was implemented in 1973 to assist rural and remote families with the extra costs of educating their children who are geographically isolated from an appropriate government school.

The AIC Allowance consists of three main categories for geographically isolated students:

- **Boarding and Additional Boarding Allowance** for students boarding away from home at a school, hostel or private arrangement
- **Second Home Allowance** for students living in the family's second home so they can attend school daily
- **Distance Education Allowance** for students living at home and undertaking distance education.

The AIC Allowance must adequately address the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by rural and remote families to access equitable educational opportunities for their children, whether they need to study via distance education, board away from home or the family sets up a second home in order to access schooling.

While the AIC Allowance increases annually with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), it is important to note there has been no significant increase to the AIC Allowance for many years, even though essential costs of educating geographically isolated children have continued to rise steadily.



Federal Government commitment: In April 2025, ICPA (Aust) received correspondence from the Prime Minister and Cabinet stating that:

"The Government is committed to ensuring that every child regardless of socioeconomic background or geographical location has access to high quality education."

Despite this strong, supportive commitment, our members' children continue to be disadvantaged due to the in-action of the Federal Government to stand by their statement or apply our recommendations to the issues faced by our members in accessing education for their children.

2025 National Average - BOARDING FEES		% Covered by AIC
Australia by State / Territory	Average Boarding Fee	Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) \$10338.00
Victoria	\$32,967.69	31.4
Northern Territory	\$32,945.00	31.4
Australian Capital Territory	\$32,190.00	32.1
South Australia	\$26,694.13	38.7
New South Wales	\$25,487.41	40.6
Queensland	\$22,876.83	45.2
Tasmania	\$22,700.00	45.5
Western Australia	\$22,266.33	46.4

AIC Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA)

The gap between the AIC BBA and actual cost of boarding continues to widen, increasing the financial burden faced by rural families.

In 2025, Boarding fees increased annually by 4% to 8%, yet the BBA only increased by 3.79%. Members continue to have their most basic needs ignored when it comes to accessing and providing an education to their children. The Basic Boarding Allowance must align with the rising costs of boarding.

Attending Boarding School for secondary education, for many geographically isolated students, is their only option. Boarding school fees continued to rise due to increasing operational costs including staffing, accommodation, transport and pastoral care. Meanwhile, the AIC BBA has seen only minimal adjustments over the years, resulting in a growing gap between the financial support provided on the actual expenses to the family space. This widening gap places an unsustainable burden on isolated families and erodes their educational choices.

As an equity measure, the AIC must be sufficient to ensure that students living in remote and rural areas can access quality education on a level playing field with their urban peers.



Without adequate support, families are forced to make difficult decisions that may compromise their children's educational opportunities, well-being and stability.

ICPA Members *agree* with the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Children in rural and remote locations across Australia should not be disadvantaged by distance or geographical location, especially when they have **no other option for secondary education.**

Some of these **students live hundreds of kilometers** from their closest town and **high school**. Some of these students have **no high school options in their small town** / community. Yet, these families are not adequately financially supported to access compulsory secondary education. If the Federal Government is serious about delivering equitable access to education for all Australian children, regardless of post code, it must commit to a meaningful increase to the AIC BBA and index it appropriately to reflect ongoing increases.

AIC Second Home Allowance

Boarding school is not a suitable environment for every student. The AIC Second Home Allowance assists families with the cost of setting up a second home away from their principal place of residence where a family member lives with the children so that they can attend a school on a day-to-day basis.

Providing families *the option of establishing a second home* when children are of school age is the best outcome for accessing education for some families / children. This option would provide families from rural and remote Australia, with the ability to educate their children when boarding is not a suitable option for their child.

In some cases, the mother and children live in a second home during school times, returning to their rural area during school breaks and holidays. This allows the family to access schooling, maintain their connection and support with their rural community and work and live in a rural area. If the Second Home Allowance were not available, more families would move their entire family permanently to an area where appropriate schooling was available, further impacting the sustainability of these communities.

ICPA (Aust) is seeking that the Second Home Allowance be paid at the same rate as the Basic Boarding Allowance to alleviate the rising costs of living.

