

**The Isolated Children's Parents'
Association of Australia**

ICPA (Aust)



2021 Federal Conference

MOTIONS

November 2021

BOARDING SCHOOLS/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME

A1. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Education, Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education and the Minister for Families and Social Services for an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance, to help alleviate financial pressures incurred as a result of increased fees by boarding schools and hostels.”

Explanation:

WA members have had a severe reduction in the State allowance Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) and any increases to the AIC in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is being eroded by the continued increase to boarding fees.

An increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance would relieve some of the financial burden placed on families to pay for their children’s education.

WA State Council would like to thank Federal Council for their continued work lobbying the Federal Government for an increase to the Basic Boarding Allowance.

A2. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby the Federal Government to review the AIC Policy and Guidelines to allow rural and remote students who are accepted into specialised programs not offered at their local school, and who need to board away from home, to be eligible for the AIC.”

Explanation:

There are examples where rural and remote students need to board away from home to access gifted and talented programs or a language other than English (LOTE). These students do not qualify for AIC due to the proximity of a government high school even though it does not offer these specialised programs.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance and advantage of face-to-face teaching across all educational programs.

A3. Wentworth Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government and relevant Departments to separate Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) into two categories – Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and Assistance for Geographically Isolated Children (AGIC).”

Explanation:

For many years ICPA have been campaigning for an increase to the AIC in line with the astronomical increases associated with the need to send students to boarding school. Unfortunately, a sympathetic ear is offered but not much else.

Part of the uphill battle we face is that whilst we are all acutely aware that rural student numbers continue to fall the number of students accessing AIC continues to increase. So, when we ask for an increase to AIC to match boarding fees it actually means a significantly larger increase in the budget than we would perceive.

We need AGIC to become a completely separate payment so that an increase to this allowance does not represent such a large increase. Those isolated due to medical reason would still be able

to access AIC at the standard rate. A separation of these categories would make it easier for government to justify an increase to AGIC at a lower cost.

A4. North West Branch (SA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies relevant Ministers to support the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who assist their employees residing in geographically isolated areas, by providing financial assistance to enable their children to attend boarding school.”

Explanation:

Currently many businesses across remote Australia are faced with the financial challenge of helping to fund the education of employee’s children. Financial assistance is essential to support families employed in remote areas of Australia as they are unable to afford the exorbitant expenses of sending their children to board for secondary schooling. Families who have no choice but to leave their homes and place of employment to continue their child’s education, simply because they cannot afford the costs of boarding, leaves employers with a hard to fill gap in the remote workplace. These remote and rural workplaces struggle to fill vacancies.

Businesses able to provide financial assistance for boarding and secondary school retain their valuable employees. However, it is these businesses able to offer financial aid that are struck with the added costs of paying Fringe Benefits Tax on the assistance provided. For example, a business who offers to cover 50% of a boarding school fee that totals \$50 000, will pay \$22 170 in tax on top of the \$25 000 of assistance. A total cost of \$47 170 to that employer, almost doubling the costs of their financial support. A significant deterrent for any business thinking of offering assistance.

It is most likely that more employers would be able to offer financial assistance to their employees if the FBT was removed. This would help stabilise a rural workforce and keep valuable families in rural and remote Australia.

A5. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to lobby the Australian government with its ‘No borders for boarders’ campaign for rural and remote students.”

Explanation

There needs to be a special exemption for all rural and remote students to cross any state border enabling them to travel to and from their homes to their respective boarding schools via their most direct route. This is to ensure students are returned home and back to school safely should there be another occurrence causing state border closures such as the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

A6. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers to grant, due to COVID-19, the same level of travel exemption to geographically isolated children who attend interstate educational boarding facilities as those persons considered essential workers, and allow the children permission to quarantine at home.”

Explanation:

Throughout COVID-19 we have witnessed an ad hoc approach to the treatment of children who attend educational boarding facilities interstate. There has been a great deal of anxiety caused to both parents and children with the inconsistent approach as each state has applied its own set of rules.

It is unacceptable that children have been unable to return home for weeks, have had to endure periods of self-isolation away from family and have had their education impacted. By the very nature of their geographical location, many students are already 'self-isolating' when they are at their principal place of residence.

A7. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) works with the relevant departments to encourage detailed and cohesive understanding and application of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines to avoid future confusion and misinterpretation which impacts geographically isolated boarding students."

Explanation:

The AHPPC guidelines introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a great deal of confusion and anxiety to both students and parents in their application. The broad nature of the guidelines has been interpreted and applied differently by boarding school facilities. Some are applied differently even within separate boarding houses on the same school grounds.

Parents are also experiencing the AHPPC guidelines being applied differently to their children simply because they attend separate schools where each schools' interpretation of the guidelines differed.

S1. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) investigates the impact the Federal governments new 'Direct Measure of Income' funding model has on geographically isolated students who attend boarding schools."

Explanation:

From 2020, the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) of capacity to contribute (CTC) replaced the previous area-based socio-economic status (SES) score measure to determine the capacity to contribute (CTC) for most non-government schools. The new direct measure will apply to all schools by 2022.

A CTC score is a measure of a non-government school community's capacity to contribute to the ongoing costs of running the school. A school's CTC percentage affects the amount of base recurrent funding the school attracts from the Commonwealth Government under the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act).

For most non-government schools, their government funding primarily depends on how much their per-student base funding is discounted.

The discount is determined by the school's SES score. Schools with well-off parents have higher SES scores and received lower base funding per student; schools with less-well-off parents have lower SES scores and receive more. The average SES score is 100, and 97% of scores fall between 85 and 125.

SES scores were calculated every five years using census data about the average income, education and occupation level in the area where each family lives.

The DMI is based on the median income of parents or guardians at the school (that is, the family income that sits in the middle of the range of incomes at a school). The median family income is translated into a DMI score by comparing the median family income of a school against the

median family income of other non-government schools. The data are standardised to a mean of 103 and a standard deviation of 13, weighted by enrolments.

The DMI uses parent and guardian names and addresses linked to data within the Multi Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP). There is an 18-month delay in the availability of income data through MADIP. Parent and guardian names and addresses provided in 2018 were linked to 2015-16 MADIP data. Parent and guardian names and addresses provided in 2019 were linked to 2016-17 MADIP data.

Adjusted taxable income (ATI) is used to calculate the median income of the parents and guardians of a school community. The use of ATI is supported by stakeholders and is consistent with other government policy for payments such as Family Tax Benefits and the Child Care Subsidy.

Additional data (such as concessional Australian Government financial benefits, Pay As You Go (PAYG) and spouse reported income data) are used to improve the accuracy of the measure by improving the coverage of data and capturing low income earners and others not included in taxation records.

As a result of using the Direct Measure of Income parameters many schools throughout the whole of Australia will receive a cut to their funding, this is a major concern for boarding families. Many schools will see their funding reduced anywhere from \$1,000,000 to \$4,000,000 per annum, equating to \$3,000 plus per student. Members are concerned that a greater increase to school fees will be levied upon families to bridge the gap as a result of the reduction in funding from the Government. The cost of boarding is already increasing at an alarming rate and certainly in advance of CPI, without further additional charges being incurred.

Unlike our city counterparts geographically isolated students who need to board away from home have fewer choices with regards to the school they attend; they are limited to those schools that have boarding facilities. Some States have Government Residential Colleges however, due to the tyranny of distance and logistics it is often impractical to attend these facilities.

For example: Families in the WA Pilbara region, the closest Residential College is in Geraldton some 1254km away. To fly there requires a flight south to Perth and then another back north to Geraldton. There is no Residential College in Perth, so the only option is private boarding.

The proportion of boarding families in schools is often such a minority so will have little impact on the DMI, but families could be forced to pay more in order to access an equitable education.

S2. Southern Downs Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) sincerely thanks the former Federal Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education the Honourable Andrew Gee, and the current Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communication and Regional Education the Hon Bridget McKenzie for their help in advocating on behalf of all geographically isolated students during the COVID-19 lockdowns and their engagement during the “no borders for boarders” campaign.”

Explanation:

Our branch is located on the QLD/NSW border, and we saw first-hand the enormous impact that many of the decisions regarding border closures and travel restrictions were having on our boarding and University students. It was an incredibly stressful time for many students and

families. We understand Minister Gee worked hard in seeking exemptions for these students and would like to extend a vote of thanks to him.

F1: New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) work with the Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communication and Regional Education, to request the respective State Governments implement in an expeditious manner, a clear and consistent pathway for the Right of Appeals process under the current National Code for Boarding School Students.”

Explanation:

The National Code for Boarding School Students that was endorsed by National Cabinet on 17 September 2021, was warmly welcomed by ICPA-NSW. We thank Federal Council and all State Councils for the work that was done in this space to achieve national recognition.

Despite the National Code being agreed to by all State Governments, the issue of different rules between the States, followed closely by, no right of appeal and no specific contact person within the health departments, remains a serious issue for members. The Code clearly states a right of appeal process must be in place, however, on countless occasions ICPA-NSW have not been able to ascertain a direct contact in QLD, SA, VIC or ACT.

Whilst some states have implemented a recognition of boarding students, it appears to be a ‘tick box’ recognition that lacks consistency. A designated contact and appeals process as directed in the National Code, needs to be provided as a priority by relevant State Health Authorities.

COMMUNICATIONS

A8. Mount Isa Branch of the Air (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to advocate to government and telecommunications providers to ensure that communications services for the purpose of education in geographically isolated areas are maintained, expanded and do not diminish.”

Explanation:

We thank the ICPA Federal Council and State Councils for continuously raising concerns regarding communication services in rural and remote areas for the purpose of education and student safety wherever possible as well as participating in numerous stakeholder groups, consultations and placing submissions.

Technology changes at a rapid pace and sometimes new developments in communications have consequences for families needing to educate their children in geographic isolation. Our families risk being “left behind” as the communication gap widens when impacts of communications advances do not consider the effect on regional, rural and remote families and services can be lessened or compromised, sometimes unintentionally.

