

# ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



## 2023 FEDERAL CONFERENCE DISTANCE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO REPORT Ali Allison

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For so many geographically isolated families distance education is a necessity, and the only way that our children can receive their compulsory education, particularly in primary school, because of where we live. Travelling every day to a local school is impossible due to the geographically isolated locations of our homes. We have no choice.

For many Mums, that means sacrificing their place in the paid workforce as they take on the role of Home Tutor, often for an extended length of time. For others, as it is impractical for Mum to take on the role, it can mean finding the right person to welcome into their homes to take on the role as Home Tutor of their children. Or it can mean finding extra workers to fill in the role on farm/property that Mum may normally play, as she needs to be in the schoolroom full time.

All of us manage the way we navigate our journey through distance education differently. But there is one universal truth, it can be a stressful, onerous and expensive task for families to provide their children with the best education they can via distance education.

My children have completed their primary distance education and I am no longer in the schoolroom full time. I have mixed feelings about this, I miss spending my days with our boys and watching them grow and learn, it was such a rewarding time. But one of my overwhelming feelings is "How did I do that?!" When they finished, I was worried that I would get bored- how naïve was I!! Between running our business, a part time teaching role in town, running a household and being a Mum I am kept extremely busy, which I love. But what concerns me is how I used to manage all this as well as being a full time distance education Home Tutor.

This is the reality for so many geographically isolated families, and we just keep going, keep fulfilling our role and doing amazing work providing the best education we can for our children. Which is why ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for geographically isolated families educating their children through distance education.

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

Motions calling for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) continue to be brought to Federal Conference. After conference in 2022 ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, and all relevant Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament calling for the establishment of a DETA, outlining the possible financial loss and implications of a mother undertaking the distance education tutor role and all the other demands that providing a Home Tutor for their children places on geographically isolated families. Following on from COVID-19, a newfound empathy for the challenges of teaching children at home and the election of a new government, Federal Council felt a certain level of positivity and optimism that our advocacy may not fall on deaf ears.

Coupled with the Australian Government's commitment to the importance of participation of women in the workforce, we sent a letter to the Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher,



highlighting the impact of taking on the role of a distance education tutor in geographically isolated locations has on women's employment opportunities and financial status and the impact on family businesses when the mother is taken out of crucial roles in the office, paddock and much more, to take up the responsibility of full-time tutor. In a response received from the Minister in September 2022, unfortunately she indicated that the issue was only related to education so did not consider our reference to the impact of this on rural and remote women.

Further, both in a reply received from the Minister for Education and during meeting delegations to Canberra we continue to receive the message that 'the day-to-day operations of schooling, including teaching and supervision, is a matter for State Education Ministers.' This continues to be a great concern for ICPA (Aust) as the role of a geographically isolated distance education tutor is a similar undertaking regardless of what state or territory you live in. The financial burden placed on families is significant and we continue to maintain that the most equitable way to recognise and remunerate the small number of geographically isolated families educating their children via distance education is by an allowance that is closely aligned with the Federal Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance.

During our delegation meeting in May 2023 with the Assistant Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm, we again requested that the topic be tabled at an Education Ministers Meeting (EMM) This meeting is a forum where all State, Territory and Federal Education Ministers collaborate on decision making regarding education across the country.

ICPA (Aust) firmly believes we need to continue to campaign strongly in this space and keep telling the story of the plight of geographically isolated families faced with the task of teaching their own children due to where they reside. Federal Council are seeking involvement from ICPA members from across the country willing to share their stories and a 'face' to our campaign.

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

ICPA (Aust) continues to work closely with the Department of Social Services and Services Australia on issues relevant to members. Through this positive relationship we have also been able to raise individual AIC cases for members. We have received positive outcomes for some families who had previously been unsuccessful with their AIC-Distance Education (AIC-DE) applications. Federal Council encourages members to reach out should they have any concerns regarding their AIC payments or eligibility and we can endeavour to raise these with the relevant departments if appropriate.

### **Student Wellbeing Boost**

Concerns were raised at last year's conference that due to their context, distance education schools and Schools of the Air may not be considered in student support programs designed by the Federal Government to be implemented in schools, particularly in relation to the Student Wellbeing Boost. In a joint media release earlier this year from Minister for Education Hon Jason Clare MP and Hon Emma McBride MP, Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Health it was noted that the Student Wellbeing Boost is a 'delivery of additional one-off funding for extra mental health and wellbeing resources and initiatives', 'with schools receiving on average \$20,000 for use in the 2023 school year.'

In correspondence and meetings with the Federal Minister for Education, we were reassured that these schools would definitely have an opportunity to participate in this program. We would encourage members to contact their school principal regarding how this program is being utilised in their school.

Equitable access to education, regardless of where you live, is an important issue to all of us who live in rural and remote Australia, particularly those of us who live in geographically isolated locations who



have no choice other than to provide our children with the best education possible through distance education. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate on behalf of all our members to ensure that all our children living in rural and remote Australia have the best educational opportunities possible.