ICPA (Aust)

Isolated Children's Parents' Association Inc

2021 Federal Conference Motion Update

March 2022

-Access to Education for rural and remote students -

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Introduction

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust) annual Conference was held on the 3 and 4 of November 2021 in Longreach, Queensland. The event was postponed from its original dates in July due to COVID-19 pandemic impacts. At the conference, 63 motions were presented across eight portfolios, along with four miscellaneous motions. All motions have been actioned since the conference.

This Motion Update reports on the progress of these actions across all Portfolios since conference. Due to the delayed conference, some responses are yet to be received, however we will keep members informed as further developments come to hand.

Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio

Motion letters were sent to relevant Ministers, Departments and organisations in early December following Federal Conference. While not all official replies have been received at the time of writing, we have been informed they are on their way and some interesting developments and meetings have arisen from them.

Boarding and COVID-19

It came as no surprise that motions (4 in total) regarding **cross border travel** and the **National Code for Boarding School Students** were tabled at Federal Conference. This has been a 'watch this space' area as COVID-19 guidelines across States and Territories are constantly changing, creating a myriad of issues for our children and families.

On the 8 November 2021, ICPA (Aust), along with other key stakeholders, were invited by the office of Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie to attend a follow-up virtual roundtable regarding the Implementation of the National Code for Boarding School Students. Following on from this, a joint council media release titled **'Border Chaos Continues – Enough is Enough'** called upon State/Territory Governments to adopt the National Code for Boarding School Students endorsed by National Cabinet in September 2021 to ensure the 2022 year was met with informed and clear determinations around cross border travel for students travelling between their home and place of school in step with the National Code. We can report that States and Territories were reluctant to adopt the National Code however thankfully most borders were opened in time for the new school year which prevented the repeat border/boarder issues faced by families that marred 2021.

We thank Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, Senator Perin Davey and Senator Susan McDonald, along with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and other stakeholders for their unwavering support and willingness to pursue this issue with the States and Territories through avenues such as National Cabinet meetings. We would also like to acknowledge the tireless work behind the scenes by both ABSA and Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie's office that went into supporting individual members, helping families overcome the perplexing layers of red tape and mind-boggling inconsistencies across jurisdictions to ensure their children could travel across borders between their school and their place of home in time for Christmas, when all other avenues had been exhausted.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)

Three AIC motions were presented at Federal Conference. While ICPA (Aust) has not received official correspondence from the Minister for Families and Social Services, we were invited to attend a virtual meeting with Minister Ruston's office to discuss the issues raised in the motion letters. Being able to provide this extra information added a human element, gave the issues context in a rural and remote setting and fostered a broader understanding of why our members request increases and changes to AIC. It was a positive meeting and Federal Council was thankful to be given the opportunity to speak on behalf of our members and build a

rapport with the Minister's office.

Senator Matt Canavan, who is now the chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment undertook to take our request for an increase to the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance to the Senate Standing Committee meeting in late February. We have not heard of the outcome at the date of writing.

Federal Council has been in regular contact with Services Australia and the Department of Social Services since Federal Conference. Following a major reshuffle throughout both departments over the past few years, we had been left floundering, losing what were once strong staff connections and dealing with revolving staff, unfamiliar with ICPA. It is pleasing to report that we now have a strong and fluid relationship with both Departments again.

At the end of November 2021, the Department of Social Services supplied us with data showing the breakdown between geographically isolated (GI) students and other recipients of AIC by State/Territory. This was a major breakthrough as we have been asking for this data as far back as 2016 when the Department stopped providing this information. This data is valuable to assist us in our advocacy to the Federal Government and relevant Departments.

In December 2021 Services Australia provided the 2022 payment rates and payment dates for AIC, which were distributed to members via our Branch Bulletin and uploaded onto our website. It was a major milestone to not receive messages from members regarding erroneous 'AIC Cancellation' letters over the Christmas period. We passed on our thanks for putting this issue to bed after four or more years.

In January 2022 ICPA (Aust) was contacted by Services Australia investigating families' concerns surrounding the current COVID-19 situation and the return to boarding. We were pleased to report recently that arising from this feedback we were given assurance that AIC will continue to be paid to families throughout term 1 and term 2 of 2022, regardless of whether a child is at boarding school or learning remotely due to COVID-19. The continuation of AIC basic and additional boarding payments will continue to be reassessed each term according to the COVID-19 situation.

We were subsequently invited to attend quarterly meetings with the DSS and Services Australia to discuss the AIC, Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY and Tertiary Access Payment. Our first for the year was held in early February. The need for an online AIC renewal form was discussed and feedback indicated that while its rollout was likely delayed due to COVID-19, this is being treated as a priority and the Departmental team were confident they are gaining traction.

Joint Councils

With the return to the school year and the opening of borders, a new compliment of issues around boarding and COVID-19 have kept State Councils on their toes. We have held two Joint Council meetings in February, with ABSA in attendance, to discuss what is happening in each State and Territory, to share members concerns and compare what is and is not working. It is resoundingly clear that grave concerns are held for our boarding children, particularly their mental wellbeing and access to education, while navigating a hotchpotch of rules and guidelines which vary between Boarding Schools and States and Territories. Our second meeting was attended by Rachel Dryden from Senator McKenzie's office who has been compiling case studies to help in whatever way they can to urge States/Territories to consider the children in their COVID-19 boarding directives and guidelines.

Much work has been done by State Councils and we congratulate and thank them for their steadfast dedication to ensuring our children have a voice.

A joint council and ABSA Media Release '**ICPA calls for a balanced approach to risk management within Boarding'** was filtered to media contacts in early March, along with a joint letter to ABSA for dissemination to

boarding schools requesting children are at the forefront of a multi-faceted approach to the implementation of COVID-19 guidelines. This media release can be found here.