A few examples which have occurred in recent times-

- Mobile coverage - transitioning from 3G to 4G – 4G coverage appears to have a smaller footprint of coverage than 3G and many customers in rural/remote areas will be required to transition to new equipment and infrastructure at their own cost in order to use the service, communications are also moving towards 5G, will this be even less coverage for these families?
- Alternative Voice Service Trials (AVST) - to hopefully identify new technologies which might effectively replace struggling systems such as High Capacity Radio Concentrator (HCRC) phone services, but unfortunately, the trial has been heavily Voice over Internet

Protocol (VoIP) heavy and at this time doesn't appear to have solutions to offer as a second source of communication for geographically isolated families other than relying on internet service for both data and voice purposes.

- Changes around Band Spectrum regarding Free to Air TV and also 850/900 MHz Auction Allocation Limits which may impact on free to air television channels/content available as well as quality of mobile coverage and expansion of mobile services in rural and remote areas.

We appreciate ICPA (Aust) keeping abreast of these and other developments and ask that they continue their strong advocacy wherever possible to ensure that communication services are not lessened in the bush as a result of new programs/technologies being rolled out.

Internet Access

A9. Western Downs Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continue working closely with stakeholders to ensure that Sky Muster Plus continues to cater for and be further enhanced to support all geographically isolated students and their needs.”

Explanation:

Western Downs Branch would like to pass on our gratitude and thanks to the Minister for Communications, The Minister for Regional Communications, NBN, BIRRR and ICPA Australia for the implementation of the Sky Muster Plus product. The Sky Muster Plus product is a game changer for geographically isolated students, including but not limited to, Small school, University, TAFE, Early Childhood and Boarding students who previously did not qualify for an Education Port. The unlimited data included in this product means students can study and learn without jeopardising their households' monthly data allowance.

A10. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to request the Minister for Communications ensure all geographically isolated students have adequate internet access with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the service.”

Explanation:

We acknowledge and thank ICPA (Aust) and the Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia for their continuous and effective lobbying of the Federal Government, Telstra, nbn™ and other providers on internet issues in the bush. In particular, the negotiations with nbn™ to provide dedicated ports for education an important breakthrough. The prioritisation of installations required for education is paramount. Many students, however, such as tertiary and training students, students of small rural schools and boarding students' home on “holidays”. These families are required to use their business/family internet for education. Also, the NT is in flux with regard to internet provision for distance education and so some families are also using their own internet for that.

While expected data speeds, plan sizes and service reliability are continually improving, our members have concerns about the data allocations in plans being heavily loaded towards unreasonable off-peak times. The Mb/\$ continues to fall extremely short of those available to our urban counterparts, thus ensuring maintenance of the internet divide between regional and urban areas.

A11. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“The ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant Ministers and Departments to ensure that internet costs for working, traveling families of geographically isolated children enrolled in distance education have access to subsidised transportable satellite internet and all associated costs involved with purchasing these kits are also subsidised.”

Explanation:

Put simply there is currently minimal kits and internet plans available in Australia for families who frequently travel and move due to work commitments. The kits that are available at present which are only ONE cost in excess of \$18,000 and internet plans start from \$300 per month.

A12. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to satellite internet providers to develop an affordable product that traveling families can access for the delivery of education.”

Explanation:

Currently for traveling, working families there is only one satellite internet company that caters for frequently moving teams and as this is the only company, they can and do charge through the roof as there are no other options or competition in Australia at present.

A13. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian communications and media authority (ACMA), the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts and other relevant political figures to work proactively with companies attempting to bring universal broadband internet to Australia, including satellite-based internet like Starlink.”

Explanation:

Education in remote Australia relies more and more on fast, reliable internet connections with large download limits. Internet requirements are only expected to increase. In particular, download requirements are increasing because more and more video content is needed for research and class delivery. Sky Muster has generous exceptions on data usage, but those exceptions don't extend to most video content. Universally-accessible fast internet with large download limits could be available in Australia within 2 years. This would be especially welcome to families who move around in remote areas, for whom there is no current affordable or practical solution for internet provision.

SpaceX' Starlink system is the most advanced and promising universal broadband internet system. It is currently in beta in southern Australia (below 32 degrees latitude). It provides 50-150 Mbit/sec connection with a latency of 20-40 milliseconds for \$139/month. Downloads are currently unlimited. The connection equipment costs \$809 including delivery and in most cases can be installed by the end user. Additionally, Starlink could be used for 4G and 5G small cell backhaul, allowing cheaper expansion and upgrade of mobile phone networks into remote areas.

The Starlink beta is expected to expand to more of Australia by the end of 2021. Speeds are expected to increase (possibly upward of 300Mbit/sec) and latency is expected to decrease. Currently the service is only available at a fixed address, but this restriction is expected to be lifted in 2022.

The ACMA has given approval for SpaceX to operate in low and remote density areas until 2025. However, some sites for earth stations are only licenced until 29 October 2021.

In the ACMA's spectrum management consultation paper, April 2020, they state: "Under current law, specific allocation processes depend on ACMA and, in some cases, Ministerial decisions made during the planning and allocation stages, and reflect other relevant government policy considerations about planning priorities. Information from incumbent and prospective spectrum users about the demand for access to specific bands and the timing of any possible allocation will also provide important input to allocation decisions." The ACMA periodically consults stakeholders on upcoming decisions. It would be great if the ICPA (Aust) could monitor and submit papers into these discussions on behalf of ICPA member families in their quest for affordable and adequate internet. <https://www.acma.gov.au/have-your-say> Keeping the perspective of remote families in the ears of politicians and ministers on these matters is also important.

A14. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) seek an assurance from nbn that the installation of a Sky Muster service and its hardware will continue at no cost to rural and remote student households, to ensure affordable access to education for rural and remote students."

Explanation:

Currently all equipment and a standard installation are provided free-of-charge to consumers and is covered by the nbn. Should this situation change in the future there is concern as to what nbn will have in place with regard to geographically isolated distance education students accessing education at an affordable cost to parents.

As a result of COVID-19 and online learning from home, a great number of members have installed a Sky Muster service. There are however members who are yet to change over; for some, it is a lack of knowledge of what Sky Muster services offer, or the cost of breaking existing contracts and for others it is due to students not yet commencing distance education and therefore parents seeing little need for large data allowances.

We want to ensure that the future uptake of a Sky Muster service is affordable for parents of rural and remote students.

WA State Council would like to thank Federal Council for their continuous effort to bring reliable and affordable internet connectivity to rural, remote and regional families.

A15. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies nbn for all geographically isolated students enrolled via distance education schools to have access to the Sky Muster education port or alternative service."

Explanation:

ICPA (WA) would like to see access to the education port available to all students studying via distance education, with the option for those enrolled in a non-government school program funding their own access.

In WA, only students studying via distance education and enrolled through Schools of the Air (SOTA) or School of Isolated Distance Education (SIDE), qualify for the Sky Muster education port which the WA Education Department funds.

There have been instances where students studying via distance education through private campuses have been told by nbn they do not qualify for the education port and referred onto the state Education Department who have declined access.

A16. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to lobby nbn, relevant Ministers and Departments to ensure that video streaming for educational use is included in future Sky Muster Plus plans for geographically isolated students studying via distance education.”

Explanation:

ICPA WA thank providers of the Sky Muster Plus products for providing unmetered content. It is imperative that video streaming, including YouTube, that is actively used by educational establishments, be included in the delivery of education programs for geographically isolated students studying via distance education.

Mobile Coverage/Service**A17. Kindon Branch (Qld)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Minister of Communications, Minister for Regional Communications, Minister for Regional Education and relevant bodies for rural and remote schools to continue to be a priority in future Mobile Black Spot Program rounds and that mobile coverage solutions when implemented extend beyond school grounds.”

Explanation:

Rural and remote schools right across Australia are the hub for many communities and often the first port of call in many situations. They are the place that people gather to when an emergency happens in a district. Some schools are so isolated that they are the desired place to house defibrillator machines as they are the go-to point during a crisis. While these schools have the task of overseeing such important life saving devices, many do not have the mobile service to ensure adequate medical advice is received in such an emergency.

With minimal or no mobile coverage for areas outside of some schools they find themselves often in situations where motorists come in for help asking to use the school phone which pulls teaching staff away from classrooms to identify and record who is on school property or even on-site Principals in adjacent residences woken at all hours with demands for assistance. To entice and maintain valuable school staff to remote small schools is difficult. It is imperative that they are provided with not only a safe and secure workplace but also for privacy in their home.

Some schools are going to the extraordinary length of purchasing their own mobile booster hardware out of their school or P & C funds to ensure that mobile service is available on the school grounds. However, this privately supplied coverage usually does not extend beyond the school fence. Communities and those travelling past these schools with private signal boosters soon learn that they can access some limited service at the school. In attempting to get connection from the mobile boosters at rural schools, people are entering school grounds in order to make calls. Schools usually require records of who is on school grounds, contact details etc and also ensuring the purpose of being on the grounds is known. Handling extra visitors who merely want to use phone service uses up valuable time for teachers and staff. The interruption to school routine could be minimised if rural schools had more general mobile coverage. The footprint for this coverage needs to extend beyond the school perimeter and sufficient infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure this can happen.

Rural and remote schools need to continue to be considered as priority for mobile coverage under future Mobile Black Spot Program rollouts and ensure that when mobile coverage is installed the coverage reaches outside school grounds.

A18. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby the Minister for Communications and telecommunication providers, to investigate the reliability and capacity of backup power on mobile towers to ensure a consistent and uninterrupted delivery of educational programs to geographically isolated children and rural and remote schools.”

Explanation:

Members continue to report significant issues with the reliability of the backup battery on mobile towers during extended power outages. We request that these concerns are raised when in meetings with telecommunication providers.