Living costs continue to rise, and incomes for geographically isolated families are comparatively low, with some farming families facing years of negative income as a result of drought. Currently, the AIC Second Home Allowance is paid at a substantially lesser rate than the AIC Boarding Allowances. For the 2023 year, the difference between the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance and the AIC Second Home Allowance is \$2280.

ICPA (Aust) has concerns about the scope of assistance for families educating rural and remote children.

ICPA (Aust) would certainly not like to see any of the current eligibility criteria for the AIC removed or diminished; however, we would like to see the allowance criteria expanded to allow more disadvantaged rural and remote students to be eligible for assistance. Due to the nature of the educational facilities in remote towns, students face limited subject choices and reduced educational opportunities. Rural and remote students who are accepted into specialised programs not offered at their local school who need to board away from home to access these programs should be eligible to receive AIC. Furthermore, a remoteness index applied to facilitate the AIC eligibility would address the educational disadvantage some students face in rural and remote locations.



An expansion of the criteria would:

- Address the inequities faced by families who live in or near rural and remote communities, where secondary schools are unable to meet the educational needs of individual students, by allowing them to access the AIC Boarding Allowance or the Second Home Allowance.
- Consider socio-economic factors, the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of a school and schools in or near those remote and very remote communities identified as severely educationally disadvantaged, in the “Educate Australia Fair”, Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre Study.

Separate category for Geographically Isolated students under AIC

While ICPA (Aust) does not begrudge any student receiving the AIC if they fulfil the existing criteria, geographically isolated students' educational needs and costs are very different to other categories of students who are not geographically isolated. It is imperative that geographically isolated students are able to be identified as a separate category to ensure their unique needs can be recognised and treated with autonomy.

Online AIC application/renewal process

A prompt, efficient, streamlined process of application and renewal through the migration to an online application and renewal platform and an improved customer service/helpline are essential to ensure the AIC application and renewal processes are efficient, flexible and unproblematic for eligible families.

Currently, when applying for the AIC Allowance, forms need to be downloaded from the Services Australia website or collected from the nearest service centre. Applications then must be submitted by manually uploading to Centrelink, post, fax or delivered in person which impacts the processing of the application considerably. Renewal forms are still physically mailed to recipients and then need to be manually uploaded, posted, faxed or delivered in person. Major errors with the distribution of AIC correspondence due to these manual processes have occurred in recent years resulting in ICPA (Aust) needing to correspond directly with personnel in Services Australia to resolve these issues on behalf of its members.

ICPA (Aust) requests Services Australia implement an automatic online and phone option for applications and renewals for the AIC Allowance as an adjunct to the current paper-based, manual system.

Review of AIC Scheme

The gap between the AIC Allowance and the actual cost of educating geographically isolated children continues to widen. Since its inception in 1973, formal reviews of AIC have been infrequent and ICPA (Aust) understand there has not been a formal review of the AIC Scheme in over 30 years. While ICPA (Aust) would certainly not like to see any of the current eligibility criteria for the AIC removed or diminished in any review, a review of the AIC Scheme is urgently needed and timely to ensure the scheme continues to adequately meet the needs of those it is designed to assist, namely geographically isolated students.

Federal Government review and amend Rule 3 in the application for Assistance for Isolated Children from SY040 to remove the continuing requirement once the initial requirement has been met. Rule 3: The student does not have reasonable access to an appropriate state school for at least 20 days in a



year because of adverse travel conditions (e.g.: impassable roads) or other circumstances beyond the family's control.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restore the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) to cover at least 55% of the average cost of boarding. As was its original intention when implemented in 1973.
- Implement formulas to ensure the AIC BBA allowing covering at least 55% of the average cost of boarding is met, appropriately adjusted, and honoured in an ongoing timeline.
- That A review of the eligibility criteria for the Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) under the Geographically Isolated (GI) category of the AIC, so that entitlement is determined solely on the basis of actual boarding costs incurred as a family without being subject to parent parental income testing.
- That the AIC second home allowance be paid at the same rate as the AIC BBA.
- Expansion of the AIC allowance criteria, including the Limited Program Schools Criteria to allow more rural and remote students to be eligible for assistance.
- A separate category for Geographically Isolated (GI) students under AIC.
- A separate category for Special Needs (SN) students identified in the AIC.
- A separate category for GI/SN students identified in the AIC.
- Improvements to AIC application and renewal process include an online platform.
- A review of the AIC scheme be conducted to ensure the allowances meeting the needs of the geographically isolated students it was established to help.
- Create an option for their AIC payments to be made in either 3 or 4 instalments per year as per individual needs of the family of a year 12 student.
- That claims processing times for AIC and ABSTUDY services be reduced

