

## **BOARDING/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME 2021**

### **Nikki Macqueen**

The Boarding/Hostels/Second Home portfolio has continued to focus on key topics which concern our families, from recent issues brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic to more longstanding issues, including the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance. The ICPA (Aust) Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Briefing Paper, found here gives an outline of the key topics being worked on at this time.

<https://icpa.com.au/au/federal-boardinghostelssecond-home-briefing-paper>

### **COVID-19 and Beyond**

COVID-19 has continued to raise serious issues for boarding students and families right across Australia and we are looking at the likelihood of 2022 being similar. Due to the online platform of the 2020 ICPA Federal Conference only motions not already in policy were accepted on the agenda and four motions were carried in the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio. Two Pandemic related motions were tabled regarding the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines for boarding as well as the establishment of an Isolated Children's Pandemic Advisory Group made up of State and Federal Education Ministers, relevant authorities, the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and ICPA representatives to address the issue of boarders crossing state borders to access their compulsory schooling.

### **Interstate Boarders**

ICPA (Aust) and State Councils, along with other stakeholders including the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) have worked collaboratively and tirelessly on behalf of families who need to cross state borders to travel to and from boarding schools, including a joint submission made in November 2020 to the Hon Andrew Gee MP, Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education indicating the vision of a National Framework to support interstate boarders. Thanks must go to every ICPA State President and their Councils for the commitment that they have given which was beyond impressive and certainly appreciated by Federal Council and duly noted by the Federal Government.

Due to a cabinet reshuffle, Senator Bridget McKenzie replaced Minister Gee and we continue to work proactively with the Minister and her staff to ensure the rural and remote voice is strongly represented when it comes to boarders and borders.

Following a year and a half of collaborative and united advocacy for the establishment of a nationally consistent and practical solution to provide certainty and clarity for families whose children board interstate, the news that the National Cabinet had endorsed a National Code for Boarding Students in September 2021 was very welcomed. This Code sets forth a roadmap for nationally consistent, pragmatic, COVID-safe travel arrangements to help families navigate border restrictions across all states for boarding students. Further information and the Code can be found at

<https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/resources/national-code-boarding-school-students>

Our gratitude goes to Senator Bridget McKenzie, Senator Perin Davey, Minister Andrew Gee, Senator Susan McDonald and other Members of Parliament, Senators and stakeholders for their dedication to achieving this outcome for geographically isolated interstate boarding students and their families impacted by the pandemic.



Boarding schools across Australia have also been supportive and proactive in assisting geographically isolated families through some challenging times during the COVID-19 Pandemic. On behalf of our members, this message was published in the August 2020 ABSA magazine “Lights Out” which is sent to every Boarding School and Hostel throughout Australia to thank Boarding Schools for working closely with boarder families to deliver online lessons when the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in temporary closure.

### **Religious Discrimination Bill**

Following on from the 2020 Conference, ICPA (Aust) has also continued to monitor the introduction of the Religious Discrimination Bill to ensure that rural and remote students are not disadvantaged. Work had begun on this prior to last year’s Conference as this issue had been raised in early 2020. ICPA (Aust) has had several discussions with Members of Parliament, Senators and various individuals and organisations including ABSA regarding the Religious Discrimination Bill. At this stage, the Bill has been tabled, however we note there have been no further advancements from our reviews of the legislation. We shall continue our work in this area and monitor the situation closely.

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

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme continues to be a central focus of the Portfolio. ICPA (Aust) has welcomed the commitment by the Government to continue to pay the allowance in 2020 and 2021 even while some geographically isolated boarding students have been unable to access their schools. Federal Council encourages members to contact the AIC hotline 13 23 18 should they be impacted in any way in the future.

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate strongly for the AIC allowance to be increased across the board and to be aligned with the CPI Education Sub-index, rather than standard CPI rate, as this does not reflect nor keep pace with the ongoing rises in educational costs for boarding. COVID-19 has extenuated this issue, with the economic impact of the Pandemic resulting in negligible increases to CPI and therefore no increase to the AIC Boarding Allowance from 2020 to 2021 and only a limited increase to the AIC Second Home Allowance. This is very concerning as it will result in further increases to out-of-pocket expenses for geographically isolated families to educate their children, which are already proving unsustainable for many. ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise this issue at every opportunity in the coming months.

