

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association  
Northern Territory  
(ICPA NT)**



**2021 State Conference**

**Motions**

**2 March 2021**

**Alice Springs NT**

# ICPA NT 2021 State Conference Motions

## Allowances

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### Boarding Allowances

#### 1. Alice Springs Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Department of Education to make the Interstate Boarding Allowance decision-making matrix available to parents applying for the allowance.

##### **Explanation**

Members have been advised in the past that they are eligible for this allowance and then when they have re-applied, their application has been denied. Families would like the process to be much more transparent and user friendly with an avenue for explanation/corrections when the family asked for the case to be revised.

#### 2. Katherine Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT appeals to the Minister for Education for families to be eligible for the Interstate Boarding Allowance on the basis of more criteria than curriculum alone.

##### **Explanation**

While we are grateful for the establishment of an Interstate Boarding Allowance, we consider the restrictions are very limiting. As it stands, families are only eligible for the allowance if they are choosing to board interstate to access curriculum offerings unavailable at a school in the NT.

For many children living in rural or remote areas of the NT, attending boarding school is often the only option for them to complete their compulsory secondary education. Many families choose to send their children interstate as there are limited boarding options within the NT. Boarding schools are chosen on merit of suitability for the student and family, taking into account the family's financial situation, access to family support and ease of travel, in conjunction with the schools learning environment and support, boarding facilities, and extra-curricular programs offered. Often, the best fit is a school located interstate. Most states in Australia have a Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) to assist families with covering the expenses of boarding schools, even if they board in another state.

This is an allowance offered retrospectively, and guidelines offer no transparent decision-making matrix, making it impossible for families to know eligibility prior to enrolling their child at a school.

Case Study attached.

#### 3. Katherine Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT continues to advocate to the Minister for Education for a Living Away from Home Allowance for Geographically Isolated boarding students.

### **Explanation**

The provision of a LAFHA for all Geographically Isolated NT boarding students, regardless of which school they are enrolled at, is the most equitable solution to assisting with access to quality schooling for Territorian boarders. The \$2000 p.a. Interstate Boarding Allowance requires review.

### **Case Study**

NT Family - Nil LAFHA - \$600 if boarding within NT - \$2000 Interstate Boarding Allowance IF they meet the current criteria.

QLD Family - taken from Qld Govt Rural and Remote Support for Isolated Students Allowance will cover tuition fees up to \$2,793 per year additional allowance of 50c per \$1 over that amount can be claimed up to a total maximum of \$5,576 per year.

## **S1. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

“That ICPA NT appeals to the relevant Ministers for partial refunds of travel costs to and from school for Inter State boarding students who qualify for AIC”

### **Explanation**

We understand that the government will have little sway over large airlines and their ticket pricing. However, we feel bringing children home to family during holidays is extremely important. The choice parents make to send our children away for education purposes is a tough one. We make these hard decisions to give our children what we believe is the best education and opportunities for that individual. Some families are forced to choose interstate schooling due to family support and future career options that are not available within the NT. Some families are currently paying \$1000 or more each way, per term to fly one child to or from school. We do not expect this cost to be covered completely, however, having the ability to provide the travel receipt, and receiving a percentage refunded will ease the hardship of travel costs that burden families.

## **Student Assistance Scheme**

### **4. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Department of Education for an increase in all allowances within the Student Assistance Scheme, including the kilometre travel rate, to more closely reflect the cost of travel, especially in light of the number of kilometres our members travel on dirt roads to access education.

### **Explanation**

For many of our members, a trip to town to attend an In-School event can include hundreds of kilometres of dirt roads.

And, for many of our members, they are traveling to and from town in their own private vehicle not a government car or work car where the costs of repairs to the tyres, chassis, shock absorbers, windscreens etc is covered by their employer.

Many businesses that provide essential services to remote communities or cattle stations have the ability to slip the travel costs depending on the surface of the road. It is not uncommon to be charged two separate rates; one for the bitumen and another for the distance travelled on the dirt.

