

**The Isolated Children's Parents'
Association of Australia
ICPA (Aust)**



2024 Federal Conference

**Motions
All-in-one Doc**

24 and 25 July 2024

Sydney, New South Wales

BOARDING SCHOOLS/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME

A1. Richmond Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government and the Minister for Social Services for an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance of at least \$4000 and the alignment of the allowance to the Consumer Price Index: Education sub index to assist geographically isolated students’ access to boarding school.”

Explanation:

We sincerely thank ICPA (Aust) for its strong advocacy to see this measure included in the 2024-25 Federal Budget, which disappointingly did not occur.

At its inception in 1973, the intention of the AIC Boarding Allowance was to cover at least 55% of average boarding fees across Australia. At present, the allowance is barely covering 40% in some states.

An increase of \$4000 per student would restore the allowance to its original intent. The alignment of the allowance to the Education sub index would ensure the allowance did not erode over time and was reflective of the true costs of educational expenses.

Affordable education goes to the heart of rural and remote communities and their sustainability. If geographically isolated families cannot afford to send their children away to boarding school to access a secondary education, we will continue to experience the mass exodus of families from these communities, the impact of which most probably will not be noticed by mainstream Australia until local butcher, grocery stores and supermarket shelves are void of Australian made produce. Access to affordable education does not only affect rural and remote families. It affects the entire country which relies on these families to feed it, and it affects the national economy which is reliant on agricultural exports. The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is not a welfare payment. It is an education ACCESS payment and should be treated as such by the Federal Government.

A2. Nyngan Branch (NSW)

DEEMED COVERED BY A1

“That ICPA (Aust) implores the Federal Government to increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to more closely reflect the actual cost of educating geographically isolated students.”

Explanation:

Boarding school fees continue to rise at a greater rate than CPI. The AIC Boarding Allowance, an equity allowance, requires constant updating to reflect this increasing burden placed on isolated families educating their children. Boarding school fees increase at a greater rate than the AIC Allowance. Should our government be serious about providing the world's best education opportunities to equip our children with the skills they require, this equity allowance needs to remain equitable, allowing isolated parents’ choice in education, equivalent to their city counterparts. We should not be disadvantaged by distance.

A3. Tambo Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for an increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to cover **at least** 55% of the average cost of boarding."

Explanation:

It was extremely disappointing that, after a solid campaign by ICPA Australia, there was no increase in the AIC in the recently tabled federal budget. It is acknowledged across the board that cost-of-living pressures are real, and that those pressures extend to rural and remote locations. That coupled with below average market prices for primary produce has exacerbated the fiscal challenges remote families face to access secondary education where there is no choice.

A4. Central West Plains Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government review and amend Rule 3 in the application for Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) form SY040 to remove the continuing requirement once the initial requirement has been met."

Explanation:

The proposed amendment should state that the student does not have reasonable access to a suitable state school for at least 20 school days per year due to adverse travel conditions or other uncontrollable circumstances **and** once approved, the application should remain valid for the child's remaining schooling years (unless the child changes residential address).

In its current form, the existing criteria for eligibility for funding under this rule does not make any allowance for the fluctuating state of rural conditions or rural access routes. The requirement to reapply during each climatic event causes undue hardship on applicants who need the predictability of funding to make decisions as to schooling.

Dry and wet conditions provide a level of uncertainty and impracticability for families in seeking educational equality for their children. Once a family becomes eligible for the allowance at any stage during the child's schooling, the eligibility should remain to allow such families to make long term arrangements for educating their children. Access to education should not be restricted by a family's ability to traverse a particular road on such an ad hoc basis.

A student is regarded as geographically isolated from appropriate schooling if one of the following rules is met:

Rule 1: The distance between the principal family home and the nearest appropriate state school is at least 56 kilometres by the shortest practicable route

Rule 2: The distance between the principal family home and the nearest appropriate state school by the shortest practicable route is at least 16 kilometres and the distance between the principal family home and the nearest available transport service to that school is at least 4.5 kilometres by the shortest practicable route

Rule 3: The student does not have reasonable access to an appropriate state school for at least 20 school days in a year because of adverse travel conditions (e.g. impassable roads) or other circumstances beyond the family's control.

