



**ICPA (Aust)**

Isolated Children's Parents' Association Inc

# *2022 Federal Conference Motion Update*

**March 2023**



***-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 3 and 4 August 2022 in Perth, Western Australia. Seventy portfolio motions were presented by Branches and State Councils from all over Australia, along with three miscellaneous motions. All motions have been actioned since the conference. This Motion Update reports on the progress of these actions.

## **Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio**

In 2022, ten motions were carried at the Federal Conference relating to the Boarding, Hostels and Second Home Portfolio. These motions related to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance, the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) School Funding Model, the effects of a pandemic and the physical and emotional toll on boarding students, staff and families and the affordability of boarding and ensuring schools were aware of their impact on geographically isolated students' education.

Motion letters were sent to relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament, Senators, Departments and organisations in October 2022 following Federal Conference. While not all official replies have been received at the time of writing, we have received correspondence from the Federal Education Minister.

### **Boarding and COVID-19**

It came as no surprise that four motions regarding boarding staff to be considered as Essential Supervisory Staff at all times, classified as Essential Travellers in emergency management plans, creation of an essential traveller exemption for interstate students and their families and emotional well-being considerations were brought to the conference. Members were still experiencing challenging restrictions associated with boarding and COVID-19 through early to mid-2022 and this was reflected in these motions.

Following conference, Federal Council wrote to all relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators to ensure that the motions passed at conference were given their due consideration and noted to ensure there is sufficient awareness and understanding of the issues raised. It is of vital importance to have these documented to ensure students and families do not suffer the same adversity as per the COVID-19 pandemic in any future situations. Federal Council received a response from the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, who explained the complexities for COVID-19 management and also the further difficulties of the various State and Territory jurisdictions setting their own pandemic control plans. The implementation of the National Code for Boarding School Students remains in line with the relevant health advice and State, Territory or non-governmental education authorities.

### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance**

Three Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance motions were presented at Federal Conference. Two called for an increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance citing that this would help ease the financial burden on families who grapple with increased boarding fees from their educational facilities. Another motion relating to the AIC requested a separation of the AIC to include a standalone category for Geographically Isolated Children (AGIC) to ensure that given the growing number of students who receive the AIC for reasons other than geographical isolation, adequate recognition of the unique needs of families who require this payment due to their geographic location and lack of other viable educational options for the student continues. These issues were included in a motion letter sent to the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services.

While ICPA (Aust) has not received an official response from Minister Rishworth, Federal Council attended a virtual meeting with the Department of Social Services and Services Australia to discuss the issues raised in

the motions for the Boarding Schools/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio along with the Tertiary and Distance Education Portfolios. The opportunity to discuss these issues one on one with the relevant departments added a human element, gave the issues context in a rural and remote setting and fostered a broader understanding within these departments of why our members request increases and changes to AIC. These meetings now occur quarterly, where we have the opportunity to discuss AIC, Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY and the Tertiary Access Payment. It is pleasing to have a strong and fluid relationship with both departments for the benefit of not only our members but also the departments with the building of their knowledge.

For members' information, the Department of Social Services provided the 2023 AIC payment rates and payment dates in late 2022. These are available on our website [here](#).

### **Direct Measure of Income (DMI) School Funding Model**

The motion regarding the impact of the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) funding model for non-government schools and the flow on effect that this will have on school fees, particularly to boarding families is of concern. Federal Council wrote to the Minister for Social Services and other relevant Ministers in regard to this and at the writing of this report, a response had not yet been received. The topic was also raised during our October 2022 delegations and it was noted by Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education. ICPA (Aust) has been working with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and has requested examples of the direct impact on our member families, specifically in regard to any increase in fees as a result of the new funding arrangements. We will continue to advocate for equity for members and students and would like members to also know that independent schools (including boarding schools) throughout Australia also have access to their own support organisations to ensure that they have a voice in situations like this. Federal Council's priority is always to ensure educational equity, school viability or educational choice is not diminished for rural and remote students with the implementation of this methodology.

### **Accessing Affordable Boarding for Geographically Isolated Students**

ICPA (Aust) has written to ABSA requesting they ensure that their member schools take into consideration and have a deep understanding of the unique challenges that geographically isolated families face with sending their children to boarding school. Whilst there is appreciation of the financial subsidies from Government and the schools themselves in assisting families with financial support, it is imperative that the schools remain educated on the adversity that families are facing.

## **Communications Portfolio**

Communications issues continue to be raised at ICPA Federal Conferences and this area remains a focus and dedicated effort by Federal Council.

ICPA (Aust) continues to engage with key communications stakeholders. This ensures we are able to raise both ongoing and more time-sensitive topics and issues. ICPA (Aust) also continues our involvement 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 members' issues are also put forward. ICPA (Aust) participates in regular meetings with NBN Co and Telstra. Recently another Telstra Roundtable was held, with representatives from Federal Council and all State Councils to discuss topics from across the country. We also engage with the Regional Tech Hub on a regular basis and are able to assist members with communications needs through this channel.

### **Internet Access**

The necessity for adequate internet services commensurate to the educational needs of geographically isolated students continues to be brought forward by members. Following the 2022 Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, citing all motions carried at the conference, underpinned by an overall request that adequate internet access is available for all rural and

remote students with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the services. We welcomed a response from the Minister in December 2022, in which she acknowledged the essential nature of reliable communications. The Minister referred to the Government's current investment of over \$2.2 billion into regional telecommunications over the next five years including \$656 million for the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia (the Plan) and over \$1.6 billion to improve National Broadband Network (NBN) services across regional and remote Australia.