**Family 1)** This family has two possible ways they travel for their children to attend in-school functions at Alice Springs School of the Air. The decision regarding which way they go largely depends on the road conditions, not the kms travelled to get there.

**Option 1** is an 800km round trip; 200km Bitumen and 600km Dirt (suitable for 4wd only).

**Option 2** is a 1060km round trip, 640km Bitumen and 420km Dirt (mostly in average to good condition, 4wd recommended).

They must travel with 2 x spare tyres, as blowouts are a common occurrence costing the family \$520 per tyre to replace (COOPER LT275/65R18 123Q ST Maxx) in the past 2 years this family has had to replace 4 tyres during trips to town (only counting trips to attend school functions.)

## **5. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT asks for an update from the Northern Territory Department of Education to see what progress has been made to simplify the application processes involved in families applying for allowances under the Student Assistance Schemes.

### **Explanation**

In 2019 / 2020, the Department had several discussions with ICPA about simplifying the application process for Student Assistance Schemes and the creation of an online portal to complete applications. We would like to know if there has been a timeline set out for this process if a completion date has been set and if ICPA is still be consulted with the process.

## **6. Katherine Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT encourages the NT Education Department to improve the Student Assistance Scheme application, re-application and processing systems and ensure the scheme subsidies and assistance is appropriate to the needs of isolated students.

### **Explanation**

ICPA members continue to have issues with the Student Assistance Office in relation to applications, re-applying in subsequent years and processing times. Applicants in general, apply for student assistance because they require financial assistance to bear the significant cost of educating rural and remote students.

Solving systemic problems would not only alleviate stress for applicants but would also reduce the stress and workload of the Student Assistance Office through a reduction in the number of queries and disagreements. Clearer avenues to dispute claims, and detailed explanations of claims denied are essential, as well as transparent decision-making matrices should be supplied. The Student Assistance Scheme must be current, and in line with the needs of users, and in comparison, with other States, the Territory is currently falling short of coming anywhere near actual costs.

Comparison Study on Travel entitlements:

Current ATO travel reimbursement - 72 cents per km.

Travel Subsidy for NT student - 46 cents per km

Travel Subsidy for QLD student- \$146 per student plus 82cents per km first 500km, then \$1.36 per km up to maximum \$1786.00

WA Boarding Students receive travel vouchers for flights to and from school in whichever state, yet NT refuse to support our isolated boarding students at all, despite the very limited boarding facilities available within the Territory.

## Boarding

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NIL

## Communications and Technology

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NIL

## Curriculum

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NIL

## Distance Education

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### **7. Katherine Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT ensures the NT Department of Education subsidises the full amount of school room internet to families and remains a key participant and advisor to the Department of Education during negotiation of service needed and during the transfer from the STARS network to an NBN centrally managed service.

#### **Explanation**

As all Katherine School of the Air students have now transitioned to NBN in their home schoolrooms, it is imperative that families have the correct plans and adequate data allowances for their student's needs.

The NT Education Act states that access to a public education must be free, and for Distance Education Students, access to reliable internet is crucial to enabling delivery of a standard public school education. The cost of schoolroom internet must be met by the Territory.

We thank the Department of Education for their subsidy of \$150 per family toward internet costs, which now allows families adequate data in multi-aged school rooms until the transition to a new service provided by the Department.

It is imperative that the needs of isolated Distance Education students are met when negotiations are held over the transition from the STARS network to a centrally managed NBN service.

### **8. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Government and the Department of Education to ensure that internet costs (as per the STARS network) for Geographically Isolated children enrolled and attending schools of distance education be the direct monetary responsibility of the Department of Education as this is consistent to the Education Act.

**Explanation**

Put simply, families do not wish to apply for, or fill out any more paperwork to help facilitate their children accessing a 'free public education'. This includes paying for internet for their children to attend and complete lessons via school of the Air.

The costs delivering internet access to remote families via the STARS network has always been the responsibility of the Department of Education. If families are forced to use other means of accessing internet because the STARS system is not offered to them when they are enrolled in school of the air, and they have to sort out their own internet connection for the schoolroom, or they choose to use a different internet provider for their schoolroom, they should not be bearing the costs of this access to education.