A5. Central West Plains Branch (NSW)**LOST**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government review Rule 2 in the application for Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) form SY040 such that it be amended to exclude the 4.5km distance from home to bus stop criteria."

Explanation:

The existing selection criteria was adopted during a period of time that is no longer reflective of today's living arrangements. It is arbitrary to require a child who lives more than 16kms, but less than 56kms, to attend their nearest local educational facility purely because their home happens to be located closer than 4.5km from a point of collection, whilst at the same time, children on the exact same bus route will achieve funding. The outcome is such that a child who actually lives closer to town than other children will receive the allowance, whilst those at a greater distance may not.

This rule is seeking to exclude from funding any child who happens to reside in a dwelling close to a main road. This location does not however necessarily mean the student has access to an equitable educational experience. The rule does not contemplate that an eligible family may have access to a larger school which provides extensive opportunities, choice of subjects and extra-curricular activities whilst a family living closer to a smaller less resourced school in a lesser populated area may not be eligible. It is an inconsistent and unfair approach to eligibility.

Further, the rule fails to take into consideration other impediments that exist with regard to public bus travel for example alternating routes that are not currently properly considered. The rule needs to be amended to more accurately reflect the unique challenges faced by rural students which should not be determined purely by distance from the bus stop.

This particular rule is one of the single most inequitable forms of determining funding in all of the allowances currently available and creates huge unjust division amongst rural families seeking an education that is dependent on a school bus route over which an individual family has no control.

A6. Central West Plains Branch (NSW)**WITHDRAWN**

"That ICPA (Aust) request the Federal Government review the acceptable reasons for seeking eligibility for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) on the basis of serious educational disadvantage at a local school."

Explanation:

Location alone should no longer be the sole determinant of eligibility for the AIC.

Currently, the following factors are not considered relevant in seeking assistance:

- A desire for the student to attend a school of choice, including a school that is classified as 'specialist' or 'selective' or a school that will 'enhance the student's academic prospects'
- The standard of teaching facilities
- The socioeconomic, racial or ethnic mix of a school
- Non-core subjects (e.g., subjects other than maths, science and English) being studied by distance education methods
- Inability to continue study in the same subjects or the same system after the student's parents have moved from one non geographically isolated area to another
- Family connections with another school
- Difficulties with out of school care arrangements
- A desire for a family to send a child to a boarding school.

A review of the reasons acceptable in determining disadvantage should absolutely be reviewed to include:

- i. A student's ability to access all range of subjects, being taught by a suitably qualified teacher from year 7. Distance education mediums are an unacceptable and inequitable alternative requiring an ability to work unsupervised and to be incredibly self-driven. These are unfair expectation to place on high school students which often result in students choosing alternative or lower level subjects to avoid distance education.
- ii. In circumstances where the local alternative cannot provide consistent and capable access to core subjects being taught by suitably qualified teaching staff for the entirety of the child's high schooling (not just at the HSC level).
- iii. The standard of teaching facilities can have a hugely detrimental effect on a student's educational outcomes and should be considered. All students should have access to equitable learning environments.
- iv. Presence or absence of appropriate cohort. Many families are seeking a boarding school education for their children to ensure their children are exposed to children of similar ages (particularly where primary school has been available only in a multi-age context). Absence of adequate cohort can result in significant disadvantage, educationally and socially including:
 - a. Lack of choice of subject due to lack of numbers
 - b. Inability to attract suitably qualified educators due to small size of schools
 - c. Little to no choice in sporting or extracurricular activities for children due to inadequate numbers of children to form teams or justify the provision of activities. This often results in one parent having to travel huge distances to provide basic opportunities to children at a huge financial cost to families. The alternative is that the child misses out.
- v. The desire to send a child to a boarding school. The desire to send a child to boarding school is not something that any parent would choose to do if children had access to the equivalent educational, sporting or extra-curricular experiences of families living in more densely populated areas. Parents are seeking equality in access to education for their children – parents in rural areas want the same for their children that we could expect if we lived in a larger town or city. All our children deserve the same access to a minimum standard of education.