Our correspondence also reiterated requests for the development of an affordable portable internet product for the delivery of education to students from transient families working in remote locations of Australia. The Minister gave assurances that options for this are being explored and NBN Co also continues to work toward solutions. Federal Council has also reiterated this need to Retail Service Providers (RSPs) that solutions must be affordable for families. We are aware that alternative services such as Starlink and other transportable internet services are becoming more available and may provide a solution to this problem for some, however no subsidy yet exists to assist families with the associated costs of these services. ICPA (Aust) would welcome examples and case studies from families who are in this situation. Federal Council have also been seeking clarity on how many families require this service to assist with our representations to NBN Co and the Federal Government.

In correspondence, the Minister acknowledged the work of ICPA and welcomed policy ideas for communications. There has been rapid growth and enhancements in rural and remote internet connectivity with regards to access in recent years and ICPA (Aust) encourages members to raise their specific connectivity challenges and requirements via case studies to be presented to the Government and other stakeholders to ensure that future developments are directed to areas with maximum advantage for educational access.

At the Federal Conference members once again requested that ICPA (Aust) seek reassurance that installation of nbn Sky Muster and its hardware continue at no cost where it is a necessary service for rural and remote students to access education. Federal Council has raised this with NBN Co on a regular basis and we have been assured that there are no plans for this to be revoked. Federal Council are steadfast in our resolve to advocate strongly against any change in the installation process if it occurred while Sky Muster is relied upon by ICPA members to educate their children in rural and remote Australia.

A recent development has been the announcement by the Federal Government of an unmetered data trial for regional NBN satellite customers, and if the trial is successful, it is hoped that this unmetering will be made available to all regional NBN satellite customers. Select participants (approximately 10,000 customers) on nbn Sky Muster Plus will receive unmetered monthly data allowances and faster speeds as part of a new trial to boost internet quality in the bush. The trial will test the capacity and reliability of satellite technology to deliver faster download speeds of up to 100 Mbps for regional customers. The trial will run from March until May 2023.

### **Mobile Coverage/Service**

Following the Federal Conference, requests were again made to the Federal Government and other stakeholders for the expansion and ongoing maintenance of mobile networks across rural and remote Australia, for both rural schools and for families who rely on mobile coverage for education needs. In correspondence with Minister Rowland, we reiterated the need for small schools that are currently without reliable mobile coverage to be prioritised in future Mobile Black Spot Program rounds or similar future funding programs and where these schools have been provided with mobile coverage, that the footprint of the coverage goes beyond the school grounds. The Minister's response was encouraging, citing that the Government's *Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia* Plan announced in the October Federal Budget includes \$400 million in funding to boost mobile coverage on regional roads and to improve mobile coverage and resilience in rural and remote communities, which will support improved public safety in regional areas, complementing existing mobile coverage at local schools and other community hubs.

This correspondence was also sent to relevant MPs and Senators and we welcomed assistance from The Hon Nola Marino MP, the Shadow Assistant Minister for Education, who wrote to Minister Rowland supporting our advocacy.

Further to this, we also raised with the Minister the need to ensure current mobile services have sufficient backup power to provide consistent and uninterrupted delivery, where the education of children is reliant on mobile coverage. We referred to members' known issues with reliability of backup batteries on mobile towers during extended power outages, and the need for a better system of identifying this failure and replacement of expired batteries. The Minister acknowledged these concerns and identified the Government's Mobile Network Hardening Program, which is providing up to \$24.1 million in funding to the mobile network operators to deliver over 1000 projects to strengthen the resilience of regional telecommunications infrastructure including over 500 upgrades to battery backup to at least 12 hours as a program aimed at addressing such issues and boosting telecommunications resilience.

The above mobile connectivity topics have also been raised in a number of other forums and most recently during a meeting with Telstra personnel, at which representatives from Federal Council and all State Councils were in attendance, where backup power was discussed extensively. Attendees were assured that Telstra is keenly aware of these concerns and continue to expand their resiliency programs and emergency response for the mobile network. Reference was made to stand alone power systems (SAPS) which are being delivered to more remote areas as well as the early rollout of Automatic Transfer Units, an electronic box/switch that is at the Telstra Exchanges, which will allow emergency services and other non-Telstra personnel to hook up a temporary generator. The key to addressing this issue, particularly in disaster situations, is ensuring that consultation and collaboration occurs between a variety of parties, including Telstra, other voice/data service providers, electricity companies and other organisations such as the Bureau of Meteorology.

### **Telephone**

In rural and remote areas, telephone connections remain a significant and essential part of the communications services relied on by residents. Understandably, at the 2022 Conference, ICPA members again requested for services to be maintained to adequate standards. In our correspondence to Minister Rowland following the conference, we sought a commitment to maintaining current services until adequate alternatives are available and that the Universal Service Guarantee (USG) be maintained to ensure rural and remote customers are not left without adequate communications due to stringent repair timeframes not being upheld.

The Minister's response was encouraging and reaffirmed the arrangements in place to provide people across Australia with reasonable access to broadband and voice services through the Universal Service Obligation (USO) to ensure people in Australia have access to telephone and payphone services, regardless of where they live or work along with the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) as a consumer safeguard that requires Telstra to meet certain connection, repair and appointment timeframes for standard telephone services (not mobile or internet services or customer equipment). It was also highlighted that Telstra is subject to a Network Reliability Framework (NRF), under which it must investigate and remediate services that experience faults in a specified period.

The Minister did note that CSG arrangements may be temporarily suspended where there is a service disruption caused by severe weather or other factors beyond Telstra's control, however in these situations Telstra must either write to individual customers or publish details of mass service disruptions on their website, which can be accessed [here](#) and focus must be on getting services back in operation as soon as possible.