**9. Alice Springs Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobbies the NT Department of Education to ensure any STARS equipment, including mobile trailers, are made available first and foremost to students who are currently enrolled in schools of distance education, especially during a time of COVID-19 lockdown.

**Explanation**

We have heard of a family (whose children are enrolled in distance education) needing to access a mobile STARS equipment trailer only to be informed that there were none available as they were all being used.

The family were told that the teachers were required to work from home or remotely to the school of the air building and thus there was no equipment for the family that lived hundreds of km's out of town and no other option for connecting to school lessons via the internet.

**10. Katherine Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT continues to relay the importance of Northern Territory Schools of the Air to all relevant Ministers and Government departments.

**Explanation**

Assurance that Katherine and Alice Springs Schools of the Air in the Territory remain an imperative and supported part of our distance education sector by the NT Government is paramount. We cannot allow the NT Govt to misunderstand the importance of these schools to our remote students, such as the devastating decision, subsequently reversed, by the WA government to close its valuable Schools of the Air due to funding cuts a few years ago. Territory families need to be supported and feel secure that their children can access an appropriate education, which cannot be provided by centralised city-based distance education institutions.

**F1. Alice Springs Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT thanks the Department of Education for the interim internet subsidy from \$55 per month to \$165 per month

# Early Childhood and Care

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## 11. Alice Springs Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT, lobbies the relevant Government Departments to ensure that existing Mobile Early Childhood Services continue and are supported to expand into regions without any early childhood services.

### Explanation

Mobile playgroups such as 'KICS' (Katherine Isolated Children's Service) operate in the Katherine region. No services like KICS operate in Central Australia.

Services such as KICS are crucial in identifying and referring children they see with speech, hearing, sight and cognitive development issues. These children are not yet school age, and many of these kids are falling through the gaps when it comes to early detection/intervention. Screening services are not servicing the Agricultural Sector of Central Australia and mobile services that frequent small communities are not advertised or accessible to many families who live on remote pastoral properties.

In June 2019 a survey of our members found that in Central Australia there were forty geographically isolated children who had no access to mobile playgroups or mobile early childhood educators. These children are at risk of delayed development, limited social skills and often have undiagnosed learning and health issues due to their remoteness and lack of social contact. Parents do not have other children around to compare their own to and often don't realise there is a problem or that milestones are not being reached in a timely manner. This negatively impacts these children and learning is often delayed. We need to act with haste to ensure these children are not slipping through the cracks in the pre-primary years, constraining them further when they start school. These children need access to play-based learning with other children and early diagnosis of learning difficulties by trained childcare workers.

In Katherine, there is a mobile playgroup called Katherine Isolated Children's Services or KICS. KICS is a good model for the Northern Territory; it reaches remote students of all backgrounds and provides early childhood education services where there are no others. In South Australia, RICE is also a good model, utilised by and benefiting isolated and remote communities. One suggestion is expanding the KICS or RICE model to central Australia. Both KICS and RICE have the vehicles, knowledge and experience of delivering in the remote outback. If these services received more funding, they may be willing to expand their services into Central Australia or branch out and have a base in Central Australia.

# Rural and Remote Schools

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**NIL**

# Special Needs

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## 12. Katherine Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT urges the relevant Ministers to collaborate to ensure access to and subsidise accommodation and travel for children with specific or special learning needs to attend appointments with qualified specialists.

### Explanation

Currently, the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS) provides subsidised accommodation and travel for remote families travelling in excess of 200km to visit doctors in a hospital. Parents of diagnosed specific or Special Learning Needs children have no access to assistance when travelling the same distance to see qualified Specialists in the Special Needs sector. Attending appointments with specialists is paramount to the education of these children. Families already having to deal with a Specific Needs Child whilst living in an isolated area and having to travel long distances to appointments are unduly stressed by the necessity, on top of that, to finance these trips themselves as well. PATS should include subsidised travel and accommodation for diagnosed children needing to see Specialists in this field of Specific or Special Needs wherever those specialists may be located, whether in a hospital or not.