When some of our members experience power outages they also lose mobile phone coverage. It has been explained that a number of the battery backups on mobile towers are aging and it only becomes apparent when there are power outages, that these battery backups are failing. The issue of battery back-up failures also applies to local exchanges and so affects the ability to communicate via landline.

The recent cyclone in WA caused a massive amount of damage to properties in the Midwest and surrounding areas. The inability to communicate during times of crisis caused a great deal of additional stress and anxiety.

ICPA (WA) acknowledge that cyclone Seroja was a catastrophic event, however as a society, and particularly in education, we are encouraged to adopt new technologies and methods of learning but events like cyclones highlight our vulnerabilities at locations not only locally but throughout Australia when a system is down. Without a reliable mobile and communications network student learning is being impacted.

Telephone**A19. Collarenebri-Mungindi Branch (NSW)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) ask Telstra to review its customer service and telephone assistance lines to more effectively assist rural and remote students and their families.”

Explanation:

The current 13 22 00 line for support is inadequate. After you have punched in all the numbers for account purposes the message tells you a link has been sent to your mobile for you to follow and chat with a Telstra assistant. That rarely happens. You can't ring your local Telstra shop regarding plans or purchasing a new phone or purchasing a SIM, they are unable to help you unless you go into the store and present identification. When Telstra stores are not located locally this is less than helpful to rural and remote customers.

A20. Collarenebri-Mungindi Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) ask Telstra to urgently expedite the moving of all Telstra call centres to the mainland of Australia, to assist students and their families.”

Explanation:

Rural and remote students and their families have experienced problems with the overseas call centres for far too long. All Telstra call centres need to be moved back to Australia urgently, so that they can effectively assist customers need to troubleshoot issues. During COVID these centres operated from within Australia and most customers saw a huge difference in the assistance being received.

A21. Territory Wide Branch (NT)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Minister for Communications, other relevant Ministers and telecommunications companies to ensure that in rural and remote areas of scant to no mobile coverage landlines, such as radio telephone, optic fibre or any other service currently being used are not replaced by a voice service over satellite internet.”

Explanation:

In rural and remote areas communication is one of the most important tools in regards to education. Technology has advanced greatly which has assisted with the deliverance of distance education material, online classes, and aids in the formation of a solid relationship with teachers who might teach from a base a large distance away. Verbal communication via a phone is one of the important tools that connect the distance education school with the pupil and this link should always be a continuous and permanent connection. In urban areas landline services are currently received over the nbn service using Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP). The Federal Government is working with several retail service providers to trial landline services over satellite internet (Sky Muster) utilising a VOIP service for satellite technology. If this trial is successful then it is a strong possibility that existing landline services over radio telephone, optic fibre etc. will be moved to a service over Sky Muster internet. This will be very detrimental in rural and remote areas where there is no other form of communication such as mobile coverage. If the satellite system fails, there will be no other way for our children to reach their distance education provider and also of importance emergency services in times of an emergency. Where this is the practice of utilizing VOIP in urban areas for the landline there is also a strong mobile system so when one goes down you still have the other to use in times of education, health, and emergency. In rural and remote areas where there is no mobile coverage or very scant mobile coverage then there will be no way to communicate if the satellite is offline and therefore all communications with the distance education provider will be cut which would be very detrimental in times of major assessments.

A22. Western Australia State Council (WA)**D/C by A21**

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to lobby the Minister for Communications to ensure the retention and maintenance of landline services in rural and remote areas, until another means of reliable, affordable and appropriate voice service is available.”

Explanation:

The Universal Service Obligation (USO) should remain on landline telephony services for those living outside of mobile coverage areas and these landline services should be maintained and upgraded, as necessary. Currently there are ICPA members who rely upon their landline as their only means of reliable and affordable voice service due to poor mobile coverage, so it is imperative that the landlines are retained and maintained.

ICPA (WA) acknowledges and thanks ICPA (Aust) for its advocacy that families living in rural and remote parts of Australia, due to the nature of where they live, require two forms of communications i.e., phone/voice and internet/data/voice - each as a separate service not solely relying on the same mode of delivery and thus ensuring if one service fails, the other is still available.

A23. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to lobby the Minister for Communications to ensure fault restoration and entitlements for geographically isolated students and their families occur within the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) guidelines.”

Explanation:

The CSG guidelines for repairs in remote service locations is 3 full working days after report. Recently members have experienced being without a fixed service landline for a period of six (6) weeks from the first date reported. Repair dates had been given only to be extended on numerous occasions. Members were either not offered an alternative service and/or due to poor mobile coverage were unable to rely on a consistent service from the existing mobile tower, leaving members with a lack of communications. ICPA WA acknowledge that if eligible, there are CSG financial entitlements when repairs cannot be effective within the CSG guidelines. However, members are concerned at the number of repeated extended outages occurring in aging exchanges, especially when the supply of parts is the cause for the delay (although this is not conveyed to the customer).

A24. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) ask the Minister for Communications to investigate the reliability of voice services in non NBN cable serviced areas.”

Explanation:

Some voice services especially those on older copper lines have become unreliable and untenable. Multiple faults are reported over short periods of time. The line is fixed, only to have another breakdown within weeks and this process begins again. These areas often have no mobile service. Every Australian especially those in rural and remote locations trying to educate their children need a reliable and consistent form of communication.

S3. Yaraka Isisford Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA Australia lobby the Minister for (Regional) Communications to ensure that any proposed solution intended to replace existing Rural & Remote telephone services have equivalent or improved facilities and functionality as existing services.”

Explanation:

Telephones are a vital component of education delivery in rural and remote areas. There is a real risk that technologies being trialled to replace radio services (HCRC) will be Plain Old Telephone Services (POTS) without things like call waiting, call forwarding, and so on.

S4. St George Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby phone providers, the Federal Government and relevant Ministers and Departments to introduce a subsidised connection of additional phone lines as required for educating geographically isolated students through Distance Education.”

Explanation:

Schools of Distance Education are requesting families install additional phone lines to allow for more accessibility to on air lessons. Families with several students completing their education through Distance Education are often required to be on air for lessons at the same time. Currently a connection fee is \$329 if the connection is straightforward and can use existing phone connections followed by the additional \$55 monthly cost for the home phone plan. As this line is for the sole purpose of calling 1800 numbers for the use of on-air school teleconferencing, a financed connection for the additional phone line/s would help alleviate the financial burden to families and ensure students are able to receive their required lessons.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

A25. CONJOINED MOTION presented by:

CARRIED

Western Australia State Council (WA), Alice Springs Branch (NT), Katherine Branch (NT), Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA), North East Branch (SA)

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, and the Federal Government, to establish a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) in recognition of the role home tutors play in educating geographically isolated students via distance education.”

Explanation Western Australia State Council (WA):

For several years members across Australia have asked ICPA to lobby the Federal Government for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). WA State Council consider Federal Council is best placed to continue the lobby and would like to thank Council for its continued efforts in this area and for highlighting the hard work that home tutors throughout Australia undertake daily to provide an education for their students.

Due to their age, many children are reliant on home tutors to assist with their education. Home tutors are not considered teachers or education assistants. They are, however, accountable for the delivery of face-to-face educational support and supervision of students undertaking a compulsory government education program.

Children who access distance education rely on home tutors who are a necessity for equitable access to appropriate education. The DETA would assist in financially recognising the work of home tutors.

Explanation Alice Springs Branch (NT):

An introduction of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), as financial recognition of the essential work a supervisor/tutor who is often the mother, performs in Distance Education classrooms would help alleviate the pressure placed on remote families whose only option is to home-school their children via Distance Education. In many cases the mother is unable to be a member of the workforce on the property, community or out station where they live due to the need for them to stay at home and teach their children. This in turns strips the family of a second income and places further financial pressure on those families who educate their children via distance education. If in the event the family employs a Home Tutor to deliver the distance education lessons to the children, they are effectively paying award wages for a child to receive a public education. This can amount a family paying a Home Tutor between \$25,000 to \$45,000 depending on salary / wage agreements. On top of the wage a Home Tutor is paid, they in many cases, home tutors are living with the family and have all food, board and other sundry expenses such as internet provided by the family.

Explanation Katherine Branch (NT):

Katherine Branch thanks ICPA (Aust) for your continuing pursuit of this motion and considers the Distance Education Resource Video to be a great resource illustrating the commitment of home tutors to education and the challenges faced by families on distance education. For many young people living in remote regions, their only access to education is to study by distance education. It is clear that distance education provision is provided on the assumption that all children have ready access to a person able to deliver the program in the geographically isolated classroom. This person is the distance education tutor who must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program. With the responsibility of the distance education tutor position often falling on the mother, fulfilling this position further compounds her workload. This can place increased pressure on other family members and may necessitate the employment of additional staff.

Explanation Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA):

The service provided by Home Tutors in the delivering of education to students in rural and remote Australia who have no choice but to be educated via the distance education mode of delivery needs to be acknowledged. Home Tutors provide what the government simply cannot cost effectively supply and as such should be recognised and remunerated fairly.

Explanation North East Branch (SA):

Case Study:

I lived and worked alongside my husband on our sheep station until my daughter began School of the Air lessons. When my daughter started school, we realised we had to employ someone else to either supervise in the school room or help on the station. As I am a qualified teacher - I took on the role of supervisor, and we employed a station hand. We were in the middle of a drought, paying an extra wage and additional expenses. Everything became more difficult with extra money going out - and not enough flowing back in. We made the difficult decision to split our family so our children could attend face-to-face school and I could earn a wage teaching again. A Distance Education Teaching Allowance would have made a significant difference to our family - and we would have been able to stay together.

A26. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Federal Minister for Education table, at a forthcoming Education Ministers Meeting, a national approach to financially assisting distance education tutors in their delivery of public education in geographically isolated home schoolrooms; and to provide outcomes of this meeting back to ICPA Australia.”