We were pleased to receive an offer from the Minister to provide details of particular geographic problem areas or individual cases where repairing of voice services is particularly poor and there appear to be no

extenuating circumstances to the Department of Communications for review. Federal Council encourages members to raise any issues they have with us to be forwarded for review.

ICPA (Aust) has also reasserted the request that existing landline services remain in place and continue to be maintained until a tested, reliable, affordable and appropriate alternative voice service is made available for those living in rural and remote areas. The Minister's response gave reassurance that this would be upheld. The Minister indicated that while the Government is open, in principle, to alternative means of delivering services to the community and acknowledged that there are a number of providers currently testing or rolling out voice services delivered through wireless and low earth orbit satellites, any changes would require measured consideration, consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. She also confirmed that the performance, reliability and cost of alternative services would need to be appropriate to satisfy the needs of users. ICPA (Aust) are encouraged by this commitment.

At every opportunity, ICPA (Aust) has also raised this topic with Telstra, including during the Regional Telecommunications Policy Workshop in late October 2022 and in the meeting with all ICPA Councils held recently. We have also implored that any testing or investigation of alternative services needs to be undertaken in real life situations and in particular in remote locations where our members will be impacted by any changes. We have received assurance from Telstra that this will be the case. Federal Council understands this is a considerable concern for those members who may be impacted and will continue to ensure we maintain robust advocacy on this topic.

In October 2022 the Federal Government announced they would create the Low Earth Orbit Satellite Working Group to examine the future role of satellite technology in delivering telecommunications services and explore the capability, features, affordability, consumer support and commercial sustainability of LEOsat products. The group will look at the potential role of LEOsats in regional, rural and remote connectivity, including mobile coverage and better delivery of universal telecommunications services. In February 2023, the first meeting of this group was held and included industry participants speaking on their use of satellite technology and opportunities for future growth – particularly in rural and regional communities. The Government expects the Working Group to provide advice and feedback on possible regulatory reforms to support the industry to ensure telecommunications regulation keeps pace with emerging technologies.

### **Distance Education Materials**

A motion carried at the 2022 Conference sought that geographically isolated distance education school materials be classified as essential mail and as such, their delivery be prioritised during mail disruptions, such as a natural disaster. Federal Council raised this request with the Minister for Communications, whom has jurisdiction over Australia Post, citing the case study included with the motion. The Minister contacted Australia Post directly for clarity on the situation noted and both the Minister and Australia Post recognised the critical importance of adequate postal services for those in regional, rural and remote areas and the great concern that delays have on the people in these communities. However, Australia Post advised that it is not possible to identify articles containing school supplies or prioritise such items. It was highlighted though that in an extreme weather event, Express Post items are amongst the first delivered and a therefore it was recommended that the Express Post service be utilised to ensure educational items are expedited through the network in these circumstances. ICPA (Aust) trusts this may assist members in future circumstances.

## **Curriculum Portfolio**

In 2022, two motions were presented and carried at the Federal Conference in relation to the move to wholly online National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing. The issues raised clearly identified that despite assurances to the contrary, there are ongoing challenges faced by families whose children are educated via distance education in geographically isolated circumstances when accessing NAPLAN testing.

ICPA (Aust) has advocated consistently that any changes to NAPLAN be made with the unique circumstances of geographically isolated students in mind, particularly in regard to accessibility. In a number of forums Federal Council has highlighted that considerations need to be made for geographically isolated students who may have difficulty accessing a school for testing due to distance, and others who may have difficulty taking part in NAPLAN in an online format due to being in a remote area without internet access. Despite this advocacy, conference motions highlighted that there were still some inconsistencies across schools and jurisdictions as to the options available for geographically isolated students, resulting in some students missing out on sitting NAPLAN testing.

Following on from conference, ICPA (Aust) raised this concern, citing the case study which accompanied the motion, through motion letters to the Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority (ACARA), as well as the Federal Government. The issue was also raised at the ACARA Peak Principal and Parents forums (of which ICPA Aust is a stakeholder) and during delegations. Feedback from all discussions indicated that these situations should not occur based on the guidelines for NAPLAN testing, which provide solutions for unique circumstances. Both Federal Government Ministers and ACARA representatives assured Federal Council that efforts will continue to avoid such situations and ensure that all schools and jurisdictions are adhering to these directives.

Another motion presented in 2022 highlighted the angst of geographically isolated families caused by situations such as the above when endeavouring to ensure their children receive equitable educational access. Members raised concern that as a result of some rural and remote students being unable to participate in both NAPLAN testing and other similar external examinations, this may impact their eligibility to enrol in some boarding schools, due to schools having prerequisite requirements for admission. It was requested that ICPA (Aust) raise this with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and other organisations to ensure boarding schools understood that as a result of geographic isolation, some students are unable to complete these prerequisites and seek due consideration in these circumstances. Federal Council raised this with ABSA and were assured that this would be passed on to boarding schools across Australia.

### **Other**

Since conference ICPA (Aust) has attended quarterly ACARA Peak Parent and Principals Body Meetings, at which previously suggested changes to NAPLAN testing, including changes to the testing dates and testing format have continued to be discussed. ICPA (Aust) assisted ACARA in sharing a parent survey prior to the testing taking place, seeking feedback on how parents felt about the changes and particularly encouraging geographically isolated families to participate to ensure their unique voices were heard. We also recently shared information regarding changes to proficiency standards as part of the reporting of NAPLAN results, aiming to make better use of the online adaptive tests to deliver better information for parents, carers and teachers. A media release from ACARA related to this can be found [here](#).