ISSUE 2 - School funding model/s and impacts on boarding schools

ICPA (Aust) represents many families whose children, due to geographical isolation, must attend Independent Boarding Schools to access their compulsory secondary education. Safeguards are needed to ensure educational equity is not reduced for rural and remote students so that these students are still able to access appropriate schooling when any funding methodology is implemented. It is crucial that the Direct Measure of Income school funding methodology does not inadvertently diminish school viability or educational choice for geographically isolated students.

ICPA (Aust) believes the boarding operations in schools must be taken into consideration in conjunction with in-school costs in any funding model to ensure that for those rural and remote students who rely on these boarding schools, it can remain affordable and accessible.

Further to this, provision needs to be made to ensure due consideration is given to the fluctuating incomes and possible inflated and inaccurate income data that the Capacity to Contribute (CTC) arrangements in the new school funding model may generate in relation to families involved in primary production. This could result in funding shortfalls for rural, regional and remote (RRR) schools not being identified and therefore not being adequately addressed in the Regional Schooling Resource Standard Loadings.



Many rural and remote families are involved in primary production industries such as agriculture. The use of taxable income to determine their CTC is an inaccurate measure for a number of reasons. Income and operating expenses within the agricultural industry are highly variable and fluctuate from year to year depending on factors such as the season and commodity prices. Many agricultural operations are private enterprises, often asset rich and cash poor and disposable income is low.

Furthermore, the income of families involved in primary production is almost completely dependent on the weather, commodity prices, bushfires, drought, floods and other rural hardships which are entirely uncontrollable and unpredictable in nature. Often with family-owned agricultural businesses and other rural businesses in small towns, the "income" is actually the business earnings, and any profit is reinvested back into the business rather than personal income to be used by a family for other needs.

Rural and remote families are in an unusual position in that their children need to source an education, which comes at a considerable cost, but they have very little disposable income even in productive years. ICPA (Aust) is extremely concerned that any reduction in Independent School funding as a result of CTC arrangements within the new funding model will compromise the ability of schools to provide adequate resourcing such as technology requirements, specialist services and teacher professional development. The inevitable consequence will be that schools will have no other choice but to increase fees. Reduced enrolments as a result of rising school fees will inevitably make many of these schools unviable, further limiting educational choices for rural and remote students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That recurrent funding for schools be extended to include the provision of boarding to ensure the continued viability of independent boarding schools and the accessibility and affordability of these schools for geographically isolated students.
- That the capacity to contribute methodology recognises financial circumstances of geographically isolated families when applied to independent schools and independent boarding schools which cater for geographically isolated students who board at the school.
- An immediate increase of the AIC BBA of at least \$4000 per geographically isolated recipient to address the rising expenses for families (Boarding Fees in 2025 rose between 4% - 8%, yet the increase to the AIC was only 3.79%)
- Annual increases to the AIC Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) of \$500 per recipient to recognise the expected increase in boarding school fees incurred by their families to ensure affordable access to a compulsory education for their children.

ISSUE 3 - Resources for mental health programs in boarding schools

Provision of resources for mental health programs in boarding schools is vital. For geographically isolated students who have limited choice other than to attend boarding school to access their compulsory education, this can be a challenging experience. For many, leaving home from as young as 11 years of age to attend boarding school will be the biggest change they will make in their lifetime. It is vital that robust, consistent support mechanisms and coping tools are in place as these children grow into young adults without the comfort of family on hand to help them through these tough times.