A7. Queensland State Council

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Services Australia to have Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) payments available, as an option, of three payments instead of four, for families with Year 12 students."

Explanation:

Adding the option of receiving three AIC payments for families with students in the final year of formal schooling would allow families the opportunity to use the allowance to cover fees that come in three term invoices instead of four. When the final AIC payment comes to the school in Term Four and there are no outstanding fees, families have to ask for refunds from schools which takes time and can be confusing. Having the option of three payments also allows for AIC to meet the costs of school fees when they are occurring, which helps reduce financial pressure on families.

A8. Louth Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies relevant ministers to support the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding school."

Explanation:

In many rural and remote locations there is limited or no access to suitable compulsory education facilities and therefore boarding school is the only option. This can often become unaffordable to families, especially when there is more than one child, so families are forced to relocate to employment with closer access to school facilities, resulting in further loss to the already diminished workforce of remote regions. In recognition of conditions, the Australian Tax Office already offers FBT concessions for employer provision of housing where there is a lack of sufficient residential accommodation in remote locations.

Similar concessions should also apply when employers financially assist with the schooling costs of employees' children where there is a lack of appropriate schooling facilities available in those same remote locations. Currently when employers offer financial assistance towards the cost of schooling, the payment is deemed a Fringe Benefit and taxed at the applicable rate of 47% so any contribution made by the employer is compounded with almost half the amount again in tax.

The cost of accessing compulsory education for geographically isolated children should not be taxed, irrespective of who is bearing the cost. Affordable access to boarding schools for employees who work in remote areas provides their children with equitable access to school facilities as those in non-remote regions. It also serves to keep valuable families in remote Australia, supporting an already challenged workforce.

A9. Walgett Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) encourages the relevant government departments to continue and expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program pilot."

Explanation:

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks for the implementation of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program that is a pilot program that commenced this year.

This scholarship has been greatly received by our members and will be an incredible help to assist the recipient families with boarding fees and all the associated costs.

We would like to advocate for this program to continue and be expanded by increasing the number of scholarships on offer, this will allow many more families the opportunity to stay in their rural or remote communities where suitable local alternatives don't exist and send their children to a school that offers boarding.

We acknowledge that the number of scholarships were small being a pilot program, but there is a real need for such a scholarship, as demonstrated by the number of applicants deemed eligible but were unsuccessful. This need is even more prevalent in the more marginalised and disadvantaged rural and remote areas that have inequitable access to quality education.

A10. Wentworth Branch (NSW)**DEEMED COVERED BY A9**

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education to continue the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program beyond the one-off 2024 pilot.”

Explanation:

The Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program announcement came as welcome relief to struggling families across remote and very remote Australia whose only access to secondary education is boarding school. However, the relief was very short lived when families realised that it was a one-off program that provided a maximum of 70 scholarships only, once.

Our branch fails to see how you can effectively evaluate a program based on a one-off, very small number of participants. It appears more like a tokenistic gesture to silence a group of people and hose down media attention rather than actually providing effective assistance to bridge the ever-growing education gap.

If the government want families in remote and very remote Australia and they want the children to grow to become productive members of society then they must provide long term meaningful access and assistance to education for those families.

A11. South Australia State Council**DEEMED COVERED BY A9**

“That ICPA (Aust) works with the Department of Education to explore the possibility of extending the Commonwealth Regional Scholarships Program into the future.”