While implementation of the Curriculum, including Version 9.0 is the responsibility of separate jurisdictions, as mentioned Federal Council continues to have representation on the ACARA Peak Parent and Principals Forum and are the only voice solely representing geographically isolated students and families. Federal Council uses this forum as an opportunity to ensure a rural and remote context is always present in discussions around the curriculum, NAPLAN and any associated topics. Should any members have any issues or topics they feel need to be addressed please feel free to contact Federal Council and we will ensure these are raised with the appropriate authorities. We encourage members to engage with the ACARA suite of websites whereby a variety of information and resources related to all curriculum topics is housed at <https://www.acara.edu.au/>



## Distance Education Portfolio

Four motions relating to distance education were passed at the 2022 ICPA Federal Conference in Perth, Western Australia.

### Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

Once again, motions calling for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) were brought to conference by several branches. Following conference, the Distance Education portfolio wrote to Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Women and the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education highlighting the need for a DETA. In this letter it was reiterated that this was an issue which ICPA (Aust) had been advocating for many years. In the letter we included the below table that highlights the possible financial loss and implications of a mother taking on the role of a Distance Education Home Tutor along with the great expense that families may face if they employ a Home Tutor.

Family member as geographically isolated Distance Education Tutor	
Average hours per day	6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year
Average years spent as DE tutor for one child	8 years (kindy/preschool plus primary school)
Average total hours spent tutoring one child	9600 –12,800 hours
Minimum Wage <sup>1</sup>	\$21.38 per hour
Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	\$205,248 - \$273,664
Superannuation @ 10% foregone	\$20,525 - \$27,366

In a response from Minister Clare, he stated that *‘the day-to-day operations of schooling, including teaching and supervision, are a matter for State and Education Ministers.’* This is a response that we continue to hear from the Federal Government. However, ICPA (Aust) maintains that a DETA should be a federally funded allowance, similar to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance with eligibility based upon AIC criteria. In saying this, every avenue is being explored and some ICPA State Councils are also raising this issue at a State level.

ICPA (Aust) also wrote to the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner regarding this issue. Ms Nash’s response demonstrated her continued support for ICPA members. Senator Gallagher also forwarded the letter onto Hon Dr Anne Aly, Minister for Early Childhood Education however we are yet to receive a response to that correspondence.

Federal Council also took this issue to delegations at Parliament House in October 2022. As this Government has a strong focus on the participation of women in the workforce, we focused our discussion on the fact that 85% of Home Tutors are mothers, who are essentially removed from the workforce for the duration of time that they are supervising their children learning through distance education. We continued to reinforce that mothers can be in the schoolroom for a decade or more with no recognition or remuneration and that the financial losses, including forgone wages and superannuation, can be quite devastating for these women.

The call for a DETA also forms part of ICPA (Aust)’s Key Recommendations and was included in our Pre-Budget Submission:

**“That in the 2023-24 Budget, funds be allocated for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) as financial recognition of the essential work a Tutor performs at a rate of \$6000.00 per family/annum.”**

<sup>1</sup> <https://business.gov.au/people/employees/employees-pay-leave-and-entitlements#:~:text=The%20national%20minimum%20wage%20is,are%20covered%20by%20an%20award.>

ICPA (Aust)'s full list of Key Recommendations can be found [here](#).

Another motion brought to conference in 2021 and 2022 asked for ICPA (Aust) to request the Minister for Education, at a forthcoming Education Ministers Meeting, table a national approach to financially assisting Distance Education Tutors. ICPA (Aust) corresponded with Minister Clare regarding this issue, however, are yet to receive a response addressing this request. This request was also raised at October delegations with Ministers, MPs and Senators at every opportunity.

### **Student Wellbeing Boost**

The need to ensure that Schools of the Air (SOTAs) and Schools of Distance Education (SDEs) were not overlooked in the Governments' *Student Wellbeing Boost* was another motion carried at conference. We wrote to Minister Clare and in his response, he provided assurance that these schools would be included in this initiative.

Further to this, Minister Clare advised that the funds will be allocated to schools "to support their students' mental health wellbeing." It will be at the school's discretion how they use the funds allocated to them to support their student's wellbeing.

### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Eligibility Criteria**

Another motion at conference called for a review and expansion of the eligibility criteria for geographically isolated families claiming the AIC. ICPA (Aust) wrote to Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services, regarding this issue, to which we are yet to receive a response.

Variations in the use of AIC eligibility criteria is an issue which affects a number of our members, particularly those in marginal locations as well as where requests have been made for special considerations due to unique geographically isolated circumstances. ICPA (Aust) are grateful to have a positive working relationship with Services Australia, as it enables us to seek solutions to any difficulties individuals may be having in regard to their eligibility to receive the AIC. Federal Council encourages all members to bring any issue they are having with the AIC process to our attention as we may be able to work through these issues with Services Australia.

## **Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio**

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Portfolio has addressed the motions tabled at the 2022 Federal Conference, through consultation with the Australian Government Departments; Department of Education, Social Services, Services Australia, Home Affairs and Employment and Workplace Relations with correspondence going to relevant Ministers and through our delegation and departmental meetings. The motions presented continue to highlight longstanding issues that rural and remote families face when accessing early childhood education and care.

The main point of interest to report for this portfolio is that the Federal Department of Early Childhood Education is conducting a comprehensive review of all early childhood programs and systems in the process of developing an Early Years Strategy, the aim being to shape the services provided in an integrated and holistic way that supports the education, wellbeing and development of Australia's children. ICPA (Aust) will be lodging a submission to the Early Years Review which is due 30 April 2023.