Explanation:

Australian, State and Territory government ministers responsible for education attend the Education Ministers Meeting (previously COAG/Education Council). In addition to early childhood education and care, international and higher education, the Education Ministers Meeting is a forum for collaboration and decision-making on school education.

In previous years, our motions have asked ICPA (Aust) to advocate for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), and we appreciate ICPA (Aust) continue to do this.

We also understand that in early 2020, the Federal Education Minister advised that lobby for a DETA should be directed to State Education Ministers.

NT State Council have gained the support of Northern Territory members to advocate to our State Education Minister for a DETA, however we believe that until there is willingness from all levels of government to recognise the value and necessity of distance education tutors in geographically isolated schoolrooms, our chances of individual success, state by state, are diminished.

In this motion we call for Australian, State and Territory government ministers to have a collaborative discussion, in a forum that has the collective power to bilaterally appreciate and agree that distance education tutors in geographically isolated schoolrooms are critical to the delivery of public education in rural & remote Australia, and indeed the cost of delivering this public service should be carried, or at least shared with government, not carried by the family alone.

A27. Broken Hill Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant Ministers and Departments to increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for geographically isolated students undertaking secondary education via Distance Education.”

Explanation:

As students reach secondary level of their schooling through distance education, their needs become greater from the primary years. Currently the AIC allowance is the same for secondary students studying via distance education as primary students. Once a student reaches year 7, more than likely they will be changing schools. This means extra cost of setting their student up for the school year. Changing schools encompasses new costs such as uniforms, appropriate furniture, educational resources, technology devices and access to satellite internet.

With students moving into secondary schooling through distance education will quite often mean that the school is a much further distance from their home. This makes travel and accommodation expenses higher for students to be able to attend residential events.

For example, many ex Broken Hill School of The Air students are continuing their education into secondary through Dubbo School Of Distance Education or ECalrossy. As students move on from BH SOTA, they need to return all furniture, resources, and access to satellite internet to the school. Another example are White Cliffs and other students who live in a town which has access to primary school but not secondary schooling. These students will be studying via distance education for the first time which means students need to be set up for their secondary schooling including new appropriate furniture, learning resources and new uniforms. With more demand on technology for student learning the families need to set up access to satellite internet and have the appropriate devices to carry out their schoolwork. Dubbo and Tamworth are a much greater distance from students in far west New South Wales which adds to travel and accommodation costs for students to have equal access to educational experiences at the student’s school.

All of these expenses are the responsibility of the student’s family.

A28. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

WITHDRAWN

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian Government to reassess entry requirements and conditions for rural families claiming assistance for isolated children through Centrelink.”

Explanation: currently a lot of families trying to claim the assistance for isolated children are having to jump through hoops. Their applications are being denied because their cattle station/home is too close to town schools but in fact the property they live and work on can be over one million acres wide spread and could take the family hours to get to a town school when out mustering/fencing etc. Each case should be assessed individually, and decisions made based on each family's life and working conditions. At present it seems there is just generic criteria and it's either a yes or no answer. Once families have been accepted and are enrolled into a school of the air, they should automatically be accepted for isolated children assistance payments.

A29. Mount Isa Branch of the Air (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Minister of Social Services and relevant bodies the need to include in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance an eligibility criteria for students who travel with their families for the purpose of rural work to areas without access to schooling and live away from their listed permanent place of residence for the majority of the school year.”

Explanation:

Families who work as contractors and other roles in rural and remote areas often have their children with them in stock camps, fencing camps, yard building, etc.... where there is no school available to attend. As these families only work temporarily at each place of contract, and sometimes change locations frequently while they fulfil their work commitments, they do not have an address other than their permanent home address to list where they live and can be contacted. This permanent or home address is sometimes in a town/area far from where they are working and may actually have a school available, however, these children are not living there during the school year to access that school. As these families are contractors and move about, they cannot list the address of the properties where they are living and working as their address/place of residence for the purpose of applying for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance even though their children don't have access to a school while they are in the camps and are studying at times in some of the most remote places possible. These families do not live permanently at the properties where they are working and still need an address listed where they can receive their mail, application forms etc...and their 'home' address may not qualify for AIC even though the actual living situation of their students does. The AIC application process should take into consideration the situation that children in contracting camps face and offer a means for these families to show eligibility for the AIC when their students are in an area without access to a school for the majority of the school year.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early Learning

A30. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobby the relevant ministers for funding to start a new early childhood service in rural and remote Australia where there are currently none available for pre-school aged children."

Explanation:

For over 15 years Central Australia has been without a mobile playgroup that services all members of the community in geographically isolated areas. Alice Springs have been advocating now for several years for the expansion of KICKS that the Katherine region has access to or having the opportunity to start up a similar programme.

A31. CONJOINED MOTION presented by:

CARRIED

Katherine Branch (NT), Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA), North East Branch (SA), WA State Council (WA), Qld State Council (Qld).

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government for geographically isolated pre-compulsory school students enrolled in a registered distance education program to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance where they meet other eligibility criteria."

Explanation Katherine Branch (NT):

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program. From the website www.education.gov.au "The Australian Government is providing funding certainty for preschool, having committed \$453.1 million in the 2019-20 Budget to extend the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education until the end of 2020 ... This funding ensures that every child will continue to have access to a quality preschool program for 600 hours (15 hours a week) in the year before school. Universal Access [has] a focus on participation by Indigenous children, vulnerable and disadvantaged children in a range of settings in order to meet the needs of working families, and will be accessible to all Australian children, regardless of their location."

If that was actually what was happening in rural and remote areas, this motion would be unnecessary!

Setting up the classroom for distance education delivery for Pre-schoolers costs the same, if not more, as for the first year of compulsory schooling. The number of children accessing this pre-compulsory year by distance education is not huge. For example: Katherine School of the Air (KSA) has had a structured Pre-School Program in place for over 20 years and currently (Sem 1 2019) has 12 enrolments. On average KSA enrolments have been around 20-25 each year. The NT Government already recognises this cohort of students by making available half of the “NT Correspondence Site Allowance – Preschool” to assist all four-year-old children that are enrolled in pre-school with the Alice Springs and Katherine Schools of the Air.

Extending the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) distance education allowance to include these students will ensure greater and more equitable participation in Early Childhood Education by rural and remote students. Distance education students could benefit enormously from a minute portion of the billions of dollars allocated to early childhood education and care, including the funding intended to ensure the system is more accessible, affordable and fairer for families.

Explanation Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA):

Under the current guidelines, part time distance education students are ineligible for the Distance Education (DE) component of the AIC allowance, which means families enrolled in the 4-year-old programme must bear the costs of maintaining and setting up the classroom in that first year of schooling. Our research has shown that this is a costly impost on families.

The AIC DE allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the schoolroom. The schoolroom must be set up and maintained the day the child begins their education. Full-time or part time, the child needs a schoolroom.

Explanation Western Australia State Council (WA):

The AIC Distance Education (DE) Allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the school room. Currently, pre-compulsory distance education students are ineligible, therefore families enrolled in these programs must bear the costs.

Most early learning programs require significantly more learning materials than that of older students studying at primary levels, with families having to provide these learning resources for students. If families received this allowance, it would help alleviate the cost of the provision of the resources.

The majority of children who are enrolled in a pre-compulsory program are found to have better educational outcomes in later years by forming these important foundations early on. Every child needs and deserves a school room.

Explanation Queensland State Council (Qld):

Most 3-4-year-old children across the country are enrolled in some form of pre-school education, be it Kindergarten, Reception or Prep. For those families who are geographically isolated the costs associated with Distance Education begin in this year of pre-formal education, including resourcing and internet connectivity. Access to the AIC Distance Education allowance should be available to these families from the outset.

Explanation North East Branch (SA):

Currently, 3 and 4-year-old students studying Kindergarten via distance education are ineligible to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance. If families received this allowance, it would alleviate some of the costs of providing an educational experience for their children. The majority of children who are enrolled in a distance education Kindergarten/pre-school program are found to have better educational outcomes in later years, by forming these important foundations early in their educational journey.

Childcare

A32. Kimberley Air Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to review the In Home Care (IHC) Scheme to make better provision for geographically isolated families to access affordable childcare.”

Explanation:

The current In Home Care Scheme does not adequately meet the unique circumstances of geographically isolated families. The criteria in the guidelines for accessing the scheme need to include the specific circumstances that come with accessing childcare in remote locations.

The current membership fees of belonging to an IHC service are prohibitive and do not take into account that families also need to provide board and lodging for the educator who because of the remoteness of the family need to live on location.

A33. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

D/C by A32

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to impress upon the Ministers for the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the need to prioritise a review of the In Home Care program, to improve its ability to suitably deliver a child care program for rural and remote families.”

Explanation:

In Home Care is the only subsidised government child care program available to geographically isolated families who cannot access mainstream child care. As it stands, the design of the program is not a ‘good fit’ for families living and working in remote areas.

We believe a review, with input from key stakeholders including ICPA federal and states, will highlight the improvements necessary to ensure this vital program continues to support rural and remote families in their workforce participation and child care requirements.

Importantly, we are not asking for an increase in funding, rather a review of policies which currently restrict families’ ability to recruit and retain skilled educators in remote areas.

A34. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) request the Minister for Education to amend the In-Home Care rules for families in remote areas to allow:

1. An educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time.
2. An educator to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family(ies) under In Home Care.”

Explanation:

The reason for this is that there are often multiple families employed by and living in the same location in remote areas (for example pastoral stations, tourism and conservation operations). Due to the remote location all staff and the educator live at the same location. Allowing an educator to care for children from more than one family in these circumstances solves the

practical problem of limited accommodation - accommodating more than one educator is likely to be difficult.

It also provides the opportunity for a greater range of people to be employed in these areas (including single parents) who would otherwise be unable to take these jobs as they wouldn't have access to childcare. By potentially increasing the number of children living at a location, all children will benefit from the social interaction.

