

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2023 FEDERAL CONFERENCE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PORTFOLIO REPORT Julia Broad

ICPA (Aust) has taken many opportunities this year to raise the inequities faced by rural and remote families in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, in attempt to shape the services provided to support the education, wellbeing and development of Australia's rural and remote children. 2023 has been the year of review and consultation for ECEC in Australia. The Federal Department of Education Early Childhood and Youth Section has been conducting a comprehensive review of all early childhood programs and systems and Federal Council has attended consultations and lodged submissions for the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Cheaper Child Care) Bill, a market research project by Deloitte Access Economics, the Early Years Vision, the Early Years Strategy, In Home Care Review and the Productivity Commission review of ECEC in Australia. At the time of writing, outcomes from these reviews are not yet available, however Federal Council will ensure members are informed as developments occur.

The issues that have been repeatedly raised in these submissions and in our advocacy this year include the need for:

- Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 3-4 year olds.
- A rural and remote In Home Education program that will allow children to learn, develop and thrive, including the introduction of guidelines to regulate the fees that In Home Care providers can charge to families and educators.
- Long term continuity of funding for rural and remote mobile learning services.
- Access to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for unique rural and remote ECEC programs.
- Specific rural and remote staff incentives to support the staffing of these programs.
- A National Working with Children Check.

Along with the current review of the In Home Care program, there is an In Home Care Quality and Safety Project being implemented by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) over the next two years. It aims to build on the strengths of the existing In Home Care framework. Phase one of the project will focus on the development of an enhanced IHC national framework and supporting IHC Standards, and an approach to pilot the standards with a sample group of IHC Support Agencies, Providers and Educators which will be delivered by the end of 2023. Phase two of the project will involve implementation of the enhanced IHC framework through a pilot and supported by a professional development program from early 2024 which will be designed to build awareness, knowledge and capability through eLearning modules, webinars and workshops. An ongoing professional practice network will be implemented.

Meeting with the Minister for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Hon. Dr Anne Aly MP during our October 2022 delegation, gave us another great opportunity to present our members' issues. Minister Aly was definitely open minded and has aspirations of improving ECEC across Australia. Federal Council also raised all ECEC issues again with many Members of Parliament and Senators during our most recent delegation in May. Senator Matt O'Sullivan and Senator Ross Cadell undertook to take questions to senate estimates on behalf of Federal Council and the following question was put



forward; *Why are students participating in approved Early Childhood Distance Education programs ineligible to receive the AIC Distance Education Allowance?* We look forward to the result of that process. Senator Perin Davey also raised issues surrounding rural and remote Early Childhood Education and Care during senate estimates hearings. Federal Council are encouraged by the support of these and other members and senators.

The 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission lodged by ICPA (Aust) once again included Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 3-4 year old geographically isolated children and surety of funding for mobile early learning programs. ICPA (Aust)'s advocacy in regard to these topics continues to cite the recommendation from the 2020 Report into Education in Remote and Complex Environments, namely that the Commonwealth implement AIC for 3-4 year olds to support early childhood education and that funding arrangements be modified for mobile early childhood education to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services were not allocated in the 2021 Budget as per the recommendations, nor any subsequent Federal Budgets .

Federal President, Alana Moller recently attended a Rural and Regional Childcare Roundtable facilitated by Grain Growers. This brought together prominent leaders and stakeholders to discuss childcare issues in regional and remote communities with Minister for Early Childhood Education and Care, the Honourable Dr Anne Aly MP to discuss cost and availability of childcare in regional areas which is putting pressure on our primary producers who are already faced with workforce constraints. Grain Growers seek to undertake further research on potential solutions for rural and regional childcare during 2023, and ICPA (Aust)'s insights at this roundtable have helped shape the formation of that work.

Thank you to our Federal Early Childhood Education and Care team of Alana, Laura, Kylie, Wendy and Ali for your support and guidance as I have developed my understanding of this portfolio and lodged the many submissions. I look forward to working with you further on these important issues.