Our members see first-hand the impact that a lack of support while attending boarding school has on their children. In the most recent *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)* report, suicide was the leading cause of death among people aged 15–24 (35%). Alarmingly male youth suicide in regional, rural and remote areas as a whole is estimated to occur at almost twice the rate as in metropolitan areas. This is an epidemic that needs to be addressed urgently and ICPA (Aust) firmly believes that the appropriate support and intervention during a child's schooling years would be beneficial.

Provision of resources for mental health programs in boarding schools, to help children navigate through times of hardship, such as students from drought affected areas is urgently needed.

RECOMMENDATION

- The provision of mental health resources to boarding schools and boarding institutions to better support this cohort of vulnerable students.

ISSUE 4 - Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT)

FBT - Issue 1. It is critical that the Federal Government change the policy on Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) as it currently applies to essential boarding school staff required to "live in" to perform their duty of care of residential students in metropolitan boarding institutions despite the boarding facility caring for children from the most geographical isolated areas of Australia.

These GI students have NO OTHER choice; they must attend a boarding facility to access a secondary education. This tax negatively impacts on the cost of an equitable education for isolated students.

The removal of the FBT on residential accommodation for essential supervisory staff employed by boarding schools will significantly reduce the costs incurred by boarding schools who care for students from GI locations. **Boarding Schools with GI students, who offer 'live-in' options for their staff should be recognised with a FBT exemption.**

The removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) on residential accommodation for essential supervisory staff could significantly reduce the costs incurred by some boarding schools. The Australian Boarding Schools' Association (ABSA) estimates that the FBT on the residential accommodation for the boarding schools in large cities adds an average of approximately \$2000 per child. Staff accommodation is a fundamental necessity of a boarding school.

Boarding school staff must live on site to supervise the boarders in their care.

Educational expenses are considerably high for families who must send their children to boarding school due to geographical location. Unfair taxes are adding to the high costs of educating students from rural and remote areas. The Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) that is applied to essential boarding staff in large cities is one example of the taxes that are impacting affordability and accessibility to an equitable education.

In addition, the taxes appear to be levied across sectors in a most inequitable and inconsistent manner. For example, FBT is applied to boarding supervisors' accommodation, yet it is not levied on aged care facilities or military establishments. As another example, GST is levied on boarding school food, yet not



on the food provided in aged care facilities.

Boarding associations and boarding schools have been lobbying for the Fringe Benefits Tax on essential boarding school staff to be removed. ICPA (Aust) supporting this advocacy and assisting in raising awareness of this concern where possible would lend a greater voice to this issue on behalf of rural and remote students.

FBT - Issue 2. Employers in geographically isolated areas assisting with the educational costs of children of employees should be exempt of fringe benefit tax for these payments. The cost of accessing compulsory education for geographically isolated children should not be taxed irrespective of who is bearing the cost. Affordable access to boarding schools for employees who work in remote areas provides their children with equitable access to school facilities as those in urban areas.

Currently, when employers offer financial assistance towards the cost of schooling, the payment is deemed a Fringe Benefit and taxed at the rate of 47%. Any contribution made by the employer is compounded with almost half the amount again in tax.

Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding schools.

Currently, in an effort to attract and retain staff in rural and remote locations, some employers offer their staff a financial contribution towards boarding school expenses of their children. This financial assistance is valuable in supporting families employed in remote areas of Australia as many are unable to afford the exorbitant expenses incurred when sending their children to board to access their secondary schooling.

Without this assistance from employers, many employees have no choice but to leave their homes and place of employment to access their child's education in a larger centre, simply because they cannot afford the costs of boarding school. This leaves employers with a hard to fill gap in the remote workplace.

However, as these payments incur a fringe benefits tax which negatively impacts the employer and the intent of the contribution, employers are penalised for assisting their employees with these expenses. This is a deterrent for any business thinking of offering assistance to their employees.

Further, as employees are required to report payment of educational expenses as a fringe benefit, this can impact upon their taxation rate as well as their ability to access other income-tested educational assistance such as the AIC Additional Boarding Allowance or Youth Allowance. This can also occur if the employer chooses to pay a higher wage/salary to the employee rather than incur the FBT on education assistance.

The removal of FBT on contributions to employees' children's education expenses would allow more employers to offer financial assistance to their employees, increasing the recruitment and retention of valuable families and workforce growth in rural and remote locations.