ICPA (Aust) was consulted and presented all of our current ECEC issues as part of a market research project by Deloitte Access Economics investigating what the role of the Australian Government should be in the ECEC sector. A submission was also completed to the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill 2022. View the submission [here](#)

ICPA (Aust) has continued to support the Minderoo Foundation's Thrive by Five campaign by attending their rural and remote meetings and being a signatory to their media campaigns and advocacy letters.

### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 3–4-year-olds.**

The recommendation below was tabled with the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services along with highlighting the need for access to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for unique rural and remote ECEC programs.

#### **Recommendation:**

The extension of the AIC Distance Education Allowance to 3-4-year-olds undertaking an approved pre-compulsory distance education program in order to:

- create more affordable access to early childhood programs the year before rural and remote children start school.
- provide an opportunity to meet the Universal Access National Partnership (UANP) requirement.
- give educators the opportunity to deliver early intervention where needed.

This was also raised during several delegation meetings in October 2022, including with Dr Anne Aly MP, Minister for Early Childhood Education. We were encouraged by these discussions and also advocated strongly for this measure to be implemented in our 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission, which can be found [here](#).

### **In Home Care (IHC)**

ICPA (Aust) has continued to develop a positive working relationship with key staff members of the Department of Education IHC team and value their support and guidance, which helps us support our members in navigating the entire IHC program. The IHC team remain open to communication and supportive in providing what information they can to help with our queries. Correspondence went to Minister Aly highlighting members' issues with IHC and a reply received in October outlined plans for a review of IHC in 2022/23 by an external provider with the aim to ensure the program meets its policy intent and objectives. ICPA (Aust) will contribute to this review and will also continue to submit member's issues with the IHC program at every opportunity.

In relation to the issue of the fees charged by IHC providers, the response has been that the Department is limited in its ability to regulate the fees charged by a private business such as the IHC providers. As part of the overall ECEC sector review, ICPA (Aust) will take the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission Review of the early childhood education and care sector. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) will be conducting a Price Inquiry into the drivers of child care prices which will also feed into the Productivity Commission's review of the early childhood education and care sector.

### **Pay parity and incentives**

Pay parity and the need for staff incentive programs to help address ECEC staff shortages in rural and remote areas was addressed in correspondence to the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. A reply has not yet been received. This issue was also raised at delegation meetings with several Ministers and Departments.

### **Working with Children Check**

The need for a National Working with Children Check was making what seemed to be slow but steady progress with the previous Federal Government. In response to ICPA (Aust)'s 2022 correspondence, the National Office for Child Safety, which now sits in the Attorney-General's Department outlined their process of continual consultation with State and Territory Governments on this issue along with plans to review and consult with non-government organisations, including ICPA (Aust). We look forward to the opportunity to take part in this stakeholder consultation.

## Rural Schools/School Travel Portfolio

The Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio has continued the advocacy for students living in rural and remote locations throughout 2022. At the Federal Conference in Perth two motions were presented relating to Rural Schools and School Travel.

### **Student Concessional Fares**

Student concessional fares continue to be a topic of concern for many of our members. The current climate of very high airfares and an unusually high demand for air travel since the pandemic has seen airfares continue to rise and in many cases, they are now more expensive than pre-pandemic fares.

At the Federal Council delegations in Canberra in October 2022 councillors spoke with many politicians and reminded them of the expense of air travel for students to access schooling, which in many instances is unavoidable, and the cost that this adds to educating students where there are often no other educational options.

Several programs have been instigated by various airlines and State Governments since the pandemic which have assisted somewhat with the high cost of airfares for regional students. While none of these programs specifically address students and their unique needs, Federal Council are hopeful that the airlines are recognising the needs of rural Australia as a whole and that with continued advocacy we will eventually see a Student Concessional Fare.

Some of these programs include:

**REX:** It is pleasing to see that the expansion of the airline REX throughout Australia has enabled the introduction of the “Community Fare.” There are various rules that need to be followed in order to qualify which can be found on their website [here](#).

**Qantas** has introduced the “Australian Resident Fares” program which offers residents from Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia discounted domestic economy return airfares from their local regional airport to their nearest capital city or major town. More information can be found [here](#).

**Western Australia:** The WA Government has introduced a Regional Airfare Zone Cap which will extend to June 2025. More information can be found [here](#).

ICPA (Aust) welcomes feedback from members who have participated in any of these programs to date. We would especially like case studies from members that outline their experiences. Case studies have the ability to tell stories that reflect real life which can have a profound affect when told to those who are in positions to make change.

### **Sensor Devices on School Buses**

Letters were sent to the Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education and many other relevant Ministers that this issue may concern. During the October 2022 delegations this concern was also raised with Ministers, MPs and Senators that Federal Council met with. Many politicians were surprised at the need for such a device and saw road conditions in rural areas as a more significant safety priority. Nonetheless we were able to explain the recent tragedies and near misses that had occurred with children being left behind in locked buses where locations can be remote and temperatures extreme.

ICPA (Aust) has not received any feedback from the correspondence sent, however we will continue to pursue this concern and raise the issue whenever possible.

For members information, ICPA (Aust) are pleased to draw attention to the Australasian New Car Assessment

Program (ANCAP) - A stricter vehicle safety system for 2023. This includes an alert system that notifies the driver or emergency services if a child has inadvertently been left in a locked car.

According to the ANCAP [Fact Sheet](#) the **Child Presence Detection** system monitors the rear seats and/or doors and provide a visual or audible warning through the vehicle's infotainment system upon exiting, a honk of the car horn, a notification or alert to an app on the driver's mobile phone, or an 'eCall' alert to emergency services. More advanced systems may also have the ability to automatically open the windows of the vehicle or activate the vehicles air conditioning system.