Explanation:

The creation of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarships program was warmly welcomed by ICPA members across regional and remote Australia. The opportunity for families whose only choice for a compulsory secondary education for their children is to send them away to boarding school, to be able to apply for and possibly receive a scholarship and significant financial support was an exciting prospect and one that hundreds applied for. And whilst the scope of the program was in no way large enough to be inclusive of the hundreds of families who applied, it was seen as the Federal Government recognising that many regional and remote students and their families are in dire need of financial support to educate their children. We hope that through considered advocacy Federal Council will be able to demonstrate that continuing this program is of great importance and will have a positive impact on families for years to come.

S1. Northern Territory State Council**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that Services Australia reviews the “No reasonable access to school conditions” to better cater for travelling contractor families whose core business is located in geographically isolated areas.

Explanation:

The Northern Territory has a number of families who travel vast distances in isolated areas to conduct their business such as contract mustering and fencing/yard building. For these families it means living in remote locations for up to 11 months of the year. At present, to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance, these families must provide evidence of a minimum of five different working locations in remote areas to be considered transient and receive AIC. ICPA NT requests that these rules be made more streamlined to enable these families easier access to the AIC payments that they are entitled to.

These families are not meeting the geographically isolated test because what is listed as their ‘home’ with Centrelink is often in a semi-urban area - a house or shed block in a regional centre like Katherine,

Alice Springs or Tennant Creek. In reality this is simply their postal address, their sense of security, storage and/or investment. Their HOME is often a travelling convoy - caravans or trucks - set up with all business, home and school. The location of this travelling home is in very geographically isolated locations across rural Australia.

At present they can only access AIC by the “No reasonable access to school” clause and its five essential criteria.

“You may also get it if your work requires frequent moves and if all of the following apply:

- You need to relocate the family for work.*
- You need to work onsite and do not operate out of a base.*
- You relocate at least 5 times a year for work.*
- Your livelihood has an itinerant lifestyle, for example a shearer or fruit picker.*
- If your child travelled with you, they would miss at least 100 school days at a local government school a year.”*

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/no-reasonable-access-to-school-conditions-for-assistance-for-isolated-children?context=22121>

The clause that is causing an increasing number of geographically isolated families to miss out is point 3 - “You relocate at least 5 times a year for work.”

Families have been asked to provide a minimum of 5 invoices to different properties/businesses to prove this clause. In the NT, especially in the Barkly Tablelands, the size of the properties are so huge and often owned by the same giant corporations, that it is feasible for contracting families to be out working for the majority of the year but not meet the 5 different properties/business rule. These families are not living at the station homesteads or out-stations - they are self-contained on a job site out in the wilderness. In reality, they are often “relocating” their home camp multiple times. Even though these may be 50km apart because they are on the same pastoral property, the applications are being rejected by Services Australia.

We are asking that greater flexibility to be made in assessing this criteria and increased understanding by Services Australia in the unique situations faced by these families.

This is an ever-growing need as the rural workforce is increasingly moving towards a contract base and whole families are increasingly working together in remote and very remote locations. Being able to access AIC is a requirement to receive the NT Isolated Student Assistance Scheme grants. These families are already going to amazing lengths to educate their children under difficult conditions and need to be supported.

S2. Tambo Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education and other relevant stakeholders to implement an exemption for schools/boarding facilities providing on site living facilities for essential supervisory staff from Fringe Benefits Tax on that accommodation.”

Explanation:

It is critical that the Federal Government change the policy on Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) as it currently applies to essential boarding school staff required to “live in” to perform their duty of care of residential students in metropolitan boarding institutions. This tax negatively impacts on the cost of an equitable education for isolated students.

It is obvious that boarding schools must charge fees that cover costs incurred to them. Staff wages are a clear example of expenses that must be factored into boarding school fees. However, if some of the taxes that are currently applied to boarding schools were removed, the fees charged to families could also be lessened. The removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) on residential accommodation for essential supervisory staff could significantly reduce the costs incurred by some boarding schools. The Australian Boarding Schools' Association (ABSA) estimates that the FBT on the residential accommodation for the boarding schools in large cities adds an average of approximately \$2000 per child. Staff accommodation is a fundamental necessity of a boarding school. Boarding school staff must live on site to supervise the boarders in their care.