Direct Measure of Income (DMI) School Funding Model

While much of our focus has been on the issues around COVID-19 in boarding, we have begun working with ABSA to monitor the affect the application of this school funding model on boarding schools could potentially have on rural and remote boarding students. ABSA has access to boarding schools across Australia and have been working with Stephen Higgs from the Coalition of Regional Independent Schools who have been collating statistical data across many regional schools and boarding schools. We are in the process of scheduling a meeting between all parties to discuss their findings. Federal Council has previously raised concerns with this school funding model, citing the need for safeguards to ensure educational equity, school viability or educational choice is not diminished for rural and remote students with the implementation of the methodology.

Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT)

A motion regarding the removal of FBT for businesses who assist employees with boarding fees has been actioned via a letter to the Minister for Finance. A reply has been received to say that they will forward the matter onto the Federal Treasurer for consideration.

Communications Portfolio

It was evident that adequate, accessible and affordable communications remain at the forefront of members concerns at the 2021 Federal Conference, across the categories of Internet Access, Mobile Coverage/Service and Telephone. Members requested that ICPA (Aust) continue to work closely with Government and telecommunications providers to ensure communications services for the purposes of education in geographically isolated areas are maintained, expanded and do not diminish.

ICPA (Aust) maintains close connections with key communications stakeholders and this ensures we have opportunity to continually raise both ongoing and more time-sensitive topics and issues. ICPA (Aust) also continues to participate in the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel and Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Consumer Consultative Forum, where the opportunity to raise the issues of our members is paramount. ICPA (Aust) participates in regular meetings with NBN Co and Telstra and most recently we welcomed an opportunity for both Federal and State Council representatives to participate in a roundtable with Telstra to discuss topics across the country.

Internet Access

Members continue to raise the necessity for adequate internet access for geographically isolated families and motions reflected the varied needs of members. Federal Council wrote to the Minister for Decentralisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie requesting assurance that internet services for the purpose of education are maintained and expanded. Particular focus was on the provision of satellite services and the need for reassurance that the installation of the Sky Muster service and its hardware would continue at no cost to rural and remote student households to ensure affordable access to education for rural and remote students. We also continue to raise the need for the current services to not only be maintained, but for further enhancements, such as expansion of unmetered content relevant to education, to ensure Sky Muster is providing geographically isolated families with a positive and adequate service as reliance on online resources expands across all levels of education.

ICPA (Aust) advocates that all geographically isolated students need access to adequate communication services to meet their education needs and any alternatives available for this to occur must be proactively made available be this via an education port, Sky Muster Plus or alternative internet services. In a response from the Minister in December 2021, it was acknowledged that internet access *"via the National Broadband Network (NBN) Sky Muster satellite service is critical to the education of many geographically isolated students",* and additionally that *"the government remains committed to ensuring that students, regardless of where they live, have access to high quality education and experience the same education opportunities as other students".* ICPA (Aust) is encouraged by the recommendation in the recent Regional Telecommunications Independent Review for the Government Fund Innovation trials to validate the value and reliability of new technology solutions able to address broadband and mobile coverage across regional, rural and remote Australia and that more and improved internet solutions may emerge in the future.

For current users, we can confirm that families already using an educational port on the Sky Muster network are able to migrate this to a Sky Muster Plus service, providing an extensive unmetered data capacity. ICPA (Aust) encourage all members who have a standard Sky Muster plan, whether on an educational port or otherwise, to investigate their options for a Plus plan with a Sky Muster Plus Retail Service Provider (RSP) as education sites as well as some web meeting tools such as Zoom are largely unmetered on Sky Muster Plus. If members are unsure if a particular education related site is unmetered, they are welcome to contact Federal Council and we can investigate this for you.

NBN Co. have recently released several tools to help families navigate the ever-growing online world.

- The Online Skills Check & Resources (OSCAR) has been created to help measure online skills and find resources to help families with their digital journey. OSCAR takes you through four essential competencies: online knowledge, device usage, sharing data and e-safety and online communication. Through the answers provided in the online skill check, users online skills are measured and information to relevant resources which may assist are provided. ICPA (Aust) sent out a link to OSCAR with our unique ICPA QR code in the March edition of the ICPA Branch Bulletin for members to access this tool.
- The nbn™ Sky Muster™ Satellite Services Guide is an interactive trouble shooting guide which can be downloaded to a device or computer so that it can be accessed if customers are offline. This troubleshooting guide helps users work through their service, troubleshoot and optimise performance. The Guide can be found and downloaded here.

Federal Council continues to add useful resources such as this to our ICPA (Aust) website so that members can find them easily.

Transient Families

The need for an affordable internet product for transient families working in remote locations of Australia has been a high priority for Federal Council as the need for an internet connection to access schooling continues to increase. ICPA (Aust) welcomed the recent nbn Mobility Trial and NBN Co's commitment to testing portable flyaway connection kits with families who had their children with them while working in remote areas of Queensland and the Northern Territory late last year. The outcomes of these trials were as expected – the families, and most importantly their children, were ecstatic with the opportunity to be able to access internet and therefore their schooling and all that encompasses while on the move.

ICPA (Aust) believes priority must be given to the provision of internet to these children as a matter of urgency in order to ensure their education is not hindered because of their family's location. Unfortunately, the costs of these kits are prohibitive and we therefore corresponded again with Minister McKenzie and other relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers in February, requesting provisions for possible subsidies or other assistance

to be made available similar to fixed (home) Sky Muster installations, to ensure transient internet connection kits are affordable and accessible for the small number of students for whom they are required.

