



Briefing Papers

School Travel Portfolio

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

Families in regional, rural and remote areas often have vast distances to travel to not only to access appropriate education and learning experiences, but also specialist assistance. Families also need to travel at times to support their students who can be attending schooling hundreds if not thousands of kilometres away. This may include long distance travel on rural and remote roads, public transportation such as buses, regional air travel, or a combination of travel types to go between their home and their school or tertiary institution in a larger centre in order to reach locations where they can access the most appropriate education for their needs.

SUMMARY

1. The inclusion of a Fares Allowance in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme similar to that of ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance.
2. Airfares and other travel concessions and dispensations available for geographically isolated students
 - Student concessions for airfares and other nationwide travel need to be made available for necessary boarding school travel and specific education appointments not covered by Patient Assisted Travel Schemes or the State equivalent available for medical specialist appointments.
 - Geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance should be able to access corporate travel airfare program discounts, similar to recipients of other government allowances.
3. Implementation of a national funding program that would guarantee no young geographically isolated children are left on school or child care buses by installing sensor devices that sense sound and movement, to detect and alert drivers if young children have been left in the vehicle.
4. Improvements are required to federally funded regional and remote road networks to ensure safe all-weather access standards for families who require these road networks in order for their children to access educational opportunities and support. Currently there are roads that have deteriorated and are in appalling conditions and therefore not safe.



ISSUE 1 – The inclusion of a Fares Allowance in the Assistance For Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme

Geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance and Second Home Allowance who must live away from home to attend school often have to travel vast distances to access their place of study. There are inequities in Commonwealth Student Travel Allowances. While the Federal Government has in place Fares Allowances to assist with student travel under the ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance Schemes, there is no provision for travel in the AIC Scheme which is the assistance a large number of geographically isolated children fall under. Having a Fares Allowance available under the AIC Scheme would ensure that all eligible geographically isolated students would have assistance available to them to help offset the cost of travelling to compulsory schooling.

RECOMMENDATION

That a Fares Allowance be added to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme.

ISSUE 2 - Airfares and Other Travel Concessions for Geographically Isolated Students

Student concessions for airfares and other nationwide travel need to be made available for necessary boarding school travel and specific education appointments not covered by Patient Assisted Travel Schemes or the State equivalent available for medical specialist appointments.

The availability of Air Travel in regional areas allows families to cover the distance necessary to travel to get to schooling or specialist services (such as speech pathologists) much more quickly and directly, however this travel often comes at a huge cost. In addition, many families must drive significant distances just to get to a regional airport before they begin their journey by air.

Air travel also offers the chance to access learning experiences that are not available in the regions where many of these students live, e.g. school excursions and camps. People also travel into regional areas such as specialist coaches, music teachers, artists and many others to work with children who live outside of city centres at various times of the year. The cost of bringing in these people with specialised skills can be very difficult to meet for rural and regional schools and school communities.

ICPA (Aust) is not aware of any “Student Concession” fares available for air travel. Bus services and railways often offer student concession fares to make student travel less expensive, but not airlines. Airlines also tend to have higher airfares for school holiday times, which are the times that many students who live in rural and remote areas need to travel to and from their place of schooling to their home.

Geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance should be able to access corporate travel airfare program discounts, similar to recipients of other government allowances.

Travelling vast distances to attend boarding school for many geographically isolated students necessarily means air travel. The cost of travel to and from boarding school can be prohibitive, even when there is competition in service providers. In many regional airports, there are few choices and airfares are consistently expensive.



A group booking scheme, attached to a Centrelink CRN number, for AIC students may assist in levelling out price spikes when isolated students need to travel to access education. This could assist with reducing the cost of travel borne by the families of AIC Boarding students accessing education vast distances from their home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That Governments consider further subsidisation of rural/remote/regional routes that show a demonstrated need.
- That National student concessions be available for air travel required by geographically isolated students.
- That Fares Allowance to be included in the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme similar to that of ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance. Uniformity is needed across all three schemes.
- That Residents Fares Scheme, Bush to Boarding and other rural student travel schemes continue and be expanded.
- That airlines retain several seats at “normal” pricing for a certain block of dates leading up to School terms beginning and ending.
- That the Commonwealth Fares Allowances be more uniform across assistance programs.
- That airlines should be encouraged to work together for the benefit of customers in forming partnerships and make connecting to destinations more seamless.
- That programs such as the Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme (RASS) be supported, and expansion provided for.
- That compensation is made available for plane cancellations, unexpected delays causing missed connections, particularly for boarding students from rural and remote areas, which is very distressing for younger students travelling alone.
- That geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance be able to access a corporate travel airfare program discount.

ISSUE 3 - Children Accidentally Being Left on Buses

Buses in rural and remote areas are often driven by the supervising teacher who must oversee all logistics of transporting and supervising the group of students. Buses with seatbelts have highbacked chairs which make it harder for the driver to see every child on the bus. Rural and remote Australia is often very hot, making the risk of being left a bus a dire one.



RECOMMENDATION

Implementation of a national funding program to install sensor devices that sense sound and movement, to detect and alert drivers if young children have been left in a vehicle.

ISSUE 4 - Federally Funded Regional and Remote Road Networks

Some roads in rural and remote Australia are federally funded. Poor condition and deterioration of remote roads has become a major concern for remote residents that have no choice but to travel on roads that are clearly not safe and are indeed impassable for weeks at a time.

Roads are vital and play an integral part of the safe delivery of students to face-to-face functions, correspondence materials delivery and the safe passage of Distance Education Staff to students' home visits and for all Department of Education and Community Services staff visiting communities as well as health workers and child care services.

Families and teaching staff have no option other than travelling on roads with extremely undesirable driving conditions which not only affects a safe environment but is also having a detrimental effect on education, and the business operations which sustain the lives of those in the bush.

This has been a continual safety concern for many of our members who must travel on such roads to access educational events on roads that are often in disrepair. The importance of continually improving regional and remote road networks to a safe and all-weather access standard for the benefit of our members to be able to access education and attend related services cannot be underestimated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improvements to federally funded regional and remote road networks to ensure safe all-weather access standards for families who require these road networks in order for their children to access educational opportunities and support.
- That the Federal Government urgently commits to a long-term maintenance strategy with adequate funding to bring national roads back to all weather and safe trafficable surface.