Educational expenses are considerably high for families who must send their children to boarding school due to geographical location. Unfair taxes are adding to the high costs of educating students from rural and remote areas. The Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) that is applied to essential boarding staff in large cities is one example of the taxes that are impacting affordability and accessibility to an equitable education.

In addition, the taxes appear to be levied across sectors in a most inequitable and inconsistent manner. For example, FBT is applied to boarding supervisors' accommodation, yet it is not levied on aged care facilities or military establishments. As another example, GST is levied on boarding school food, yet not on the food provided in aged care facilities.

Boarding associations and boarding schools have been lobbying for the Fringe Benefits Tax on essential boarding school staff to be removed. ICPA (Aust) supporting this advocacy and assisting in raising awareness of this concern where possible would lend a greater voice to this issue on behalf of rural and remote students.

S3. Midwest Branch (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Federal Ministers for Education and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and other relevant ministers, for additional financial support to schools for students with a disability from rural and remote areas, who have no choice for their education but to go to boarding school."

Explanation:

Currently students who attend boarding schools who have no other educational option and who require additional support in the boarding house due to a disability diagnosis do not have access to funding for support.

There should be an additional payment made to schools as a supplement to 'Individual Disability Education' funding to support the specific needs of a student living with disability in the residential boarding house system.

These vulnerable and rural and remote students are supported in the school, but in many schools are left to navigate the complexities of a boarding house alone, and without appropriate support.

Brave are the families who try to educate the geographically isolated kids with a disability, this journey is full of hope and dreams for an inclusive education for our kids who will need it the most to navigate the complexities of life. Braver are the kids who give it a go.

We want all our geographically isolated kids to have an equal opportunity for education.

We urge you to pass this motion to support students with disability and to ensure their needs are being met in boarding houses across Australia through the provision of funding that offers an equal and inclusive opportunity to education.

S4. Midwest Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Federal Ministers for Education and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the Commissioner for Regional Education and other relevant ministers and commissioners to include an amendment into the 2025 review of the “Disability Standards for Education 2005” that encompasses the needs of students with a disability who reside in a boarding facility for secondary education due to not being able access a local school due to isolation.”

Explanation

The needs of students with a disability in boarding house facilities across Australia should be recognised so that they have the opportunity for appropriate and inclusive education on the same basis as all other students. The “Disability Standards for Education 2005” must reflect the needs of students who reside in an educational facility residential accommodation setting for students from rural and remote areas, who have no choice but to go to boarding school. The standards need to reflect the needs of students outside of regular school hours.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 are Commonwealth Government legislation, they are administered by the Attorney-General’s Department and sit alongside the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

The Act seeks to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against people with disabilities. Under section 22 of the Act, it is unlawful for an educational authority to discriminate against a person on the ground of the person’s disability or a disability of any associates of that person. Section 31 of the Act enables the Attorney-General to formulate disability standards in relation to a range of areas, including the education of persons with a disability. The supportive environment of a boarding house needs to work in with conjunction of the day school for a successful education journey, and supportive measure put in place within the day school must carry over to the boarding house for a comprehensive education.

The standards are reviewed every 5 years.

The standards reflect enrolment, participation, curriculum development, accreditation and delivery, student support services and elimination of harassment and victimisation. Each area includes statements and guidance notes to assist in delivery for educational institutions.

Our boarding students do not have access to a local school for education, they are enrolled into schools that offer boarding due to the need for education. As families we need the standards that represent educational inclusion across Australia to also be inclusive of the residential boarding setting and specify the needs of students with a disability to be included for the 24 hours a day that they are educated and cared for.