Mobile Coverage/Service

ICPA (Aust) also included in our correspondence to Minister McKenzie, issues raised in regard to the need for both expanded mobile coverage in rural and remote areas, particularly in the vicinity of schools and the need to ensure current mobile services have sufficient backup power to provide consistent and uninterrupted delivery. In a response received in December these concerns were noted and reference was made to funding available to expand mobile services through the next round of the Mobile Black Spot Program and Round 2 of the Regional Connectivity Program. We do know that previous Mobile Black Spot programs have concentrated on expanding coverage in the vicinity of small rural schools and we expect this to continue. Members are encouraged to investigate opportunities for funding applications for locations of concern. The recent Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, included in their 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Report released on February 14, 2022, recommendations to "*Encourage shared network access and innovative funding for mobile in regional areas"* and to *"Increase Government investment in regional connectivity".*

The issue of back-up power reliability and capacity on mobile towers has been raised in a number of forums by Federal Council. Consistent, uninterrupted service is important to families living in geographically isolated areas for the delivery of children's education programs as well as safety and health concerns. ICPA (Aust) has been working collectively on communications issues and recently Federal and all State Councils attended a communications meeting with representatives from Telstra to discuss the issues members raised at the federal conference. At this meeting, information was provided regarding Telstra's mobile sites being actively upgraded with battery and battery replacements as well as mobile transmission equipment also being upgraded to improve resilience in regional, rural and remote areas. There is currently some suggestion that this advocacy on backup power should also include the various power supply companies as they are ultimately in charge of overall power sources. Federal Council will continue in discussions on back-up power and work towards better outcomes in areas dependent on these services.

ICPA (Aust) advocates strongly for this investment to be concentrated in areas with maximum advantage for educational access in any future funding opportunities.

Telephone

In rural and remote areas, telephone connections remain a significant and essential part of the communications services relied on by residents and understandably members continue to request for services to be maintained to adequate standards. Through correspondence to Minister McKenzie and other relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers as well as recent submissions to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review and the Carrier License Conditions - Better Reporting on Telstra Delivery of Voice Services consultation, ICPA (Aust) has raised key concerns of our members including:

- The need for customer service and telephone assistance lines to more effectively assist rural and remote students and their families.
- The need for priority, subsidised phone line installations and repairs in rural and remote areas when the purpose is education delivery.
- The need to ensure rural and remote students have consistent access to continuous and reliable telephone communications through regular maintenance of existing telephone infrastructure and the provision of a temporary satellite phone or other service to any rural or remote family where a phone fault is not rectified within three working days.

We have also sought reassurance that for those members who only have access to landline provided in non-nbn cable serviced areas, high-capacity radio concentrator (HCRC) networks and copper lines, the retention

and ongoing maintenance of these current services is maintained and prioritised until equal or better alternatives can be identified and installed. We continue to advocate that all residents living in geographically isolated areas should have access to two independent communications services and not be solely reliant on one communication source while stressing that a move from existing HCRC or copper line services to Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) services reliant on satellite is not a satisfactory replacement of legacy voice services at this time, where rural and remote residents currently only have satellite internet access.

The Minister's response to our letter raising these topics in December provided reassurance that the Government is committed to upholding the current Universal Service Obligation (USO) commitments, which will ensure that existing services are adequately maintained until such time as viable alternatives are identified. We are also hopeful that the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee recommendations to "*continue but reform existing universal services for the future"* will ensure this commitment is adhered to.

Other relevant communications topics

The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review, which ICPA (Aust) robustly participated in, was conducted last year and the Committee tabled its report *2021 Telecommunications Review – A step change in demand* on 14 February 2022. The full report is available here.

The review committee made twelve recommendations:

1. Adopt a longer-term strategic approach to regional digital infrastructure and skills
2. Increase Government investment in regional connectivity
3. Implement a regional telecommunications resilience fund
4. Trial emerging connectivity technologies
5. Build connectivity literacy and digital capability among regional users
6. Enhance NBN Co's regional fixed wireless and Sky Muster services
7. Implement and enforce new performance and reliability standards for wholesale and retail services
8. Continue with reform existing universal services for the future
9. Improve information available to consumers about mobile services including coverage and performance
10. Encourage shared network access and innovative funding for mobile service in regional areas
11. Focus on the digital needs of Indigenous communities
12. Improve affordability of telecommunications for vulnerable groups in regional areas.

The Government is yet to hand down their response to the Review, however ICPA (Aust) is hopeful that the response will include positive news for communications for rural and remote students.

Curriculum Portfolio

With no Curriculum motions at the 2021 Federal Conference, Federal Council has focused on our ongoing relationships with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to ensure that the perspective of rural and remote students are considered in decisions made about the Australian Curriculum. We continue to participate in regular ACARA stakeholder meetings as part of the Parents and Principals Peak National Bodies group and have had the opportunity to provide feedback on relevant topics relating to rural and remote education.

Federal Council has also been liaising with all State Council Curriculum Portfolio Leaders along with the former Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Alan Tudge MP and currently acting in the position the Hon Stuart Robert MP and the Minister for Regional Education, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, raising awareness of the possible impacts of proposed changes to NAPLAN on geographically isolated students. Federal Council has also voiced concern following the release of 2021 NAPLAN data and results in relation to rural and remote

students' educational outcomes.

National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) 2021 Results
Federal Council was part of the ACARA Stakeholder meeting in December relating to the 2021 NAPLAN results. The data highlighted the shortfall in educational outcomes for rural and remote students. It is concerning that between 2016 and 2021, there are significant gaps between the results of regional, remote and very remote students compared to metropolitan students. A media release was circulated by ICPA (Aust) to highlight this concerning outcome. This media release is available here.

While NAPLAN results are only one diagnostic tool, they are indicative of the disparity in educational outcomes for children from rural and remote Australia and clearly demonstrate more needs to be done to support these students' access to an equitable education. ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with ACARA and all levels of Government and education stakeholders to advocate for the unique needs of geographically isolated students.