In recognition of conditions in rural and remote locations, the Australian Tax Office already offers certain FBT concessions and benefits.

For example, the lack of sufficient residential accommodation in remote locations attracts concessions for employers to provide housing for their employees and also through the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) provides concessional treatment in relation to FBT.



In many rural and remote locations, there is also insufficient access to suitable compulsory education facilities and therefore boarding school is the only option available.

ICPA (Aust) therefore believes similar concessions should be made for employers in geographically isolated locations to assist employees with the costs associated with their children's compulsory education and to support workforce attraction and retention in these challenging and isolated locations of Australia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Exemption of the Fringe Benefits Tax on accommodation provided by boarding schools (with children enrolled as identified in the AIC allowance) who wish to assist essential 'live-in' boarding school staff, be approved and implemented.
- Removal of the fringe benefits tax for businesses wishing to assist employees residing in geographically isolated areas to enable their children to attend boarding school.
- The Recurrent School Funding Model includes provision for Boarding Schools to receive a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption, an accommodation provided to staff where the school accommodates students from remote and very remote areas as defined by the Accessibility Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) score.
- The Federal Government support an instruct the Treasury to change the FBT policy to enable all boarding facilities who have students enrolled from rural and remote areas identified through the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme to require that they are exempt from FBT under the existing guidelines; 58ZC Exempt Benefits - Remote Area housing Benefits (on campus accommodation)

ISSUE 5 - Students with disability from rural and remote areas

- Additional support to boarding schools for students from geographically isolated areas with a disability that have no local secondary school options available to them due to isolation.

Boarding facilities need to be equipped with adequate resources to cater for boarding students with specific education needs. Further funding needs to be available to ensure students in residential boarding facilities needs can be met, and reasonable adjustments and accommodations can be implemented in accordance with The Disability Standards for Education 2005. 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 a student with a funded disability (e.g., Autism) is enrolled at a school, the school is eligible to apply for schools plus funding or special education funding from individual state based Departments of Education and federally through the Individual Disability Allocation (IDA) and Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with a Disability (NCCD), via their individual system dependant on what type of school they are classified as, with the amount of funding allocated per student in accordance with their diagnosis and needs. This funding is then dispersed at the schools' discretion for the purpose of education. However, a boarding student (24 hours per day, 7 days per week in a school term) receives the



same level of funding as a day student. For geographically isolated families, residential boarding is an important continuation of our children's education and there is currently no access to funding for a student with a disability in a residential boarding facility, to assist with the increased duty of care, responsibility, and accountability required to meet the needs of a geographically isolated student with a disability accessing a boarding facility.

When the significant role of boarding schools is taken into consideration, it is reasonable to expect that adequate funding and resources are provided to facilities where student requirements have been clearly identified on the NCCD database.

- Additional financial support to families to help meet the needs of geographically isolated students with a disability, who reside in a boarding facility for secondary education.
- An amendment to the 2025 review of the "Disability Standards for Education 2005".

A collaborative approach including stakeholders such as the Department of Education, Commissioner for Regional Education and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to work to include an amendment to the 2025 review of the "Disability Standards for Education 2005" to ensure financial support (as outlined above) is met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That funding is provided for students with a disability in residential boarding facilities, so that their needs can be met and reasonable adjustments and accommodations can be implemented in accordance with the 'Disability Standards for Education 2005'.
- The provision of additional resources to facilities, including boarding schools, where student requirements have been clearly identified on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Schools Students with Disability (NCCD) database.
- The inclusion of an amendment into the 2025 Review of the 'Disability Standards for Education 2005' to encompass the needs of Geographically Isolated students with a disability residing in a boarding facility for secondary education.

ISSUE 6 - Continue and expand the 'Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program' pilot.

The implementation of the CRSP in 2024, has allowed many families who were successful recipients of the Scholarship, the opportunity to stay in their rural or remote communities (*where suitable, local, secondary school alternatives do not exist*) and be able to meet the financial obligations of sending children to boarding school to access a secondary education.

There are hundreds of eligible families who fit the criteria to receive a Commonwealth Regional Scholarship that were not successful in their application (or had the opportunity to submit an application) who are feeling more helpless as the financial, emotional and social burden increases.

