

# ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



## 2022 DISTANCE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT

Ali Allison

I was honoured to be given the role of leader of the Federal Distance Education portfolio and have enjoyed learning a lot whilst working in this portfolio. ICPA continues to be a strong advocate for geographically isolated families in Australia who have no choice other than to educate their children via distance education. I have taught both of my sons over the past decade in our geographically isolated schoolroom via distance education and am very aware of the issues and challenges families face.

### **Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)**

Metropolitan, regional and rural families across Australia now have lived experience of educating their children at home, due to school lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. ICPA (Aust) hopes that this experience and understanding of the challenges faced when educating children at home may help with our continued advocacy for a Distance Education Tutor Allowance (DETA). Remuneration and recognition for Distance Education Tutors continues to be a dominating issue for geographically isolated families. Over the past decade motions have continued to be brought to federal conference by branches asking for ICPA to lobby the relevant authorities for a DETA.

Following the 2021 Federal Conference in Longreach a letter was written to Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, former Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education. Her response outlined that this issue was a state and territory issue.

In response to this letter Federal Council wrote an open letter to all stakeholders who value rural and remote education, including the relevant ministers and shadow ministers. In this letter we emphasised that, *“The unique issue of supervision and delivery of these (distance education) programs within individual family’s schoolrooms across rural and remote Australia goes beyond standard educational delivery and requires a distinctive multi-faceted approach.”*

We also drew particular attention to the extensive, unremunerated work performed by the home tutor, as detailed in the table below.

<b>Family member as geographically isolated distance education tutor</b>	
Average hours per day	<b>6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year</b>
Average years spent as DE tutor for one child	<b>8 years (kindy/preschool plus primary school)</b>
Average total hours spent tutoring one child	<b>9 600–12 800 hours</b>
Minimum Wage	<b>\$20.33 per hour</b>
Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	<b>\$195 168 - \$260 244</b>
Superannuation @ 9.5% foregone	<b>\$18 540 - \$24 721</b>

ICPA (Aust) raised the need for a collaborative and consistent solution involving both State and National tiers of government to address this situation which is so important to rural and remote Australia.

ICPA (Aust) continue to raise awareness of this issue through the Geographically Isolated Distance Education Day (GIDE). Last year we continued the campaign over December and into January 2022. We feel it would be beneficial to boost awareness and understanding of this issue by putting the faces of our amazing distance education tutors out into the world and sharing some of the staggering statistics of time spent in the schoolroom and the forgone wages and superannuation. We would like to see this campaign continue and are calling out for the 85% of Mums who are tutors in their distance education schoolrooms to share their stories with us. Much work has been done in this area and it will continue.



### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) - Distance Education**

In April, Federal Council was very pleased to receive a breakdown of AIC data by State/Territory, by eligibility categories and by allowance type. This data will assist Federal Council's advocacy by giving a good understanding of the number of people and families in the categories relevant to ICPA (Aust).

Two motions were brought forward at Federal conference in Longreach regarding the AIC, requesting ICPA (Aust) advocate for:

- An increase to the AIC for geographically students who are completing their secondary schooling via distance education, and
- An inclusion in the eligibility criteria for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance for students who travel with their families for the purpose of rural work to areas without access to schooling and live away from their listed permanent place of residence for the majority of the school year.

Correspondence was to Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, then Minister for Families and Social Services, in December 2021 regarding both issues and Federal Council received a response in March. In a response from Senator Ruston, it was acknowledged that there may be some issues with AIC eligibility for itinerant families, with a commitment made to progress work to update the Guidelines to reflect this. While the ICPA (Aust) request for an increase to the AIC Distance Education Allowance for secondary students was noted, no commitment was made to address this request.

Federal Council began regular meetings with representatives from the Department of Social Services and Services Australia in February. These meetings are an opportunity to raise issues associated with the AIC, both from a legislation and implementation perspective and ICPA (Aust) is confident this quarterly meeting format will ensure the needs of member families can be addressed timely and effectively.

I look forward to continuing work in the Distance Education portfolio and working towards equitable access to education for geographically isolated families whose children study via distance education.