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) changes to testing criterium
ICPA (Aust) has been raising with the Minister for Education and Youth concerns in regard to proposed changes to NAPLAN testing and the possible effects on geographically isolated students. Education Ministers from all States and Territories met in December 2021 and ICPA (Aust) has been advised this issue was discussed. We were also advised Ministers will meet again in early 2022 to discuss the matter further. In correspondence sent to the then Minister for Education and Youth in early December, ICPA (Aust) highlighted particular areas of concern. Federal Council also passed this on to Curriculum Portfolio Leaders across all State Councils encouraging them to make contact with their relevant Ministers.

The major area of concern is that suggested changes in certain aspects of the timing and implementation of the testing program may adversely impact geographically isolated distance education students. For example, if sitting of the tests was to be extended (e.g. over 2 weeks/3 weeks) this would be unworkable for many remote families who would have to relocate to their Distance Education/School of the Air centre location for longer periods of time for testing. This would be further exacerbated if there was a removal of the option to sit the tests at home for this cohort of students. The concern is that rural and remote students will be underrepresented in testing as the physical logistics for the administering of exams will become too arduous and there will be a reluctance for schools and families to participate.

We also harbour concerns regarding timing of the testing for students who are entering Boarding School in year 7 and the impact of the possibility of misrepresentation if an earlier testing regime is implemented as they adjust to their new circumstances.

We were heartened to receive a response from Acting Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Stuart Robert MP recently indicating that "*As we meet to discuss reforms to NAPLAN, I will reiterate the concerns of regional and remote students and their families."* Federal Council will continue to monitor this issue in the coming months.

Distance Education Portfolio

Following Federal Conference in early November 2021, letters addressing four motions were sent to appropriate Ministers and Shadows in November and December 2021. Three major issues arose from motions carried at conference:

- Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) and a national approach to financially assisting distance education tutors in geographically isolated (GI) home schoolrooms
- An increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for secondary geographically isolated Distance Education (GIDE) students

- Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) criteria for students who travel and live away from their listed home for the majority of the school year.

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) and a national approach to financially assisting distance education tutors in geographically isolated home schoolrooms

Once again, the call for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) was presented as a conjoined motion from five branches. ICPA (Aust) has been strongly advocating for a DETA on behalf of our members who have been consistently bringing motions for this to Federal conferences. Unfortunately, this advocacy continues to fall on deaf ears at Federal, State and Territory levels.

In November, ICPA (Aust) again wrote to the relevant Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers requesting a national approach to this longstanding issue and calling for financial remuneration for the work that distance education tutors in geographically isolated schoolrooms perform. ICPA (Aust) requested that the issue be tabled at an Education Minister's meeting.

In a reply received from Senator Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education it was once again indicated that,
"The costs of teaching and associated supervision – as is required in the case of distance education – are the responsibility of State and Governments" and that contact should be made with *"State and Education Ministers to raise your concerns."*

Whilst we acknowledge that the teaching and associated costs of educational programs is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments and while all States provide State-based distance education schools, programs and teaching staff to deliver these programs, ICPA (Aust) believes the unique issue of supervision and delivery of these programs within individual family's schoolrooms across rural and remote Australia goes beyond standard educational delivery and requires a distinctive multi-faceted approach.

Thus, in light of our ongoing Geographically Isolated Distance Education campaign launched on 1 December 2021, along with further correspondence to Minister McKenzie, Federal Council sent an open letter to Members of Parliament, Senators and educational stakeholders all over Australia seeking support for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) in February. The letter received a positive response and generated a significant amount of traffic on social media with almost 500 reactions, comments and shares on Facebook. To date ICPA (Aust) has received several favourable responses from Members of Parliament and Senators showing their support.

Alongside the letter ICPA (Aust) also shared information and infographics displaying statistics and calculations of foregone wages and superannuation that many distance education tutors sacrifice by dedicating years to supporting their children in the home schoolroom. This data shows a clear picture of the disadvantage experienced by these families who have no choice but to educate their children by distance education due to where they reside. Our open letter and flyers can be found here and we welcome members to share them across their networks.

ICPA (Aust) is continuing to work on raising awareness of distance education (DE) tutors and the vital, unremunerated role they play. Federal Council is currently continuing their focus on this advocacy and are planning a media campaign to shine the spotlight on the personal stories of DE tutors.

An increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for secondary GIDE students

A motion calling for an increase to the AIC allowance for geographically isolated distance education secondary students was also carried at conference. Calls for increases to the AIC, across all categories, has been an ongoing issue for our members.

Federal Council has written to Minister for Families and Social Services the Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and

other relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers, however, are yet to receive a reply. A meeting with advisers to the Minister in December provided the opportunity to strongly raise the need for an AIC increase across all categories.

In early February, Federal President, Alana Moller, Federal Vice President and Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio leader Lisa Slade and Distance Education Portfolio Leader Ali Allison attended a video conference meeting with Services Australia and the Department of Social Services representatives who manage AIC. This was a very positive meeting and Council feels optimistic that this will be a productive and collaborative working relationship. The team have recently provided council with AIC comparative data showing the breakdown of distance education recipients of the AIC and how many of these are geographically isolated. Having access to this type of data will greatly assist in advocacy for improvements to the AIC specifically for our geographically isolated students who have no choice but to be educated by distance education or in boarding situations.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) criteria for students who travel and live away from their listed home for the majority of the school year
This is a unique issue faced by children who travel with their families in geographically isolated locations.

Motions from previous years have called for a separate category under the AIC for geographically isolated students. A distinct and separate category for geographically isolated students may also help recognise the unique situation of students who are undergoing their education while they are travelling and living with their parents who work in geographically isolated areas, even though their permanent address may not qualify for the AIC. This is a unique situation for some of the families who work in the most remote locations of Australia. Following conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and other relevant Ministers and shadow Ministers in relation to this issue. Federal Council has yet to receive a reply.

As mentioned above, Federal Council feels positive that a good working relationship with the Services Australia and the Department of Social Services will assist continued advocacy in this area.

Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio

Following Federal Conference in early November 2021, letters addressing four motions and four supplementary motions were sent to appropriate Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers by early December 2021. Four major issues arose from motions carried at conference:

- In Home Care
- AIC for 3-4 year olds
- The need for a National Working with Children Check (WWCC), and
- Calls for improved employment and training incentives for early childhood staff.

In Home Care
ICPA (Aust) was pleased to welcome staff from the In Home Care Project Management team to the Federal Conference and we have continued to engage in fruitful discussions regarding issues associated with In Home Care in rural and remote contexts. At the conference, discussions took place with members regarding requests for In Home Care to be amended to allow for:

- IHC Educators to care for children from more than one family at the same time; and
- IHC Educators to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family(ies) under In Home Care.

The IHC Management team sought feedback to ascertain why Family Day Care is not a viable option for

multiple families on one remote property and has therefore not been a suitable solution to providing childcare in the above circumstances. Department staff have been open to addressing these issues where they can and ICPA (Aust) urges members to contact Federal Council if you have any experiences we can share with the department regarding these, or any other issues associated with In Home Care.

ICPA (Aust) is currently compiling a letter to relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators seeking a review and amendments to the In Home Care (IHC) Scheme for more appropriate provisions within the scheme to address the unique circumstances of geographically isolated families requiring childcare. We will also continue to seek opportunities to raise these requests in upcoming correspondence and meetings.

AIC for pre-compulsory schooling

Once again, conference saw the request from a number of branches for the extension of the AIC Distance Education Allowance to 3-4 year old geographically isolated children accessing an approved distance education early learning program. Federal Council has written to the Minister for Regional Education, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie and Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston as well as other relevant MPs and Senators to raise this issue. The topic was also raised in a meeting with Minister Ruston's advisers in December. It was also included as one of the six recommendations in Federal Council's 2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission, which can be found here.

With thanks to State Councils, Federal Council was able to ascertain there had been a slight increase in the numbers of children enrolled in these programs across Australia from approximately 200 in 2018 to approximately 250 currently. Obtaining these numbers allowed us to provide clear costings in our Pre-Budget Submission for this request.

Mobile Early Childhood Services funding

Addressing funding issues for remote mobile early childhood services is ongoing. A letter, addressing the three motions carried at conference regarding funding of early years education was sent to then Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, along with other relevant Ministers and Shadows, Members of Parliament and Senators. At the time of writing, we were yet to receive a response.

Federal Council was advised in late 2021 of the possibility of a new Early Childhood and Mobile Playgroup service in the Alice Springs region. RAISEducation received charity status and intend to fund their services through corporate sponsorship, donations, fundraising and grants. They hope to offer services in individualised learning programs for remote classrooms, a mobile playgroup in the Alice Springs region, professional assessment and intervention and supporting the transition from early years learning to primary school.

National Working with Children Check (WWCC)

The ongoing inefficiencies of each State and Territory having their own Working with Children Check was again addressed in a letter to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Karen Andrews with copies going to the Ministers for Education, Regional Education, Government Services and relevant Shadow Ministers. Minister Andrews replied detailing the progress that has been made and referred to the National Standards for Working with Children Checks (WWCC) and the National Office of Child Safety as steps toward national consistency. National Cabinet agreed on 10 December 2021, to explore avenues to further improve national consistency in the WWCC. They aim to eliminate unnecessary red tape, duplication, and regulatory barriers around WWCC without sacrificing safety standards. ICPA (Aust) will continue to update members on these developments as they progress.

Employment and training incentives for rural and remote early childcare staff

Given the complexity of the issues affecting employment and training of rural and remote early childhood staff, a letter citing examples of the shortfall in staff detailed at conference and suggesting possible incentives was sent to the Minister for Education as well as other key Government and Shadow Ministers. Responses are

yet to be received; however Federal Council would welcome any further case studies exemplifying challenges being experienced due early childhood staffing shortfalls in rural and remote areas to strengthen our advocacy around this request.

Rural Schools/School Travel Portfolio

Four motions were presented at the 2021 Federal Conference for the Rural Schools/School Travel Portfolio, particularly focussed on air and road travel for our geographically isolated students.

Air Travel

Following conference, ICPA (Aust) has continued to advocate to the Federal Government for the inclusion of a fares allowance in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance, similar to that of ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance and/or a "Students 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.

The request for the inclusion of a Fares Allowance in the AIC was raised most recently in a virtual meeting with Minister for Families and Human Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston's office which was held to discuss the issues raised around AIC. This meeting gave us an opportunity to foster a broader understanding within the Minister's office of why our members request changes to the AIC, including the need for an inclusion of a Fares Allowance. It was a positive meeting and we appreciated the opportunity to speak on behalf of members with the Minister's office. Federal Council has also been in regular contact with Services Australia and the Department of Social Services since Federal Conference and will continue to raise AIC topics in scheduled future meetings.

While there has not been any developments on the broader issue of the request for a Fares Allowance in the AIC, Federal Council will continue to pursue this in earnest.

Another motion requested that Federal Council communicates and collaborates with regional air service providers to seek affordable airfares for students who need to travel from their home to attend their education facility. ICPA (Aust) has found it challenging throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain a dialogue with airlines regarding rural and regional air travel, however as air travel becomes more active again, we will endeavour to contact those who may be able to assist with our advocacy. With the coming down of the borders across the country we hope that provision for developments in the area of more equitable access to regional airfares for geographically isolated students will have some positive developments.

Letters were sent to the relevant Ministers and advisers towards the end of 2021 regarding the introduction of a Student Concessional fare. Federal Council believes Case Studies that outline specific situations would be a valuable tool to have ready to highlight the difficulties families face when accessing reasonable transport to and from schools. Families with examples in this area are invited to submit their case studies to the Rural School & Rural Travel Portfolio Leader for inclusion in this Persona. A further follow-up to this motion will be undertaken in the first half of 2022 to include this further information.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to have an open dialogue with Qantas and look forward to this relationship developing further.