For geographically isolated families, residential boarding is an important continuation of our children’s education. Students with a disability require extra support in their daily lives to reach their full potential. Boarding houses have a duty of care, responsibility and accountability for the increased needs of a student with a disability. This is inclusive wellbeing, medical, social, homework time, nutrition and extracurricular school activities. Appropriate legislation needs to be implemented to encompass our boarders living with a disability so that they too can have equal rights to an appropriate and inclusive education. Disability does not turn its self-off, at the end of the school day when the bell rings.

Additional Information to support motion can be found here:

Part 11 Review

11.1 Timetable for review

The Minister for Education, Science and Training, in consultation with the Attorney-General, must:

- a) within 5 years after the commencement of these Standards, conduct a review of the effectiveness of these Standards in achieving their objects, including a consideration of whether any amendments are desirable; and
- b) conduct further reviews to be completed at intervals of not more than 5 years.

<https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/2020-review-disability-standards-education-2005> this has a 5 year review process, due 2025

S5. Richmond Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to transfer the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme from the portfolio of the Minister for Social Services to the Minister for Education.”

Explanation:

The AIC was introduced in 1973 by the then Minister for Education Kim Beazley Senior. It was an allowance to support geographically isolated children to access education. This announcement was, in fact, the first significant win for the newly established Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association.

In recent times, the AIC Scheme has moved from the Department of Education portfolio to the Department of Social Services portfolio, presumably because the assessment and processing of AIC claims sits with Services Australia.

This shift has meant that the allowance is now treated like a welfare payment and therefore the need to increase it is not a priority because for the most part, access to the allowance is not means tested. It is available to all families who fulfill the criteria.

However, the AIC is not a welfare payment. It is an education access payment for geographically students who do not have daily access to a school due to where they live. Even though the allowance is administered under the Department of Social Services, the scheme itself should sit under the Minister for Education to ensure geographically isolated students have access to an appropriate education regardless of where they reside. This is a right for all Australian children.

F1. Northern Territory State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Regional Education Commissioner to convene a Round Table to determine equitable solutions for recognition and recompense for the compulsory Distance Education home supervisors for geographically isolated families.”

Explanation:

Suggested participants may include State and Federal Education Ministers, Department heads, ICPA State and Federal representatives and Distance Education principals.

COMMUNICATIONS

Internet Access

A12. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to request the Minister for Communications to ensure all rural and remote students have adequate internet access regarding reliability, speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the service."

Explanation:

Geographically isolated families rely on the internet for their educational needs. While expected data speeds, plan sizes and cost are continually improving, service reliability remains an issue. Currently some families are maintaining two different providers of internet, to ensure reliability. For example, nbn and Starlink, so if one drops out the other may still work. This is reflective of the historical unreliability of internet services, poor product and provider choices as well as large wait times for installation of hardware for new services, or repair of equipment. Families should not be having to pay for two internet connections due to the unreliable nature of internet connectivity in the bush. Or suffer long periods of not internet which affects their attendance and engagement at school.

Case Study

A family is using nbn and Starlink and rely on generated power (no access to mains power). Generator has tripped or surged, causing the modem to stop working on Starlink. Even when the modem is connected to a surge protector board. This has caused the internet service to not work until a replacement arrived, which has taken 3 weeks. In the interim the family were able to use their back up nbn service. If they hadn't had that back up, the students would have had no access to internet. Similarly, during a previous wet season, the NBN dish was struck by lightning and couldn't be fixed by the service provider for two months. It was this situation that led them to getting the Starlink service as backup.

A13. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies NBN Co to continue to work with global Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite providers to establish LEO internet services under nbn obligations for remote Australian students, including price certainty, network and data sovereignty and options for local support."

Explanation:

Low Earth Orbit internet offers many advantages over geostationary satellite internet. These advantages are becoming more and more important to the education of children in the remote areas of Australia. For example, the ability to use low-latency videoconferencing.