### **Look Before You Lock**

Prior to the return of the 2023 school year, it was pleasing to see that the Queensland Government took steps towards education and awareness that may assist in the prevention of further tragedies, launching a campaign with the catch cry "Look Before you Lock". More information on this initiative can be found [here](#).

ICPA (Aust) will continue to forward the Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio motions at every opportunity and invite members to contact Federal Council with any further information.

## Specific Education Needs Portfolio

At the 2022 Federal Conference, four motions were carried, centred on access to medical and allied health services for our rural and remote children. Two of these motions have been presented at previous conferences.

After conference we sent correspondence to the appropriate Ministers and organisations in relation to the following motions:

- Permanent Medicare Benefits Schedule item number for telehealth consultations be assigned to Allied Health Services to support specific educational needs and learning difficulties of geographically isolated children.
- The request for rebates provided by private health insurers to be extended to allied health services delivered via telehealth.
- The need for Federally funded health clinics to be accessible to all Australians.
- Financial assistance/incentives to attract health graduates to rural and remote areas.

### **Permanent Medicare Benefits Schedule Item Number for telehealth consultations assigned to allied health services**

In correspondence to the Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care, ICPA (Aust) stressed that many geographically isolated children do not have access to face-to-face allied health services. Rural and remote families face issues such as long travel distances, lengthy waitlists to access services in metropolitan areas, little or no access to services locally and financial hardship due to additional costs associated with accessing face-to-face services. Allied health services delivered by telehealth makes these services more accessible for all geographically isolated children.

In a response from the Minister, it was noted that the Government recognises that telehealth can significantly improve access to primary and allied health care services for those living in rural and remote locations. From 1 January 2022, many of the telehealth services implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were made permanent on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS).

From 1 March 2023, several improvements will be made to M10 (face-to-face) and M18 (telehealth equivalent) items of the MBS currently available for children with potential complex Neurodevelopmental Disorders (such as Autism Spectrum Disorder) and other eligible disabilities.

Factsheets that describe the changes to MBS telehealth are available [here](#).

In July 2022, ICPA (Aust) contributed a submission to the Audit of the *Expansion of Telehealth Services*, by the Australian National Audit Office, providing feedback related specifically to the telehealth needs of rural and remote education and geographically isolated students. The submission can be found [here](#).

### **Rebates provided by private health insurers**

In correspondence sent following conference, ICPA (Aust) reiterated the importance of access to medical specialists and allied health professionals for rural and remote families with Private Healthcare Australia. We requested that private health insurers act quickly to ensure that all rural and remote children have access to affordable and rebated early intervention and medical services necessary to support their educational and developmental needs.

We were made aware that a number of health insurers have already introduced or are providing benefits for allied health services via telehealth. However, it is up to each individual health insurer to determine which services they cover and whether this cover extends to telehealth.

### **Accessibility to federally funded health clinics for all Australians**

In ICPA (Aust) correspondence to the Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care, it was emphasised that families are frequently turned away from the local federally funded rural and remote health clinics because they do not meet the criteria to access these services. However, for many of these families there are no other local health clinics available, therefore they are required to travel vast distances to access treatment for their children which could have been provided closer to home, thus impeding their learning and social ability.

In response, the Minister advised that grievances or complaints in relation to accessing health services should be addressed directly to the CEO or Board of the relevant organisation in the first instance. Complaints, concerns or grievances not adequately addressed by the CEO or Board, can be raised with the Office of the Health Ombudsman which is available in each State.

### **Financial assistance/incentives to attract health graduates to rural and remote areas**

In further correspondence to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, ICPA (Aust) highlighted that rural and remote areas have been struggling with adequate and appropriate health services long before the COVID-19 pandemic and that recruitment and retention of health staff in rural and remote Australia would be improved greatly by offering incentives to live and work in these areas.

In Minister Butler's response, ICPA (Aust) was advised that the Government delivers a number of programs and incentives to support the recruitment and retention of General Practitioners in regional, rural and remote locations and that the Government is investing \$146 million in new initiatives to provide regional and rural Australia with more doctors, more rural generalists and more team-based care, and to ensure full use of the existing health workforce. Furthermore, we were informed that in recognition of the challenges faced by many GPs, particularly in rural areas, the Government has committed \$35 million of this funding to expand the Innovative Models of Care Program from 1 January 2023.

On 9 February 2023 the Federal Government announced the passage of legislation that offers incentives for doctors and nurse practitioners who choose to live and work in rural and remote Australia will have their HELP debt wiped or reduced.

"It means that a doctor or nurse practitioner who lives and works in:

- A remote or very remote town for a time period of half the length of their course would have their entire HELP debt wiped.

- A large, medium or small rural town for a time period equal to the whole length of their course would have their entire HELP debt wiped.
- An eligible place for a period of time equivalent to half the time required is eligible to half the applicable debt reduction.”<sup>2</sup>

ICPA (Aust) has also collaborated with other services and organisations within the Allied Health field, some of which you will have found information on in both Pedals and the Federal Focus (previously the Branch Bulletin).

ICPA (Aust) will continue to address these issues where appropriate, and we encourage members to approach us with case studies or new issues as they arise.

## Tertiary Portfolio

The Tertiary Portfolio has addressed the tertiary motions raised at the 2022 Federal Conference and previous unresolved motions, through consultation with the Department of Education and Services Australia, meetings, delegation and correspondence to relevant Federal Ministers. The motions presented continue to highlight the issues that rural and remote tertiary cohort face when accessing higher education. There have been some welcome outcomes from our advocacy which will positively impact rural and remote tertiary students.

### Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP), which is in its third year, is available for eligible school leavers from inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas 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. In 2022, changes to the delivery, eligibility and payment structure has widened the criteria and further assisted 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. The Australian Government Department of Education has confirmed that the TAP is a permanent scheme and the program numbers are not capped.