We are aware that flights in regional areas are increasing, with Qantas opening some new routes and new airlines coming on board in various locations. This is a positive sign for improvements to the current affordability and accessibility challenges faced by our members who rely on air travel to access equitable education for their children.

Now that air travel throughout Australia is actually something tangible, we will be reaching out to all existing

and newly formed airlines to see what the possibilities are for our geographically isolated students and their families to access more affordable transport option.

Road Travel
At conference, members requested adequate federal 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. While roads funding is largely a State/Territory responsibility, ICPA (Aust) understands there are federal programs in place which deliver funding for local road maintenance, such as the Roads to Recovery program. In a motion letter sent to the Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport, Hon Scott Buchholz MP we requested that a dedicated, federally funded road maintenance programs continue to be allocated so that local Government has the financial ability to prioritise school bus routes. We are awaiting a response and will update members with any news on this motion.

Specific Education Needs Portfolio

Our members in rural and remote Australia continue to experience inequities and challenges in relation to Specific Education Needs as evidenced by the five motions brought to the 2021 Federal Conference. These motions related to:

- lack of Medicare rebates for Allied health telehealth without a Chronic Disease management plan
- private health fund recognition of telehealth
- support for rural and remote areas early intervention services
- universal access to Federally funded health clinics in rural and remote areas
- mental health program needs in rural and remote areas.

Medicare rebates for Allied Health telehealth
ICPA (Aust) has written to the Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers, asking 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.

Thanks to COVID-19, more Australians than just rural and remote families have come to see the benefits of and place for telehealth. While no official response has been received, some Federal Government media releases are of interest.

On 13 Dec 2021, Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, announced '*Telehealth will become a permanent feature of primary health care, which has been transformational to health care delivery and underpinned much of the government's … COVID-19 response*' and the commitment of $106 million for a permanent telehealth [sic] for Australian patients and $77 million to improve access to Medicare. [The government will] '*support permanent telehealth services, ensuring greater flexibility to patients and doctors for the delivery of health care; allowing GPs, specialists, and allied health professionals to continue to consult with their regular patients by phone or online*'.

The catch is that in order to access the Medicare rebate for speech and/or occupational therapies, a child needs to first have a General Practitioner Management Plan (GPMP, previously Chronic Disease Management Plan). Having to access a General Practitioner (GP) result in further time lapsing and further expense for a family and further detrimental delays in the treatment and development of a child. Medicare benefits are only available for telehealth with the GP if the 'patient' has seen the GP (or been to the GP's practice) face-to-face in the previous 12 months.

So, while the intention is to ensure '*that all Australians are able to access timely and affordable, high quality healthcare*', this is still far from achievable in rural and remote areas, at the expense of children's learning outcomes, and ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for improvements.

Private health fund recognition of telehealth

Dr Rachel David, CEO of Private Healthcare Australia responded to our request that 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. Dr David wrote "*Private Health[care] Australia was very pleased that the industry was able to quickly move to allowing telehealth rebates for customers from March 2020. Telehealth has generally been a success for many Australians, and as you have recognised, funds have either extended access to telehealth or made it a permanent feature of their products. We are confident that each of our member funds will provide rebates for telehealth permanently.*

While telehealth is going to be a permanent feature of Australian health care, there are still some issues to be considered to maximise access for Australians accessing telehealth. These issues include quality standards, training for practitioners and ensuring that city - or overseas-based services do not affect the viability of existing providers living and serving in remote communities. Any further feedback or advice from your membership to improve access, quality and service continuity would be most appreciated.'

Dr David kindly forwarded our letter to each of Private Healthcare Australia's member health funds for their information and consideration.

The peak organisation, Speech Therapy Australia, lists Private Health Funds allowing customers who have extras cover for speech pathology (May 2021) to make a claim for speech pathology services delivered via telehealth here.

Support for rural and remote areas early intervention services

ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, and recommended the Minister provide financial support for existing organisations to expand and for more organisations willing to take their Early Intervention Services into regional and remote Australia, and that the number of sessions covered by Medicare be increased. The Minister was provided with data from the Royal Far West POSITION PAPER – JULY 2017 SUPPORTING CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA which clearly illustrates the developmental vulnerability of children in rural and remote areas. The Position Paper can be found here and the full motion and explanation here.

In some areas, early intervention service providers are available and willing to travel to rural and remote Australia and undertake complete assessments on these children. However, they do not have consistent funding to guarantee these services year to year or to expand to service areas without any access to services. Many pre-school aged children in regional and remote Australia do not have access to vital early intervention assessments or programs due to a lack of services or distances they have to travel. Early intervention needs to have started before these children attend Primary School, to make sure they have the best start to their education. Support is required for those families whose children need early intervention to ensure the families can access these services and that they are affordable. A Medicare rebate is available for some services but accessing those services and the rebate can be difficult and the number of sessions which can be claimed is inadequate.

ICPA (Aust) requested the Federal Government implement the above recommendation to ensure all rural and remote students have improved access to interventions and services necessary to support their education. This would enhance the educational outcomes of geographically isolated children and would be a timely and sound investment for rural and remote families and in turn, the sustainability of rural and remote communities.

While no response from the Minister has been forthcoming, ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for more early childhood services at every opportunity.

Universal access to Federally funded health clinics in rural/remote areas

ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Federal Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers and agencies asking them 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. The recipients of the letter were informed of situations where remote families with only a single 'local' health clinic were being refused treatment as they "don't meet the criteria" whereupon they 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.

The letter articulated that ICPA (Aust) considers discrimination based on race, demographic or any other criteria by publicly funded health facilities is unacceptable, ever, let alone in a situation where there are no local alternatives for rural and remote families to 'conveniently' access.