### Case Study from Katherine Parent

I believe that living in a remote part of the NT provides us with enough struggles as it is, let alone having to deal with a child with special needs. I feel that I am only relatively new to this experience and have found it all a steep and very expensive learning curve. Having to tick all the boxes to even get a diagnosis which means seeing various different doctors, paediatricians, psychologists, Occupational Therapists, speech pathologists, and the list goes on, all numerous times, all scattered within the NT. On top of the extreme distances that need to be travelled, staying overnight as it cannot be deemed possible to do a return trip in one day, and all the added stress of having to find the funds to make these appointments possible. The very scary part is that this is only the beginning; these appointments and travel are now a part of the foreseeable future, along with the impending and no doubt ever-rising costs.

## 13. Katherine Branch

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT urges the Minister for Education to ensure all rural and remote students have access to and are prioritised for early identification and intervention for specific learning needs.

### Explanation

Students in rural and remote areas often have little or no access to early intervention services and therefore, no indication of why their child continues to struggle at school. For Distance Education (DE) students, undiagnosed learning difficulties lead to stress and frustration in the DE schoolroom.

The home tutor, often the mother, while well-equipped with 'gut' feelings about their student, is ill-equipped to diagnose, treat and manage diagnosed specific education needs. Support and respect for the home tutor are integral on the path to diagnosis.

Even when the child is identified as having need for assessment, it is a long, slow process through the Department of Education channels to have the child tested and can only be hurried if the family can afford assessment privately - with consultations being in excess of \$700. In addition, there are the expenses of travel, accommodation, time off work, and days away from the schoolroom. Correct and critical Intervention cannot proceed until a formal diagnosis is done, leaving the child and



distance education tutor unable to access assistance and often falling behind in their schoolwork. The NT Department of Education must recognise that assessment and early intervention of learning difficulties in Distance Education students must be prioritised due to their isolation.

### **Case Study**

Year 2 student at Katherine School of the Air is flagged as needing assessment due to inability to reach reading milestones, with no obvious reason. Paperwork is filed through school to have the child assessed through Department of Education team. Intervention begins at school through learning support, but with no testing or diagnosis, it is unclear what strategies should be implemented. Child falls further behind at school. Family drives 650km each way to Darwin to have a private assessment at a cost of \$750.00. Child is diagnosed with Dyslexia. A new Individual Learning Plan is developed with the Teacher and Home Tutor, enabling the child to have appropriate provisions implemented, and a specific decoding reading program delivered through the Learning Support Centre. After 4 years, the family have never had any contact from the Department of Education's team. Without the family bearing the significant cost and travel of a private assessment, the child would be left without a diagnosis, and possibly left well behind with her studies.

Many families do not have the knowledge of learning difficulties, or resources to pursue private assessments, and due to the geographic isolation, this leaves some students vulnerable to falling behind whilst waiting for assessment.

## **Miscellaneous**

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### **COVID-19**

#### **14. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the Northern Territory Government and the NT Chief Health Officer, to grant an exemption to all geographically isolated students from 'COVID 19 quarantine at government facilities' allowing these students to quarantine at their family home, providing the family and student meet the requirements to 'quarantine at home' set by the NT Chief Health Officer.

#### **Explanation**

Many children of remote families attend secondary schools' interstate.

Many of these families have an exemption to quarantine in a mandatory facility as they are classified as 'Agriculture as an essential service'.

Where the family of a student fall under an essential service category, then this classification should be passed onto the child as both of their primary caregivers (parents/guardians) are required to remain on the property to care for livestock and the millions of acres of property in their care.

#### **15. Alice Springs Branch**

**CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Department of Education and the Northern Territory Government, including the NT Chief Health Officer, for geographically isolated students enrolled in a Northern Territory School of the Air, and their families, to be able to cross the border and enter the Northern Territory for the purposes of accessing education.

**Explanation**

The Alice Springs Branch has a number of families who live in Northern SA (on remote properties) that are enrolled in distance education in the NT via Alice Springs School of the Air.