In response to the queries related to the Tertiary Access Payment identified in motions, the following update has been received from the Department of Education.

#### TAP Eligibility

- The latest [TAP Guidelines](#) for 2022-2024 clarify that a student may commence studies at any point in the year following completion of Year 12 or equivalent. The Department of Education website “Who can get it” section now reads: ***You need to be an eligible student moving away from home to study at a tertiary education provider. This payment is for those who start studying in the year after finishing year 12 or equivalent.*** For example, in the scenario raised in the motion, a student who completes a bridging/enabling course in Semester 1 of the year following Year 12, and who then undertakes eligible tertiary study in Semester 2 would qualify for the TAP (subject to meeting all other criteria).
- In relation to the reference to the “academic year” the website refers to: ***Study at least 75% of a full-time study and Study a course with a minimum duration of one academic year.*** It has been confirmed

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<sup>2</sup> 9 February 2023, Ministers’ Media Centre, Media Release: Debt Wiped for Country Practise, The Hon Jason Clare MP, The Hon Mark Butler MP & The Hon Emma McBride MP from [Debt wiped for country practice | Ministers' Media Centre \(education.gov.au\)](#)

that 'academic year' effectively means 12 months and is irrespective of when in the year a student starts.

The above is now clearly visible on the website as well as in the Guidelines. ICPA (Aust) has been advised that the Department will ensure that all universities are using the updated languages as per the current Guidelines in their promotion of the TAP.

Information on the TAP can be found at:

[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment)  
[www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment)

### **Regional Universities**

In correspondence to the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, ICPA (Aust) applauded the policy to deliver up to 20,000 new university places and the prioritisation of places to universities that offer opportunities to under-represented groups including students in regional and remote areas, those who are the first in their family to study at university and First Nation Australians. Additionally, ICPA (Aust) requested that regional universities were prioritised to enable rural and remote students' greater choice to study within the regions, remain connected to their communities, help to improve the academic outcomes for this cohort and improve accessibility and affordability. In response Minister Clare reassured ICPA (Aust) of the availability of the 26 Regional University Centres and a further six new Centres expected to be operational in Semester 1, 2023 which provide access to a university education for those students wishing to remain within their communities. There was also an increase in funding to Regional Universities (Regional University Campus Funding) in 2021 which aimed to increase regional student places.

### **Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES)**

The RRES program closed for new applicants after the 2022 round. The concerns of late RRES payments affecting students was passed on to the Australian Government Department of Education who in turn raised it with Queensland Tertiary Admission Centre (QTAC) who administered the RRES. There are a number of factors that affect student payment times and QTAC aimed to have payments paid within 2-4 weeks of the census dates, assuming all documents required are supplied on time.

The Department of Education also shared this issue with others, including the team responsible for administering the TAP, to ensure awareness of the importance of timely payments for students is considered in future programs, particularly those that are administered by external agencies.

### **Youth Allowance online application issues**

While not a motion in 2022, ICPA (Aust) has continued to liaise with Services Australia with issues raised by members about the Youth Allowance online application. Pleasingly, areas in the application have been amended to remove some ambiguities in the wording of the questions.

The following issues were presented as motions and actioned but to date we have had no response:

### **Relocation Scholarship**

Federal Council continues to advocate for the Relocation Scholarship criteria to be changed to include those rural and remote students who must relocate away from home to access a tertiary education and do not qualify for dependent Youth Allowance. 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 or for independent Youth Allowance recipients. It does not recognise the significant costs incurred by all rural and remote students over the duration of their tertiary education who must relocate to access higher education.



ICPA (Aust) welcomed the introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) however this payment only assists rural and remote students with relocation costs in their first year of tertiary study. Extending the Relocation Scholarship and aligning the TAP with the Relocation Scholarship amounts would benefit the Youth Allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students ineligible for Youth Allowance and ICPA (Aust) is recommending this at every opportunity.

#### **Independent Youth Allowance (YA) Parental Income Limit**

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. ICPA (Aust) continues to raise that this Youth Allowance category recognises these rural and remote students have earned the required amount in a 14-month period and proved their independence from their parents, therefore their parental income should not be a criteria.

#### **Dependent Youth Allowance (YA) Parental Income Limit**

Despite welcomed changes to the dependent YA eligibility criteria (removal of the Family Assets Test, the Family Actual Means Test and the changes to the Family Pool), the current parental income remains extremely low and a significant increase is required to be more reflective of the actual cost of supporting a dependent tertiary student. The cost of relocation and the ongoing costs of supporting a tertiary student for the duration of their tertiary course is beyond the means of many rural and remote families, particularly if they are also supporting other full-time student family members either at school or at tertiary level.

#### **Changes to the criteria for Youth Allowance**

The longstanding motion requesting that the Federal Government change the criteria for gaining independent Youth Allowance, so that rural and remote students who are not eligible for dependent Youth Allowance and have to leave home to study at tertiary level are eligible for independent Youth Allowance on commencement of their chosen tertiary course remains unresolved despite the following recommendations from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy - Final Report*:

***Recommendation Two: Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity by allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance .***

Implementation of this recommendation would

- assist in greater access to Youth Allowance for rural and remote tertiary students and their families who are unable to support their children through this education pathway.
- enable rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY, to then relocate to their place of study for a minimum of one further year and would also incorporate reviewing the recent changes to the parental means test cut-off.