Unfortunately, no response has been received and ICPA (Aust) will continue our advocacy on this issue in meetings, consultations, delegations and further correspondence.

Mental health program needs in rural and remote areas

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

The urgency in relation to the specifics of this motion, especially youth suicide, seems to have been lost on the recipients, as we have had no response.

While the Federal Government has made numerous announcements about improved access to mental health services and telehealth, the resources necessary and the programs being advocated in this motion letter are still lacking.

ICPA (Aust) has recently collated a selection of resources and contacts on our website for members to access where required. This information can be found here. Federal Council will continue to add relevant services and resources to this page to assist members to support their children.

Tertiary Portfolio

The tertiary motions presented at the 2021 Federal Conference, continued to highlight the breadth of issues facing rural and remote tertiary students when accessing higher education. Federal Council has addressed the motions through correspondence to and collaboration with Ministers and Government departments including the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Minister for Regional Education, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Social Services and Services Australia.

Pleasingly Federal Council can report that there have been some welcome outcomes from our advocacy which will positively impact rural and remote students accessing a tertiary education.

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) which commenced in 2021, is a one-off, means-tested payment of up to $5000 for school leavers from inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas. Eligible students are those who relocate more than 90 minutes by public transport from their family home to undertake a full-time, eligible higher level tertiary education course (Certificate IV or above) following year 12 or equivalent and whose parental income is below $250 000. The TAP aims to assist eligible students with the costs of relocating to undertake tertiary study including start-up expenses, costs of living, direct costs of education or training and the cost of travelling home in semester breaks.

Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education announced changes to the delivery, eligibility and payment structure of the TAP on the 17 December 2021 in response to the evaluation of the program, which ICPA (Aust) provided feedback to. Changes included:

- eligibility extended to eligible inner regional students
- application and payment process for **all** TAP applicants whether attending a university, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider or other higher education provider will be administered solely through Services Australia and
- eligible students from outer regional, remote, and remote areas, will continue to receive up to $5,000 in two payments, and students from inner regional areas will receive a single payment of $3,000.

Federal Council will continue to seek further adjustments noted in the feedback we provided to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) during the evaluation consultations of the TAP. This includes the alignment of the TAP to the Relocation Scholarship in order to truly reflect the costs of moving away from home to access a tertiary education, assurance that the TAP is a permanent payment available to all rural and remote students who fulfil the criteria and that the numbers of eligible students who can receive the TAP are not capped.

Information on the TAP can be found at:
www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment
www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment

Proof of Identity for Youth Allowance
The initial confirmation of identity for many rural and remote students who live vast distances from a Centrelink service centre or rural and remote access centre, has been a longstanding issue. Until now these students have not been able to start or proceed with their application for Youth Allowance until these original documents have been sighted at a rural and remote access centre or service centre leading to delays in the application, approval and commencement of Youth Allowance payments.

Following correspondence from Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds, Minister for Government Services and discussion with the Department of Social Services, ICPA (Aust) is pleased to report that a new process of identity confirmation has been established. There are now processes in place for students to confirm their identity and commence their application for Youth Allowance online, removing the need for the applicant to present in person to a service centre.

Proof of identity can be:

- online - Youth Allowance applicants have the option of lodging identity documents by video chat. During the online claim process applicants have the option of booking a video chat appointment for sighting and approval of original identity documents
- over the phone, or
- in person.

More information can be found here: How to prove your identity with Centrelink - Youth Allowance for students and Australian Apprentices - Services Australia

Recommendations from the *Education in remote and complex environments Report*
ICPA (Aust) has welcomed the measures for rural and remote tertiary students that have been implemented from the *Education in remote and complex environments Report,* the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey Review) and the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (Napthine Review); including the introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment, the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships, the Regional University Centres, the Course Seeker website, the appointment of the Regional Education Commissioner and improvements to the Fares Allowance scheme. These have

considerably improved access, outcomes and opportunities for regional, rural and remote students' access to higher education.

ICPA (Aust) continues to seek the implementation of **all** the recommendations which would ensure rural and remote tertiary students' access, participation, retention, completion and success in the course of their choice. These measures include:

- improved availability, information and support of accommodation, income support and high-quality career information and advice
- improved access to high-quality VET programs in regional, rural and remote areas
- the provision of greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for Youth Allowance
- improved access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services and
- improved quality and range of student support services including pastoral care, mentoring programs and academic support.

Correspondence from Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education indicated the Government Response to the *Education in Remote and Complex Environments Report,* which also made welcome recommendations to enhance tertiary access for rural and remote students is currently being finalised and Federal Council is eagerly awaiting its release.

Relocation Scholarship

Along with the request for the TAP to be aligned with Relocation Scholarship payment structure, Federal Council continues to advocate for the Relocation Scholarship criteria to be changed to include those rural and remote students who must relocate and live away from home to access a tertiary education and do not be qualify for dependent Youth Allowance. Correspondence was sent to Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services and in December 2021 Federal Council had a meeting with Minister Ruston's advisers discussing this and other advocacies. Currently the Relocation Scholarship is an adjunct payment of dependent Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY Living Allowance and is not available as a stand-alone payment nor for independent Youth Allowance recipients.

Parental Income for independent Youth Allowance applicants

Members once again requested the removal of the Parental Income Test from the eligibility criteria for rural and remote students qualifying for Youth Allowance as an independent under the workforce participation criteria. This Youth Allowance category recognises these students have worked for 14 months, earned the required amount and proved their independence from their parents and therefore their parental income should be immaterial to their application. Federal Council has raised this with Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, however, has not received a reply to correspondence in relation to this motion.