Allowing an educator to care for their own children would also increase the range of people available as In-Home Carers in remote areas. It is extremely difficult to find appropriately skilled people willing to live in remote areas. Allowing someone with their own child to be care for other children at the same remote location would be of great benefit.

Example 1: A single mother applies for a station hand position. She is highly qualified and prior to becoming a mother had extensive experience working on remote cattle stations. The owner of the station she has applied to also has a small child and already employs an educator through IHC. There is suitable accommodation for the mother and child but not enough for another educator. By allowing that educator to also care for the station hand's child, the station hand gets a job for which she is qualified for (it is also difficult to find good station hands so expanding the pool of people who could take these jobs is important) and both children have access to good quality childcare and a playmate.

Example 2: A guy applies for a station hand position on a remote cattle station. He and his partner have a toddler. There are no childcare facilities within 200km. The managers of the station also have a toddler. By allowing the partner to become the In-Home Carer (dependent on obtaining the relevant qualifications etc) the manager's child has access to high quality care, the manager(s) can concentrate on their jobs, the station hand is not separated from his partner and his partner has a fulfilling job.

The rules around Family Day Care provide a starting point for a structure to determine the appropriate number/age of children and how the CCS would work in this situation. Further consultation with families living in remote areas with young children would be required to refine these structures to ensure they are practical and suitable for their situation.

Early Childhood Education and Care – Other

A35. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government to implement a nationally recognised and administered Working with Children Card (WWCC).”

Explanation:

WA State Council fully support the implementation of a nationally administered police clearance, specifically for children and thank Federal Council for their continued lobbying on this issue.

Currently a person who wishes to obtain a WWCC for work purposes, has their application checked nationally, then the process is administered at a state level. When employees who already hold a WWCC in one state move interstate, they are expected to reapply for a WWCC in the new state they are applying for employment in. This process causes lengthy delays of up to eight weeks in employing staff, causing disruptions to families and students' education.

A36. Blackall Branch (Qld)

D/C by A35

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the relevant departments within the Federal Government and supports each State ICPA organisation with their lobbying, to implement a nationally recognised and administered Working with Children Check (WWCC), to enhance the safety for students and accessibility to interstate employees, for rural and remote families.”

Explanation:

The Working with Children Check or WWCC was proposed in 2000, with each state and territory’s scheme operating independently of each other. Its purpose is conducting background checks for people seeking to engage in child-related work. These checks aim to prevent people from working or volunteering with children if records indicate that they may pose an unacceptable level of risk to children. While the check is currently conducted on a state level, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2015 has called for the transition to a nationwide check.

There is a real impediment to rural and remote families endeavouring to engage employees, working with their children from interstate, as the checks do not always pick up crimes committed in other states. In addition, the hold up when a prospective employee, from interstate, does not have that relative WWCC and the new ruling that no one may commence work until their state relative paperwork is sighted, can mean a lengthy delay to the commencement of employment.

Some criticism of the WWCC system followed a report that a man being investigated by counter-terrorism authorities, who had previously been involved in a standoff with police at gunpoint in which he threatened them with a sword, continued to be authorised to work with children. Neshia Oneil Hutchinson, President of Australian Childcare Alliance NSW stated that the Working With Children Check system contained serious flaws where unless an individual was convicted of a crime against a child, they may still pass the check. This would allow individuals convicted of crimes against adults to be allowed to work with children. Furthermore, the state-based system would possibly allow someone committed of a crime against a child in another state to receive the check as well.

Given this and the recommendations by the Royal Commission we feel that the nationwide system should be expedited.

S5. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for assistance for Approved Providers to offer incentives to recruit and retain qualified Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote areas.”

Explanation:

50% of Educators working at any one time in Early Childhood Education and Care services are required to hold a Diploma qualification (or be actively working towards a Diploma qualification). Services are also required to engage at least one Early Childhood Teacher who holds a tertiary level Early Childhood Teaching bachelor’s degree.

The recruitment of qualified staff is a constant barrier in regional and remote areas to the delivery of professional and meaningful Early Childhood Education. The lack of availability of qualified people is a major contributing factor. Incentive programs are becoming not only popular but necessary to engage qualified Educators from larger towns and cities. For many not-for-profit services, resources are extremely limited and the ability to offer competitive incentives is non-existent.

If not meeting the qualified Educator ratio, services are not able to operate. Services are in breach of legislation and the Approved Provider is liable for a \$50000 fine. In which case, service delivery is affected due to service closures. Children are not able to attend, and they miss the opportunity to participate in vital preschool programs.

Increased financial assistance coupled with incentive programs for skilled employees for rural and remote services would allow Approved Providers to attract and retain qualified Early Childhood Educators and Teachers. Services will then have the capacity to support children to meet necessary Early Childhood outcomes. The risk for rural and remote services if this is not achieved is that children will be at a disadvantage to other children through compromised delivery of Early Childhood Education and Care.

S6. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for funding amounts for Mobile Preschools to be reflective of individual service delivery models in rural and remote areas.”

Explanation:

Current funding for Mobile Preschools is grossly inadequate. There are no reviews within the 3-year funding period so when a service increases delivery (extra days at existing venues or extra venues) within that funding period, the Approved Provider must fund the additional services with existing funding or cash reserves. This affects the long-term sustainability of services. For example: At the start of 2021 HCS increased 3 of their venues from fortnightly to weekly. HCS is also soon to add Ivanhoe (which is located 210km North of Hay) as a venue. HCS receives no extra funding to deliver these additional services and must find ways to fund them with existing funds. New Mobile funding model is expected to roll out in July 2021 and although there has been sector consultation, there has been no confirmation of funding models. This leaves services in doubt about service delivery capacity and unable to plan for delivery of services.

DET is pushing for 15hrs of preschool per week per child. For many Mobile Preschools this is not possible. For example: Currently children who attend HCS Mobile can access 6 hrs per week. HCS currently service 6 (soon to be 7) different communities per week and without additional secure funding, don't have the resources to increase those venues to a second day per week.

S7. Alpha Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby the relevant Federal Ministers and departments to immediately prioritise re-establishing early childhood educational programs in recognised highly vulnerable rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

There are 14 families including 22 children wanting to attend educational services – 1 day-care centre and playgroup 1 day per week that started in May

- 57% of children start school in the Cunnamulla district developmentally vulnerable
- The Early childhood education and Care department have been active in Cunnamulla since July last year and no significant action or change has occurred
- Results from the Australian Early Developmental Census have deteriorated since 2009 and Cunnamulla is one of 5 locations which are going backwards
- Paroo shire has been nominated as a QLD state early childhood priority
- The Paroo Contact Children's Mobile is currently unfunded, Contact Inc (who own the equipment & did operate the service) have made no contact with Cunnamulla, the equipment including fully equipped Toyota Landcruiser 4WD with canopy all sit in Cunnamulla unused as there is no funding for the coordinator/teacher.

- The Paroo Contact Children’s Mobile needs to get funding to immediately recruit staff to utilise the vehicle and trailer currently based in Cunnamulla, and extensive early childhood resources/equipment to offer regular scheduled supported playgroups to Eulo, Cunnamulla, Noorama, Quilpie and Thargomindah.

S8. Cunnamulla Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That the ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the relevant Federal Ministers and Departments to increase training opportunities and employment incentives in order to enable local childcare providers in rural and remote regions to attract and retain staff members to subsequently increase capacity for children to attend.”

Explanation:

Currently in the shire there are more than 100 children under the age of 8. The only childcare centre has a new service provider and waiting lists have decreased however they are unable to take more children due to a lack of staff. There is still an issue with recruiting staff and providing housing for them. The State schools are entitled to government housing, the catholic school is now building their own housing complex and also have long-standing leases with rental properties. Childcare services do not have the same access to housing and cannot provide the same support to staff.

RURAL SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TRAVEL

A37. Richmond Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for a Fares Allowance component to be added to the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) similar to what is available under Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY programs.”

Explanation:

We thank Federal Council for the work done so far forwarding this issue. Both Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY programs offer eligible students a Fares Allowance for travelling between home and their place of study if they need to live away from home in order to access this study. Likewise, geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Students Boarding Allowance and Second Home Allowance to access *compulsory schooling* also must live away from home. These students should have a Fares Allowance comparable to the other Commonwealth Programs available to them. While some states do offer travel assistance to students from rural and remote areas, others offer no assistance at all and there is great variance between states. Having a Fares Allowance available under the AIC Scheme would ensure that all eligible geographically isolated students would have assistance available to them to help offset the cost of travelling to *compulsory schooling*.

A38. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for a national initiative and introduction of a ‘Student Concessional Fare’ that is protected from peak or inflated ticket costs, for students attending educational institutions within Australia who need to travel between their home residence and the educational establishment they attend.”

Explanation:

Geographically Isolated students who use public transport (bus, train or plane) to travel to their educational facility, would like to access a set ticket price that remains the same, even if the child needs to change their travel arrangements at the last minute. ‘Student Concession Fare’ For

example: If a standard airfare can be purchased for \$365 between Alice Springs and Sydney, then we would like to see that this standard fare be offered to students who travel on public transport to access their school all year round, even if booking at the last minute.

There are many instances that families have had to change travel arrangements for their children and some families are not in the position to afford booking all fares for their children a term / year in advance.

Families whose Children rely on air travel to access schooling are worried about the recent announcement of the closure of Virgin Airlines and what impact that will have on domestic travel in and out of regional centres and Alice Springs is a great example. Many of these families rely on domestic air travel to take their children to school.

When multiple factors, out of families direct control, are impacting fare prices, rural and remote families feel the full force. We don't have the luxury of comparing airfares as there may only be one airline providing a service between regional hubs and major centres such as Brisbane.