ICPA (Aust) continues to urge the Federal Government to implement all of the recommendations made in the Report, which is available here:

[www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report](http://www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report)

#### **A review of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period**

Members asked for the removal of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period for rural and remote students who have fulfilled the self-supporting criteria for Youth Allowance as an independent and have to relocate to access tertiary education, to recognise the high cost these students face when relocating and the need for these savings to fund the cost of relocation, ongoing costs of living and attending university.

## **Rent Assistance**

Members asked for Rent Assistance to be substantially increased for rural and remote students receiving Youth Allowance to more closely reflect the real cost of living for this cohort and the actual rental market. Rent Assistance has not kept pace with the increases in rental costs.

ICPA (Aust) applauds the Federal Government's continued commitment and prioritisation of tertiary education and the measures already put in place. The introduction of all the above measures would ensure equity of access for rural and remote students to a tertiary education. ICPA (Aust) will continue to pursue and raise the profile of these current, previous and ongoing issues 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**

The 2022 Federal Conference presented and carried one motion in the Training Portfolio. The 2022-23 Council year has been focused on the current and previous motions, which continue to highlight the difficulties rural and remote students face when choosing to continue with their post school education, particularly as apprentices and trainees. Much needed change is required in this area as the country navigates an extreme skills shortage. We have continued to raise with Government that current initiatives and supports for trade-based industries are predominantly employer focused, and this must be addressed for employees undertaking training in these industries. The 2022 Skills Summit resulted in valuable recommendations which we hope will be implemented. We will inform members of any positive outcomes for those accessing post school trade training as they are announced.

### **2022 Motion**

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to increase investment in skills and Vocational Education Training (VET) and the focus on improvements to TAFE facilities as outlined in the 'Your Education Policy - TAFE Technology Fund'. At the conference, members voted for advocacy to ensure regional TAFEs are included in this measure.

Following conference, correspondence was sent to the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Skills and Training, the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner, and other relevant Minister, Senators and MP's seeking assurance that this commitment to provide high quality IT facilities, workshops, laboratories and telehealth simulators extends to regional, rural and remote communities and the TAFE institutions which provide services in these locations, allowing access for rural and remote students closer to home. Our correspondence reiterated that rural and remote apprentices and VET students are often under-represented in post-compulsory education and experience significant disadvantage in their efforts to pursue their chosen courses and that any measures aimed at improving quality of and access to TAFE facilities address these barriers would be welcomed.

ICPA (Aust) also welcomed the Government's commitment to increase opportunities for apprentices and trainees in areas of skill shortages, including the proposed plan for Fee Free TAFE places. This initiative has been introduced from January 2023 to provide more opportunities for apprentices and trainees, fill skills shortage gaps like those in trades and construction, resources, digital and cyber security, new energy and advanced manufacturing and provide opportunities for school leavers and other priority groups to access TAFE courses. ICPA (Aust) highlighted that it is imperative that there is acknowledgement of the barriers that rural and remote students face in accessing VET courses locally and recommended that these students are prioritised in the allocation of these Fee Free enrolments.

These topics were also discussed during our October 2022 delegations with Members of Parliament and Senators. To date we have not had a response from the Minister to this correspondence.

Other longstanding issues within the Training Portfolio continue to be addressed in correspondence and other communications with Ministers, MPs and Senators. ICPA (Aust) continues to raise the need for a significant increase to the commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) for Australian Apprentices and trainees and alignment of the allowance to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In correspondence to the Minister for Skills and Training as well as within our 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission ICPA (Aust) emphasised that an increase to the LAFHA is imperative to ensure adequate financial assistance is available for apprentices and trainees who are ineligible for dependent Youth Allowance but must live away from home to access their chosen pathway. We cited that apprentices from rural and remote locations face extreme financial pressure given the significant expenses associated with relocating and living away from the family home including rental bond, rent, utilities, food and fuel without adequate financial assistance to offset the cost of living.

A response received from the Minister described the Government's current initiatives to assisting students to access training opportunities, including those initiatives mentioned above, however no commitment was made to an increase to the LAFHA or its alignment to the CPI.

We recommend rural and remote apprentices, trainees and their families look carefully at the Government's Australian Apprenticeships site to ensure they are familiar with the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List and the Incentives System which can be found [here](#). Australian Apprenticeship Support Network Providers are tasked with establishing assistance but may need prompting for specific rural and remote supports available.

Further, ICPA (Aust) also continues to raise the request for a broadening of the Relocation Scholarship eligibility criteria to include apprentices and trainees to assist with the cost of relocation expenses incurred when embarking on vocational education, training courses and apprenticeship pathways away from home.

All issues within the Training Portfolio continue to be raised through every avenue available to ensure all rural and remote young Australians have the opportunity to pursue a VET pathway, apprenticeship or traineeship of their choice, regardless of their geographical location.

## Miscellaneous Motions

At the 2022 Federal Conference, three Miscellaneous Motions were carried. Two were thank you motions which did not require any advocacy action from Federal Council. Another motion requested that ICPA (Aust) allocates funds each year to an external professional consultancy to advise and mentor on how to best gain traction on some longstanding advocacies.

Following conference, Federal Council researched a range of professional consultancy firms. ICPA (Aust) is pleased to report that rural and regional public relations agency C7even has recently been retained to assist with broadening the ICPA profile, reach and engagement of ICPA with the wider community through media. C7even will assist ICPA (Aust) with many aspects of advocacy, including public relations and communications, digital media, strategy development and advertising and content marketing.

ICPA (Aust) has retained C7even for twelve months with a review following this period. Federal Council would like to thank members for supporting this initiative and we are very excited for the future benefits for the organisation and members.

## *Conclusion*

As outlined above, since the 2022 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 available avenues. 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 2023 Federal Conference in Darwin on 26 and 27 July. 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](http://www.icpa.com.au).

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