Just like their NT neighbours, Alice Springs is their closest town and where their children attend school. The biggest problem these families face is the invisible line that divides the NT & SA, this crosses the paddocks of their properties and prevents these families from coming to town to do all manner of business as well as preventing their children from attending school.

It is critical that these remote families are able to access 'in-school events' held only 4 times per year. For many children, this is their only opportunity to see their teachers face to face and participate in group learning activities including sport, music, science activities, general interaction with their peers and also for learning assessments and grading carried out by class teachers.

We ask that these families are recognised by the NT Government, and pathways are in place to ensure they are able to access educational activities for their children.

**16. Alice Springs Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT asks the Northern Territory Government to work with them to develop a pack of forms and documents, to help families prepare to meet the requirements when applying for an exemption from 'COVID 19 quarantine at government facilities' for all geographically isolated students attending educational facilities interstate.

**Explanation**

ICPA members have been proactive in developing several documents to submit to the CHO when applying for an exemption to quarantine. Members have been able to share their personal documents with ICPA in order to help other families adopt a streamlined approach when asking for the same exemptions.

In order to help streamline applications the NT Government receive from families seeking an exemption for their child to quarantine at home, we believe it would be beneficial that NT Government and the Chief Health Officer work with ICPA to compile templates of supporting documents (ICPA have created several of these already) that are required when applying for such exemptions for their children.

Such templates could include: travel journals, statutory declarations from the boarding school, intended travel routes, health records and documents listing previous Covid-19 Tests, private C19 management plans for quarantine at home etc.

**17. Alice Springs Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Department of Education and the Northern Territory Government to remove any costs involved in mandatory COVID-19 quarantine at government facilities, for Geographically Isolated students whose permanent place of residence is in the Northern Territory.

**Explanation NIL**

**18. Katherine Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT implores the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics to increase maintenance of roads to ensure safe conditions for families travelling to attend to educational needs.

**Explanation**

Many Families need to travel vast distances over NT Roads to attend to the educational needs of their children, and there is concern over funding not being available for adequate road maintenance. Case Study: The current maintenance program on the Central Arnhem Road cannot keep up with the high volume of heavy vehicles/road trains using the road to access Nhulunbuy, cattle stations, communities, and mining exploration sites, leaving the road in an unsafe condition only weeks after a maintenance grade. This affects families when the road becomes so poor that they need to consider whether their children can attend a school contact event or assessment, or travel to collect or return school resources or unit work. If the road is deemed to be in an unacceptable state for Department of Education Teachers to travel, or a longer travel time is needed due to road conditions, there can be a delay or school patrols can be cancelled, leaving students without the valuable contact time with teaching staff.

**19. Alice Springs Branch****CARRIED**

That ICPA NT be acknowledged and congratulated in their ongoing efforts throughout the year in attending delegations and lobbying Government on our behalf for a brighter future for our children in rural and remote Australia.

**Explanation**

NT State councillors spend many countless volunteer hours following up on the motions that we submit each year at their NT State Conferences, providing guidance to Branch Executive, Committee and Members, providing feedback on motions from previous conferences. We would like to thank them for continually making themselves available to members and helping with a number of issues that arise at Branch Level and ensuring that our motions will get a voice at the table when the opportunity arises.

**20. STATE COUNCIL****CARRIED**

THAT Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran AO, Administrator of the Northern Territory, be appointed Patron of the ICPA NT for the 2021/2022 year.

**21. STATE COUNCIL****CARRIED**

THAT Ruth Woerle is appointed the ICPA NT Archives Manager for the 2021/2022 term.

**22. STATE COUNCIL****CARRIED**

THAT Annika Bell is appointed the ICPA NT Down The Track Web Manager for the 2021/2022 term.

**23. STATE COUNCIL****CARRIED**

THAT the 2022 ICPA NT State Conference be hosted by Katherine Branch.

## Miscellaneous - AGM

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### **24. STATE COUNCIL**

**CARRIED**

THAT the amendment to the Isolated Children's Parents' Association NT (Inc) Constitution as circulated on 28 December 2020, be adopted at the 2021 AGM.

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END