While our urban cousins are able to catch the school bus to the local high school at no charge, students in rural and remote Australia have a huge out of pocket expense to access their school, often paying for Bus, Train and Air travel and for many GI students this is not subsidised.

There are actually examples of how such a policy mechanism can work through allowances such as ABSTUDY and it is really important for ICPA to work with our relevant ministers at a state and federal level to talk about how a 'Student Concession Fare' rate could be rolled out for all GI students in rural and remote Australia.

It is critical that there is a national approach in regards to fair student travel costs and we should be setting some guidelines and putting policy in place to ensure students accessing public transport to and from their educational institution, are able to secure a student rate that has not been increased due to:

- a monopoly on available carriers
- increase in fares due to peak holiday times
- increase in fares due to seasonal or tourism events.

Essentially this would ensure students are not subject to airfare price hikes at peak travel times, they would be able to access the standard economy rate at any time during the year when travelling to and from their school.

The real impact of ticket price hikes at peak travel times and the problems with increase in airfares will only worsen if the residents of Alice Springs are left with one operational domestic carrier. Members whose children board away from home are often in the predicament of paying well above the standard ticket price when selecting airfares. While it is easy for airfare providers to tell families to book children's flights twelve months ahead because they know the school term dates, this is often not a reality and can end up costing families more in the long run when they need to change flight details / dates.

Airfares to and from Northern Territory airports are typically expensive, more so because students travel during school holiday fare periods, when the fares are almost always more expensive again. Student Travel Concessions are a State Government responsibility, but in the case of airfares, travel is across jurisdictions, meaning State Government concessions don't apply. The Northern

Territory is not unique in this respect. A National Student Concessional Fare would help all geographically isolated students who travel across jurisdiction for education purposes.

So, we are asking that when booking tickets for students travelling to and from school, they are exempt from the huge increases to tickets when purchased close to the time of travel. Having access to the standard ticket prices if you booked in advance for the 12-month calendar, would be a huge financial relief for many rural and remote families who rely on these services each year.

A39. Lightning Ridge/Goodooga Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Transport and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, to supply adequate funding for local councils in rural and remote areas, to prioritise and maintain unsealed roads that are travelled on by families accessing schools and school bus routes.”

Explanation:

Children in the Lightning Ridge and Goodooga region are often required to travel long distances along unsealed roads to access schools and school bus routes. It is recognised by local families that there are risks associated with these trips and it is important that these trips are as safe as possible. While members are aware of the importance of driving to the conditions, they believe improving the maintenance programs conducted on these access roads will greatly decrease the risks associated with the frequent trips. Without giving priority to roads that families travel on to access schools and school buses, accessing face to face education becomes difficult and dangerous. While distance education is a valuable alternative, many families do not have the time to commit to providing the necessary school room supervision or be in a financial situation to employ a suitable supervisor. For these families, travelling on poorly maintained unsealed roads becomes an exhausting daily task for students and parents, impacting on school attendance and classroom performance.

S9. Bollon Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) work with regional air service providers like Qantas to provide affordable airfares to students who need to travel from their home to attend to their education.”

Explanation:

Geographically isolated students often need to travel to fulfil their educational requirements. For example, many students based in rural Australia attend boarding school and University many kilometres away from their home. Whilst there have been and still are some very generous programs offered to support our students there are some areas that still face cost challenges. The Maranoa region is one area where a once affordable scheme was in place but was recently replaced by a less supportive one. Good communication between ICPA (Aust) and Regional Air Service providers can highlight the unique challenges faced by our rural and remote students and help bring about support.

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS

A40. Charters Towers Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers, for online allied health services, such as Speech and Occupational Therapy, to be permanently included as Telehealth Medical Benefits Scheme items to help with the cost of such therapies for rural and remote children.”

Explanation:

Online therapy sessions allow rural and remote children regular access to a therapist. The cost of online therapy can be substantial. The financial status of families may limit the effectiveness of these sessions if the family cannot afford for their children to attend online therapy session on a regular basis.

A41. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to Private Healthcare Australia to ensure the rebates provided by private health insurers extend to allied health services delivered via telehealth to assist with the educational development of geographically isolated children.”

Explanation:

During the COVID-19 crisis, the federal government expedited the inclusion of certain allied health services covered by the Medicare rebate, and since, there has been an expansion of telehealth generally. However, some private health insurers do not cover telehealth appointments, or if they do, they cover at a reduced rate compared to the in-person appointment. Private Healthcare Australia is Australia’s private health insurance industry’s peak representative body. The private health rebates should extend to allied health services delivered via telehealth.

In this motion, we are asking private health insurers to recognise the importance of telehealth appointments for geographically isolated children and to remove the financial penalties of using a telehealth appointment instead of an in-person appointment.

A42. New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) urges the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Minister for Education and Youth to financially support more organisations willing to take their Early Intervention Services into regional and remote Australia.”

Explanation:

Many Pre-school aged children in regional and remote Australia do not have access to vital early intervention programs or assessments due to lack of services or distances they have to travel.

There are early intervention services already available - such as Royal Far West’s Healthy Kids Bus Stop - that are willing to travel to regional and remote Australia and complete these assessments on children aged 3-5 years old, but do not have the consistent funding to guarantee these services year to year or to service more areas.

We should be ensuring that any early intervention needs have started before these children attend Primary School, to make sure they have the best start to their education.

If there is a need for early intervention, we need to support these families, and ensure that they are able to access these services and they are affordable. Yes, we have Medicare, but as many of us are aware the issue is not always fixed in limited number of sessions!

Below are some statistics from the Royal Far West website¹:

¹ Royal Far West, POSITION PAPER – JULY 2017 SUPPORTING CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA, Key Facts and Figures, page 1 from <https://www.royalfarwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RFW-Policy-Paper-Supporting-childhood-development-in-regional-and-rural-Australia-July-2017.pdf> on 28th May 2021

- Children in rural, regional and remote areas are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable than children in metropolitan areas – 27% of all children in outer regional, remote and very remote areas compared to 21% in towns and cities.
- Children living in Very Remote areas are twice as likely as those living in Major Cities to be developmentally vulnerable.
- More than 1 in 6 (16.2%) children and adolescents aged 4-17 in rural areas have mental health problems. The highest prevalence is in Outer Regional areas (19% of children and adolescents).
- 32% of children in regional, rural or remote NSW are unable to access the health services they need.

A43. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) urges the Federal Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers and agencies to ensure that federally funded health clinics across Australia are accessible to all Australians, so all geographically isolated children can receive diagnosis and ongoing treatment of medical issues that impede their ability to learn and thrive.”

Explanation

Northern Territory ICPA members frequently report being turned away from their local public, albeit remote, health clinics because they *‘do not meet the criteria’* (to access the public health clinic).

Remote families have no other ‘local’ health clinic alternative, but if they “don’t meet the criteria” and are refused treatment, they necessarily must travel vast distances to access treatment for what could have otherwise been dealt with closer to where they live, at their closest remote health clinic, serviced by rostered doctors, specialists and allied health providers.

It is not acceptable that publicly funded health facilities discriminate on race, demographic or on any other basis, let alone in a situation where there are no other local alternatives for rural & remote families to ‘conveniently’ access.

Case Study:

Mum of four-year-old enrolled through SOA with a stutter and some speech problems, went to local remote clinic wanting to book an appointment with speech therapist that travels to the local clinic on occasion, during the year. Mum was told, ***“I’m sorry, you do not fit the criteria, you will have to make an appointment in Darwin”***. Mum gets hold of the same speech therapist that travels to local clinic, still told “no, I can’t see you in XXXX (971km from Darwin), but I can see you in Darwin anytime”. Speech therapist tells Mum that the first she must do is get a hearing test for her child, “most local clinics are able to do a simple hearing test”. Back to XXXX clinic and told yet again, sorry, ***you don’t fit the criteria***. Mum has had to travel 971km to Darwin for hearing tests and initial consult with therapist, the rest of the appointments were done over Zoom. Mum reports “Zoom is ok, but certainly made it harder with the delay, to be able to fully show the mouth positioning and sounds. It would be helpful to see the therapist at our local clinic once in a while, to make sure we are doing the right thing.”

A44. New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) urges the Federal Government, including the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Minister for Education and Youth, to urgently implement age appropriate and high-quality mental health programs within both schools and external services for youth in regional and remote Australia.”

Explanation

The mental health of our youth has been suffering in regional and remote Australia. Recently, in the Riverina of NSW, three youths have taken their own lives in a matter of months. This is not endemic to just the youth of the Riverina district; the tragedy of young lives being lost through suicide is real and happening throughout rural and remote NSW and furthermore rural and remote Australia.

For the youth of today, the world has changed and become increasingly technology based, with the easy access of smart phones, text messaging and multiple social media platforms. This has meant that the outside world is ever present in our homes, and often the youth are unable to escape these negative influences.

We need to ensure that early signs are picked up, not only within the home, but also the school systems. Once recognized, the appropriate help at school and after hours is accessible.

According to Headspace “74% of young people surveyed reported that their mental health was worse since the outbreak of COVID-19”² and “Children and young people in drought ravaged New South Wales have told UNICEF Australia that the natural disaster has meant they have had to prematurely “grow up”, facing difficulty in balancing increased farm work with their education, as well as experiencing escalating levels of stress and other adverse psychological outcomes.”³ With these two factors in mind we should be ensuring that mental health services are easily accessible and available within all areas of regional and remote Australia.

Our children in rural and remote Australia not only dealt with COVID-19, but also the impact that natural disasters such as fires, floods, drought and even mice plagues have had within the family. This is a big responsibility to place on children and if there was more funding spent on helping these children/youth deal with these situations, we will create stronger and resilient children for the future.

TERTIARY

A45. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates for the removal of the parental threshold from the Independent Youth Allowance for students applying under rural and remote work criteria.”