Following Canberra delegations in May, ICPA (Aust) sought to strengthen its AIC advocacy in an effort to better represent the experiences and needs of our geographically isolated children and their families. Ministers, Members of Parliament, Senators and Government Departments will receive a newly developed AIC Briefing Paper, which collates all the AIC issues in the one document. We have also supplemented this with case studies of members’ situations forwarded to us from State Councils. This AIC Paper can be found on the ICPA website at

<https://icpa.com.au/au/federal-assistance-isolated-children-aic-briefing-paper>

To assist our advocacy, ICPA (Aust) has prepared the below table using available data to exemplify the changes in boarding fees in comparison to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance. While state to state the figures are quite diverse and we have not been able to obtain all data for all states, there is no doubt that the trend is boarding fees are rising significantly more than AIC each year. Federal Council is immensely grateful for the AIC payment and acknowledge the growth in the payment over the years since its inception, however, we continue to harbour concerns about the impacts

of the ever-increasing gap between boarding fees and the AIC payment on the ability for our families to access adequate schooling for their children.

Comparison of average Boarding fees and Assistance For Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme								
AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2015	AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2021	% Increase of AIC 2015-2021	State	Average Boarding Fee 2015	Average Boarding Fee 2021	% Increase of Boarding fees 2015-2021	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2015	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2021
\$7 897	\$8 557	8%	Vic	-	\$26 631	-	-	32%
			WA	-	\$22 730	-	-	38%
			SA	\$19 991	\$22 789	14%	39%	37%
			ACT	-	\$26 042	-	-	33%
			Tas	\$15 467	\$19 533	26%	51%	44%
			NT	\$14 233	\$24 830	74%	55%	34%
			Qld	\$17 288	\$20 430	18%	46%	42%
AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2014	AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2021	% Increase of AIC 2014-2021	State	Average Boarding Fee 2014	Average Boarding Fee 2021	% Increase of Boarding fees 2014-2021	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2014	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2021
\$7 667	\$8 557	12%	NSW	\$20 331	\$25 206	24%	38%	34%

AIC online renewal has been a motion raised often throughout the years and it is something that we mention in every meeting we have with the Department of Social Services. We have been told it will be rolled out in 2022, and we shall continue to hold the Department to that. There have often been mistakes in AIC paperwork sent from the Department to families as well as erroneous payments, and we are hopeful that an online renewal/application system will alleviate these inaccuracies.

### Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology for School Funding

At the 2019 Federal Conference, members raised concerns on the Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology for school funding and its impact on regional, rural and remote students and the schools they attend, especially those who must attend independent boarding schools to access their education.

ICPA (Aust) has been monitoring this topic closely and since March 2020, has lodged two submissions to the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) in which Council accentuated the concerns of our members. We also took the opportunity to participate in a consultation with the Board where we raised the concerns of members and highlighted the unique circumstances of rural and remote families, especially around the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) methodology along with the disregard for boarding operations in the funding measure. This was also a key topic raised during delegations in Parliament House in May this year. The Hon Alan Tudge MP, Minister for Education has tasked Minister Gee with investigating the anomalies which have been raised by ICPA and other organisations to ascertain the impact on rural, regional and remote schools, and we hope that this will see this issue addressed.

### Other Portfolio Activities

In May 2021 ICPA (Aust) President Alana Moller and myself were guest presenters on an ABSA webinar titled “Solving the Homesickness Challenge” directed at Heads of Boarding across Australia. We thank ABSA for the opportunity to put forward a rural and remote parents’ perspective and for inviting us to be involved

in such a great presentation. We look forward to participating in such forums again in the future. Federal Council is pleased to be able to work with ABSA on a range of topics and are grateful for their ongoing support and assistance for not only the boarding portfolio but for ICPA as a whole.

Thank you to the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio Kristen Coggan, Nikki Mahony, Kim Hughes and Alana Moller for your assistance this year. This will be my final report as I shall be stepping off Council after this Conference. Over the seven years I have been on Council, I have either led or been a member of this portfolio, and I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute. During this time, I have seen the Portfolio change name, the launch of the Australian Boarder Parent Handbook by Dr Kate Hadwen, undertook the ICPA (Aust) AIC Application Survey and the Boarding School Access Research for Geographically Isolated Students, had countless phone calls and meetings with Department officials including the legendary Guy Mathews and Matt Ferguson plus attended three ABSA Conferences representing ICPA (Aust). I would like to express my heartfelt thank you to Richard Stokes, Tom Dunsmore and their team at ABSA for always being only a phone call away and for keeping their door open. The support they offer ICPA and our rural and remote boarding families across Australia is astounding. Thank you to the three Presidents I have served my term under: Judy Sinclair Newton, Wendy Hick and Alana Moller, and to every Federal Councillor during that time. As I have always said, ICPA has given me far more than I have given it.