There are hundreds of children who need to move away from home to attend boarding school to access compulsory secondary education because there are no local options in their area.



Assistance, as outlined in the 'CRSP intended outcomes' should be afforded to all families who fit the criteria, not just a select few.

By extending the CRSP past its pilot and increasing the number of scholarships made available, the Australian Government will be providing long term meaningful access and assistance to education for students and their families who live and work in rural and remote locations with limited or no secondary school options.

The intended outcomes (as stated on the Australian Government – Department of Education webpage) of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program are to:

- Assist students from rural, regional and remote areas with boarding fees, in order to provide a quality education option where local alternatives may not exist or be suitable.
- Provide additional financial support to families who are unable to afford boarding school fees and associated costs, even with existing government support, with the intention to reduce family's financial contribution towards boarding school fees.
- Provide a supported boarding experience for students and families from low socioeconomic status backgrounds or experiencing financial hardship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To continue the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (pilot) into the future.
- To expand the number of Scholarships available in the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program.
- To award a Commonwealth Regional Scholarship to all students who fit the criteria.
- Publicly announce the review date and findings for the CRSP pilot and share with ICPA (Aust).
- Acknowledge that the CRSP has been a highly successful initiative that has been supported to expand and continue beyond its pilot program by: Regional Rural and Remote families from across Australia, ICPA Members, Australian Boarding Schools Association and the Busy at Work group.

ISSUE 7 - Permanent establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF)

The development of a permanent RHEF would provide emergency relief to families eligible for the AIC allowance in disaster-stricken regions, ensuring their children have access to schooling, tertiary and trade opportunities and provide relief to parents who are educating their children by schools of distance education when their families are struggling to recover.

- Unforeseen disasters and industry crisis are not something that can be planned for.
- Overnight, family income and abilities to meet educational payments can be taken away.
- In rural and remote locations, gaining an education often requires students to leave their homes and communities, to attend boarding school and or to undertake tertiary or training pathways.
- Families who lived through natural disaster events are exposed to the impact on the affordability of boarding school fees or assisting children to further studies due to loss of crops, livestock, infrastructure and financial livelihood.



- In the wake of catastrophic flooding families lose their homes and schoolrooms where distance education takes place.
- Without financial assistance, the education of disaster affected students is significantly disrupted.

Key features include:

- Trigger events: natural disasters, economic shocks, or family crises.
- Eligibility: rural and remote families receiving AIC, children in local rural schools, and tertiary students from hardship-affected areas.
- Assistance types: supplementary RHEF payments (min. \$2,000/student/year), school grants, tutoring support for distance education, extended childcare subsidies, and tertiary access allowances, Additional funding for the Isolated Classroom (e.g: loss of educational material during a flood event)
- Administration: delivered through the Department of Social Services, using existing AIC infrastructure, which is automatically triggered when an AIC family is identified in a 'trigger event.' This will ensure a rapid and meaningful response.
- Capacity for direct family application, irrespective of disaster declarations (this would encompass family crisis)

An example of how the Rural Hardship Education Fund can be implemented:

In 2019, widespread flooding occurred in Northwest Queensland. Financial assistance was automatically tied to AIC recipients. This provides a real-life example of how the RHEF can be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a permanent Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) is established to provide financial assistance to rural and remote families, ensuring their children can continue their education during and after periods of natural disasters and to reduce educational disadvantage.
- The RHEF payment is linked directly to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme with automatic payments and ensuring timely identification of children enrolled and educated by schools of distance education or geographically isolated areas.
- Provide a minimum \$2,000 (indexed with CPI) per-student supplement during hardship periods that is triggered automatically when a natural disaster / family crisis is identified.
- Extend funding to rural schools and early learning centers.
- Include distance education students (as identified via AIC) and childcare hardship provisions.
- Offer tertiary access support for affected students.
- Allow direct family applications irrespective of natural disaster declarations.
- Maintain and evaluate the REHF giving agency to the family's identified via AIC to ensure long-term impact is meaningful.
- Flexible eligibility not tied solely to state drought declarations.