Explanation:

Rural and remote students can be eligible for independent youth allowance before they turn 22 if (i) their parental home is in an inner regional, outer regional, remote, or very remote area (ii) they need to move away from your parental home to study and (iii) they have worked since leaving secondary school. Students also need to have either: earned 75% or more of the National Training Wage Schedule rate in any 14-month period or worked at least 15 hours a week for at least 2 years.

² Coping with COVID: the mental health impact on young people accessing headspace services, August 2020 pg 2, from <https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/COVID-Client-Impact-Report-FINAL-11-8-20.pdf> on 28th May 2021

³ Media Release: UNICEF Australia, Children in drought affected areas have a “You just get on with it” attitude, when the reality is their need for psychological support increases by the day, 19 February 2019 from <https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Documents/Drought-Report-2019-Media-Release.pdf> on 28th May 2021

Katherine Branch thanks ICPA (Aust) for its advocacy and the Minister for Families and Social Services for raising the parental threshold from \$150,000 to \$160,000 from 1 January 2019 and taking into account other dependent siblings. However, these rural and remote students who qualify for Independent Youth Allowance under the above conditions must surely be considered Independent full stop. Parental income should not enter into consideration at all. Rural incomes are so fickle, even being given three financial years of parental income to choose from cannot always give these students a fair assessment of the ability of this family to support a tertiary or training student. These students clearly demonstrate independence through working for a least a year and leaving home to study. They take a gap year because they need to be financially independent but that can also place them at risk of being one of the statistics: students who take gap years are less likely to continue to further education. Any hurdles to these rural and remote students qualifying for Independent youth allowance, such as Parental income thresholds, threatens their tertiary education.

A46. Walgett Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) request the Federal Government to change the criteria for the Relocation Scholarship to include all students from remote or rural areas relocating who do not qualify for Dependent Youth Allowance.”

Explanation:

Relocating is a costly exercise when moving long distances. Students who do not qualify for Dependent Youth Allowance who have worked since leaving school for the year but have to start university in the February are missing out.

We have found due to COVID that online learning is isolating and lonely and campuses need to be filled. Towns have suffered greatly, and the influx of rural and remote students is important to our universities. These young adults need financial help as their savings they have collected through the year dwindle rapidly with the cost of moving away. It gives them the opportunity to move and settle and commence studies before looking for employment.

S10. Tasmania Branch (TAS)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government review the criteria of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to ensure all rural and remote tertiary students are able to fulfil the course of their choice”

Explanation:

The Tertiary Access Payment commenced 1 January 2021 and is available to eligible students:

- who have to move away from home to study at a tertiary education provider providing it is more than 90 mins away from your home by public transport
- who start their study straight after year 12 or equivalent
- who are studying at least 75% full time study load of a higher education course or Vocational Education and Training course, certificate IV or above
- who are from an outer regional, remote or very remote area, and
- whose parents or guardian’s income is under the current combined parental income limit of \$250,000.

Our branch is extremely appreciative and thank the Federal Government for the commencement of the TAP. We believe there is a need for some additions to the existing criteria which are consistent with ICPA (Aust)’s longstanding lobby for a Tertiary Access Allowance. This includes the need for the TAP to be equivalent to the Relocation Scholarship in order to truly reflect the costs

of living away from home to access a tertiary education. There needs to be assurance that the Tertiary Access Payment becomes a permanent payment available to all rural and remote students who fulfil the criteria, and the numbers are not capped. This will ensure students whose course commences in the second or later semester, do not miss out.

S11. Tasmania Branch (TAS)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) request the Federal Government permanently implement the measure that was put in place during the COVID-19 lockdown for rural and remote tertiary students and Australian apprentices applying for Youth Allowance: initial confirmation of identity can be attended through a student’s myGov account.”

Explanation:

Many rural and remote students have difficulty in proving their identity because of the requirement that they must present their identity documents at a service centre and that is problematic for many due the vast distance many of them live from a service centre and attending during opening hours. These students cannot start or proceed with their application for Youth Allowance until these documents have been sighted.

During COVID -19 Youth Allowance applicants were able to confirm their identity online through their myGov account allowing them to start their claim online and avoid delays in their application process. For rural and remote students this provision should continue and could have the requirement that original documents be presented at service centre for confirmation, or the uploaded documents be certified before their payments commence. For many rural and remote students their identity has already been proven through previous Centrelink payments such as AIC and this should be able to be recognised when applying for Youth Allowance.

S12. Tasmania Branch (TAS)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) implores the Federal Government to implement the recommendations from the *Education in remote and complex environments Report* relating to tertiary students.”

Explanation:

The Federal Government commissions reviews in response to issues and inequities and must be held accountable to respond to the recommendations. The *Education in remote and complex environments Report* recommended that the Government announce an implementation plan for the recommendations and actions from the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey Review) and *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (Naphthine Review).

The implementation of all the recommendations would see measures introduced and being available for rural and remote students including:

- improved availability of accommodation
- improved information on accommodation and income support
- improved access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services
- improved VET programs in rural and remote areas and
- greater flexibility in qualifying pathways for Youth Allowance

To achieve equity for rural and remote tertiary students, these above measures, in addition to the measures that have already been implemented previously must be implemented. The previous measures have benefited members to date and have been greatly appreciated by rural and remote tertiary students. Possibly the most significant is the introduction of the Tertiary

Access Payment. Others have included the expansion of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships and the Regional Study Hubs, and improvements to the Fares Allowance.

S13. Tasmania Branch (TAS)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) thanks the Federal Government for the measures put in place for rural and remote gap year students impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown.”

Explanation:

The measures that supported working gap year student affected by the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown on their ability to fulfil their working criteria when trying to prove their independence for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY have been greatly appreciated and continue to be throughout 2021 with the measure which allows a working gap year student to earn \$15000 through agricultural work between 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021 to fulfil their working criteria.

TRAINING

A47. Richmond Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government to provide an immediate increase to the commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) and indexation to the CPI to better assist Australian Apprentices with the cost of living.”

Explanation

We thank ICPA Federal Council for their advocacy in this area over many years. The eligibility criteria for the LAFHA is based on the recognition that an Australian Apprentice has moved away from home to access their apprenticeship.

The LAFHA has not increased since 2015 and remains at:

- \$77.17 per week for the first 12 months
- \$36.95 per week for the second 12 months
- \$25.00 for the third 12 months

An example of the weekly rate of pay for a junior first year apprentice under the Vehicle, Manufacturing, Repair, Services and Retail Aware 2010 is \$482.68 before tax and deductions.

Without adequate assistance to offset the cost of living, rural and remote apprentices face extreme financial pressure to make ends meet with the significant costs associated with living away from the family home. Expenses include rental bond, rent, utilities, food, and fuel.

It should also be noted that because the LAFHA is only available to apprentices who are not eligible for Youth Allowance and therefore apprentices receiving the LAFHA are not entitled to any adjunct payments which come with Youth Allowance e.g., the Coronavirus Supplement which supported many young people during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic, this period for Australian Apprentices without any additional support was particularly dire.

The Federal Government has put a tremendous amount of money into providing incentives for employers to create more apprenticeship positions as a response of the skills shortage largely brought about by the COVID 19 pandemic. There is also significant skills reform being undertaken in the VET space. However, if reasonable attention is not placed on providing meaningful financial assistance to support young rural and remote apprentices who must move away from home to

access these positions, representation from this cohort will diminish and improvements to the number of skilled and qualified workers in regional, rural and remote areas will be unachievable.

A48. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby the Federal Government to improve the process by which eligible Australian Apprentices can apply and receive the Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA).”

Explanation:

Currently, if you are eligible to apply for the LAFHA you contact your local Apprenticeship Network provider.

Members are finding it difficult to source information to keep them informed and the processes required, as arrangements are made between TAFE and the employer; no allowance is payable until the TAFE component of their course is commenced.

Some TAFE courses keep getting pushed back and six months after commencing their apprenticeships students still have not undertaken any TAFE components and consequently have received no financial assistance.

A49. Richmond Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government the need to provide relocation assistance to apprentices and trainees who must relocate from their homes to access apprenticeships and traineeships.”

Explanation

We thank ICPA Federal Council for their continued advocacy on this issue.

Apprentices and trainees who are ineligible for Youth Allowance as a dependent may receive the commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) if they have had to move away from home to access their apprenticeship or traineeship. However, this allowance, although appreciated, is not adequate to provide meaningful support to offset the significant costs of relocation and living expenses including rent, rental bond, food, fuel, and utilities.

Currently there is little assistance available for apprentices or trainees to relocate to access their chosen pathway. Apprentices and trainees who are eligible for Youth Allowance as a dependent are not eligible for the Relocation Scholarship, which is an adjunct payment to Youth Allowance available for higher education study. There is also no provision for apprentices and trainees to receive the new Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) which provides assistance for relocation costs to access higher education.

It is imperative that some sort of relocation assistance is provided to these young people to ensure they have the opportunity to pursue their chosen pathways regardless of geographical location.

MISCELLANEOUS

A50. Mount Isa Branch of the Air (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates with Government and other relevant parties for the establishment of a ‘Rural Hardship Education Fund’ to assist geographically isolated families to meet necessary education costs in times of difficulty.”

Explanation:

While some areas have received welcome rain and better seasons, there are still areas which continue to be impacted by the unrelenting drought with some families now in their 9th continuous year of dealing with drought conditions and lessened income.

Drought and other unforeseen disasters such as fires, floods and industry events which are out of producers control (i.e., The Live Export Ban, Dairy Crises etc.) all impact suddenly on rural families' income and their ability to pay the out-of-pocket costs necessary for their children to access education. This lack of income does not only affect families living on rural properties but also carries over into small town businesses and the other industries such as freight, mustering/shearing contractors, etc which also rely on primary production.