ICPA (Aust) is very appreciative of the Federal Government's continued commitment and prioritisation of tertiary education for rural and remote students and the recent positive and significant measures that have addressed many current and past motions, albeit in part. ICPA (Aust) will continue to progress and raise the profile of current, previous and ongoing issues rural and remote students face when accessing a tertiary education through all avenues available to us at every opportunity, to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to access, participate and complete a tertiary education of their choice commensurate with their aspirations and career plans. Federal Council will inform members of any developments as they come to hand.

Training Portfolio

At the 2021 Federal Conference three training motions were presented and carried. There has been substantial growth in the engagement of Vocational and Education Training Post School. Unfortunately, our families continue to report circumstances whereby both policy and process are increasing the difficulties for their children to access financial supports to enable them to undertake training post school. Parallel to this, the State/Territory and Federal Governments have directed tremendous financial supports and structures into providing incentives for employers to create more apprenticeship/traineeship positions as a response of the national skills shortage, which has been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as we stressed in correspondence post conference, if reasonable attention is not placed on providing meaningful financial assistance to support young rural and remote apprentices and trainees who must travel or relocate 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.

Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA)
Members have once again requested an increase to the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) and that the allowance be indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to better reflect the cost of living.

Correspondence was sent to the Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business, the Hon Stuart Robert MP in this regard, copying in relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers seeking this request. To date we do not have a reply.

The need for an increase in LAFHA and alignment with the CPI was also included as a Key Issue in the ICPA (Aust) 2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission which can be found here.

A motion also called for improvements to the LAFHA application process and timeframes. Contact was made with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to clarify the processes and relevant parties involved when students are relocating to begin their on-the-job training but have not yet commenced off-the-job training due to COVID-19 delays in delivery. In these situations, members have reported that payments were withheld until the off-the-job training commenced.

DESE confirmed that there should only be a three month wait on payments and that they are handled by the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers.
https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/

Furthermore, DESE advised the ability for LAFHA to be claimed without an approved training contract has always been in place to account for scenarios such as the one outlined. Each particular jurisdiction determines the requirements from the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to approve the training contract. This may be an acceptance of an enrolment from the RTO, or it may be that a full training plan is required. On occasions, this can slow down the approval of training contracts and is specific to the relevant jurisdictional requirements. In most instances three months is sufficient time to have this finalised. Federal Council is encouraging members to contact their branch and/or Portfolio members if this issue arises in the future.

Relocation Assistance Payments
Members also requested that relocation assistance be made available for apprentices and trainees who need to relocate from their rural or remote home to commence their trade. Currently there is limited assistance available for rural and remote 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, the adjunct payment to Youth Allowance available for higher education study. There is also no provision for apprentices or trainees to receive the new Tertiary Access Payment (TAP), the Department of

Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) payment which provides assistance for relocation costs to access higher education.

Correspondence raising these concerns was sent to the Hon Stuart Robert MP and copied to relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers. To date we do not have a reply.

ICPA (Aust) is also seeking the inclusion of rural and remote Australian Apprentices and trainees in the Tertiary Access Payment when they are required to move away from home to access their chosen pathway given they are accessing a study component as part of their trade/career.

There is currently significant skills reform being undertaken in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) space. In 2019, ICPA (Aust) responded to the Vocational Education and Training Review. This process is being repeated in 2022 and once again we are participating and encouraging members to also do so.

Members are encouraged to visit the Federal Training Financial Assistance information and links in the Training Portfolio section of the ICPA (Aust) website here.

Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) Motions

There were two miscellaneous motions presented at conference related to Rural Hardship Education Fund advocacy. Members urged Federal Council to continue advocating for the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) to assist geographically isolated families to meet necessary education costs in times of difficulty. Further the request was made for the RHEF to be expanded via a carried motion to include in our advocacy provision for personal hardship, where children's education is impacted due to the distinct educational contexts associated with educating children in rural and remote Australia.

ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education and Minister for Emergency Management and National Recovery, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, urging the Federal Government to implement a program which assists families in educating their children through the unique hardships they endure citing that geographically isolated children should not be disadvantaged or unable to continue their studies due to times of rural hardship including consideration for personal crisis due to the circumstances where they live. This letter was also forwarded to other relevant Members of Parliament and Senators, including Senator Pauline Hanson who supported ICPA (Aust)'s calls for a Rural Hardship Education Fund in 2019 when she put a motion to the Senate calling for a RHEF to be implemented.

In a response received from Minister McKenzie earlier this year, it was indicated that the Government "*recognises that it generally costs more to deliver schooling in regional and remote areas*" and referred to the Government's current funding commitments to assist with these extra costs, including the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance. Unfortunately, ICPA (Aust) believes this funding does not consider the expense incurred over and above the already inflated educational costs for these families when a hardship, be that environmental, industry-based or personal, occurs in their unique situations. Minister McKenzie did encourage Federal Council to engage with the National Recovery and Resiliency Agency, which we have done in the past and continue to do where possible.

The need for a Rural Hardship Education Fund has also been included in the ICPA (Aust) 2022-23 Pre-Budget Submission which can be found here.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise the need for a permanent Rural Hardship Education Fund to provide surety of support when our families need it most.

Conclusion

As outlined above, since the 2021 Federal Conference, Council has undertaken a variety of actions to pursue the current and previous issues that were raised through members' motions. These include correspondence, submissions, media releases and face to face and virtual meetings with politicians, Government departments and organisations.

All portfolios will continue to follow up on those motions where no response has been received and raise the profile of our members' issues through all avenues available to us. Federal Council remains committed to advocating on behalf of members. We will also keep members informed of any development following this motion update.

Federal Council welcomes all members to the 2022 Federal Conference in Perth on 3 and 4 August. Please do not hesitate to contact Portfolio leaders if you have questions regarding the issues outlined in this document or in relation to formulating motions for the upcoming Federal Conference. Contact details can be found here. Updates on various lobbies and other related issues are regularly posted on the ICPA (Aust) Facebook page and listed on the website at www.icpa.com.au.