Families in geographically isolated areas still need to find the means to pay for the gap in the costs of their children's education fees even though they have little to no income during these periods of hardship and the recovery periods afterwards. In past droughts, Exceptional Circumstances could be applied for and a top up was added to the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance, but at present no such scheme exists. During these past few years of drought some families have had to decide whether or not their children can remain in schooling or to choose between their children, deciding who can go away to school and which ones won't receive a further education. Geographically isolated families affected by bushfires, tropical cyclone events and other hardships face similar difficulties. Small rural schools have also faced difficulty in not being able to raise funds for school excursions and other activities for their students.

Families affected by the 2019 monsoon event in North West Queensland greatly appreciated the immediate support offered by the Federal Government with a \$1000 supplement to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) to ensure they had immediate assistance for their children's schooling. Similar measures occurring quickly in other times of rural hardship would go a long way to help rural families both financially and also mentally by reducing worry over how to meet their children's schooling costs at a time when they are already struggling.

It is essential that a Rural Hardship Education Fund be established and put permanently in place to assist rural families that need financial help to ensure that their children can remain in schooling during tough times. The announcement of the creation of the National Recovery and Resilience Agency in May 2021 might be an avenue in which the Rural Hardship Education Fund can be pursued to ensure that access to education for geographically isolated students can continue unchanged when their family faces hardship.

A51. Blackall Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) review the online membership payment process to enable branches to access up-to-date membership details, online, at anytime."

A52. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) Federal Council accepts our collective gratitude for the work you put into not only advocating for members, but also for the depth and quality of information you develop, make available and share with stakeholders, state councils and members, in the course of your advocacy on a national level."

Explanation:

ICPA Australia has always done an incredible job advocating for members, but in this motion, we'd like to acknowledge Federal Councils consistently high standards for the benefit of our members. From your submissions to national inquiries, to the new website, the federal BB, your portfolio

briefings and motion updates, your collective efforts are always the highest quality and for this we thank you for representing ICPA nationally in a most professional and esteemed way.

S14. Capricornia BOTA (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA Australia continue to advocate for the establishment of the Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) and for the RHEF to also include hardships experienced by geographically isolated families in the event of a personal crisis.”

Explanation:

We fully support the concerns of ICPA (Aust) that the education of children is being compromised in times of hardships experienced by families living in rural and remote areas of Australia. In addition to the hardships of the RHEF assistance that have been identified by ICPA (Aust) we are calling for personal hardships to be included under the RHEF where a crisis impacts the ability to deliver or access education.

When Geographically Isolated families experience an unforeseen circumstance such as an accident, injury or illness including prolonged terminal illness of a family member it often requires them to seek medical treatment or travel to regional or metropolitan areas. Depending on the circumstance, seeking immediate medical treatment and possible rehabilitation/follow-up treatment typically requires travelling long distances from their place of residence for extended periods of time. If the primary caregiver is required to travel away, the dependent school age children’s education is often compromised.

Living in rural and remote areas of Australia adds a level of complexity in times of personal crisis.

- When Distance Education is the only education option for families living remotely and a personal crisis directly affects the Parent/Home Tutor, the dependent school aged children stand to be disadvantaged due to the Home Tutor being unable to fulfil their normal duties within the schoolroom resulting in falling behind in all areas of curriculum. In a mainstream setting relief teachers could be sourced to cover classes and the education of children would remain unchanged.
- In times of an emergency, families living in rural & remote areas often don’t have the support network of close neighbours and family due to the sheer geographical distance of where they live to care and support their school age children, so their education continues unchanged.
- In times of emergency where family members are able to help, it is logistically challenging and expensive to access travel to and from some of the remote areas of Australia.
- Those living in rural and remote areas are limited to the degree of access to face-to-face support services via community health services following a personal crisis e.g., Counselling and Mental Health services.
- Sourcing suitable paid help (Governess or Nanny) in Geographically Isolated areas to assist with the day-to-day school demands of either children attending a small school or distance education setting in an emergency situation is often unaffordable.
- Prior to the implications of the COVID -19 pandemic there was already a shortage of suitably experienced people to fill Governess & Nanny positions in rural and remote areas of Australia. This issue has now been exacerbated due to the ongoing travel restrictions

of COVID-19 it is placing increasing pressure on families who require help and that are financially able to do so.

- In the case of a personal crisis affecting an employee, there is pressure placed on the income earner to keep working to financially support the family so as not to lose their job.

It is intended that this non-exhaustive example illustrate the degree of challenges experienced and that more support via the establishment of the RHEF is required for families living in rural and remote areas of Australia in times of hardship to ensure that education disturbance is equitable to that of our urban counterparts.

CASE STUDY:

A family of five had taken up a new employment opportunity as managers of a rural property. They had three school aged children aged 11, 9, 6 years. The oldest child had just started the first year of boarding school and was still adjusting and was very unsettled, the other two children were enrolled with an SDE in year four and year one with the mother being the home tutor.

Less than a month into their employment the two youngest children were involved in a farm accident - the nine-year-old sustained a fractured pelvis and the six-year-old sustained a life-threatening injury to the trachea. Both children were airlifted to the closest regional hospital where they were hospitalised with the youngest child in ICU and both parents being required to be in attendance due to the children being in different wards. Due to complications and specialist surgery the youngest child was transferred to the major capital city after five days in ICU was required to be hospitalised for a further 5 weeks.

The nine-year-old was discharged after five days and taken home and required a large degree of care by her father but due to the seriousness of injuries of the six-year-old he flew to the capital city. Their extended family were unable to help due to separate serious medical issue affecting another family member and had to rely on the generosity of a friend in the district to stay with the child with the fractured pelvis and older sibling who had come home from boarding school.

The education of the children was directly affected due to the mother/home tutor responsibilities being compromised. While the mother/home tutor was required to be away with the six-year-old in hospital her sister in year four was required to take responsibility for her own lessons as her father was forced to work to maintain the family income which took him away from the house as they had no leave entitlements owing to them having just started their new job. The Year Four student often had to call her mother for help with technology issues but there was little she could do to support her child.

After five weeks of hospitalisation the mother and 6-year-old were able to return home but given the traumatic event it was difficult to adjust and regain the routine in the schoolroom with regular medical appointments adding an additional two weeks of lost school time.

Due to the accident and the loss of their home tutor the two girls basically lost a term of fully engaged learning that had a significant impact on educational outcomes to the degree where it was suggested that the six-year-old repeat the year.

When asked what could have helped the situation in relation to the educational impact, the family felt that they would have benefited from having a qualified person step in and take over the teaching to allow the mother/home tutor time to develop a strategy moving forward with the education of her children. It is often not financially viable for rural and remote families to be able

to afford any sort of hired help as they are on basic wages. It was a heavy load to bear as there wasn't any support offered to this family and it placed a strain on the family for a considerable time after the event.

Additional Information

Ref: Farm accident statistics

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/infographic-agriculture-fatality-and-injury-data>

Ref: Mental Health in Rural Australia

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Former_Committees/mentalhealth/report/c16

AGM

A53. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That the Federal membership fee remains at \$22.00 per member family for the 2022 membership year."

A54. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That Corporate Membership be set at \$275.00 per organisation for the 2022 membership year."

A55. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That school corporate membership be set at \$275.00 per school or educational institution for the 2022 membership year."

A56. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That Queensland Audit Services, be appointed as auditor for the 2021 – 2022 financial year."

A57. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That the 2020 - 2021 Audited Report be received and accepted."

A58. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That the amendments to the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc) By-Laws updated 10 May 2021, as circulated, be ratified."

A59. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That the updated Policies of ICPA (Aust), as adopted by Federal Council, April 2021, be ratified."

A60. ICPA Federal Council **CARRIED**
"That the amendments to Section 3.8.2 of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc) Constitution updated July 2021, as circulated, be adopted."

Explanation

This amendment ensures the definition of a State Council in 3.8.2 directly reflects Member Bodies Rule 11.3 and 11.5.

3.8.2 A State Council is a properly constituted body elected from financial members within that State or Territory, ~~provided that it has at least three branches to -~~

- i) have general control and management of the administration, affairs, property and funds of the State association; and
- ii) have general control of branches within that State or Territory.

A61. ICPA Federal Council**CARRIED**

“That the amendments to Section 5.6.4 of the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia (Inc) Constitution updated July 2021, as circulated, be adopted.”

Explanation

This amendment takes away the need for Policy Objectives to be voted on at an Annual General Meeting or Annual Conference.

By voting on motions at Conference, delegates are setting the direction they require Federal Council to take in its advocacy for the coming year. It is therefore prudent for Federal Council to review these annually and update the Policy Objectives where required following Conference to reflect the motion outcomes rather than waiting until the next Conference to have the Policy Objectives voted on. By updating the Policy Objectives after Conference each year, the Objectives can be an immediate and direct reflection of the motion outcomes following Conference.

Any changes to the actual Policies will still be required to be voted on by delegates at Federal Conference, however the Policy Objective review and updates should sit within the general function of Federal Council to reflect the outcomes of Federal Conference motions.

A62. ICPA Federal Council**CARRIED**

“That the amendments to Section 27.1.1 (ii) of the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia (Inc) Constitution updated July 2021, as circulated, be adopted.”

Explanation:

These amendments ensure that only members listed on the Register of Members of the Association are entitled to vote as delegates at an Annual General Meeting or Annual Conference. This is consistent with what constitutes ordinary membership in Section 6.2 of the Constitution and ensures that all voting delegates are current financial members of the Association.

A63. ICPA Federal Council**CARRIED**

“That all other amendments to the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia (Inc) Constitution updated July 2021, as circulated, be adopted.”

Explanation:

Amendments to the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia (Inc) Constitution include several small edits, which include formatting and grammar (3.17, 7.3, 13.4.1 and 17.7) and the addition of a rule number (3.8).

A64. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (WA) host the 2022 Federal Conference in Perth on 3rd and 4th August.”

A65. Northern Territory State Council (NT)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (NT) hosts the 2023 Federal Conference in the Northern Territory.”