Some global providers are starting to offer internet plans in Australia, but often they do not provide local support. Key players in the Australian telecommunications industry are starting to partner with these global providers to offer products that include local support. NBN Co is also looking at opportunities to bring offerings to Australia under the nbn banner.

We think it is important that NBN Co takes these partnerships seriously, and not just allow private companies to dictate what is offered here in Australia. The Sky Muster satellites are only meant to be in service until the early 2030's and they are already showing their age. NBN Co must be looking now at what comes next to best serve the remote Australia population and reduce the digital divide.

As the NBN Co Ltd Statement of Expectations 2022 states, "NBN Co will enhance Australia's digital capability by delivering services to meet the current and future needs of households, communities

and businesses, and promote digital inclusion and equitable access to affordable and reliable broadband services." We believe low-latency internet is a current need for remote education. It also states, that NBN Co is expected to be "Undertaking proactive network planning, including for the transition of satellite services, and positioning itself to utilise emerging and future technologies to meet future demand, promote innovation, improve services and generate efficiencies in service delivery."

Furthermore, it states "NBN Co should ensure security and resilience issues are integral parts of its decision making and demonstrate best practice in managing these issues. NBN Co should take an active role in supporting telecommunications sector security." Data security and resilience are at risk where wholesale internet services are provided by international private or government-owned companies. NBN Co would do well to set the standard for what Australians can expect from LEO internet in Australia.

Mobile Coverage/Service

A14. Namoi Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to ensure that some form of funding/rebate is given to rural and remote people having to upgrade devices and infrastructure to access basic communication services for education."

Explanation:

Rural and remote people are incurring a large expense to continue to be compatible with 4G/ 5G systems.

A15. Namoi Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that Telstra Corporation ensures that when major network disruptions are occurring in rural and remote areas for greater than 24 hours, an alternative temporary network is supplied to the town/ area to ensure a lack of disruption to students' education."

Explanation:

Recently Wee Waa (NSW) had scheduled mobile tower upgrades that left the town/ area without Telstra mobile coverage for 5 days. No alternative was provided. Alternatives such as portable towers are available and should be automatically allocated to areas that are going to be left without service for a significant amount of time.

A16. Kindon Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government and all stakeholders to provide connectivity to ensure the safety of rural and remote school students, their families and school staff at standalone schools."

Explanation:

The lack of phone coverage in and around rural and remote schools is a major concern for the staff of these standalone schools. These schools are isolated from rural townships and there are no other buildings in the vicinity. Due to their location, schools are constantly managing passing people who have no business being on the school grounds when they come inside the school boundary to receive help. This is a major safety concern for both staff and students. These schools have limited staff and when one is called away to assist a visitor to the school, this interrupts the students learning and places them in a vulnerable position without adult supervision.

Schools who need Cel-Fi boosters are affected once they move out of range of that device so if there is an incident away from the main building they do not have service where the incident is. This is not good enough and would not happen in a city school.

Currently at Kindon State School there is a Telstra tower at Wyaga which is ten kilometres away. This tower gives coverage approximately three kilometres either side and the next structure heading east is Kindon State School. Of course people are going to go to the school to call for assistance if needed because they have no other choice. In the meantime our staff and students are subject to safety issues which could be fixed if there was enough connectivity surrounding the school.

S6. New South Wales State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) asks the Minister for Communications for a guaranteed action plan including an appropriate timeline should the switch from 3G to 4G not deliver the ‘equivalent or better coverage’ roll-out proposed for families who have students relying on the service for education, care and safety.”

Explanation:

Members are sceptical about the reliability of 4G because there have been noticeable reductions in service whilst the transition has been implemented on local towers. Emergency calls are not even being able to be made in some cases.

Mobile connectivity is very important for rural and remote families. The importance of service is for education, care and safety of children.

One example of the deterioration is that for some members who have the NGWL for landlines - a service that traditionally has relied on 3G technology - the option offered is now Starlink, this potentially reduces capacity and preparation for emergencies because if the power goes out, the landline will also go down, rendering no communications at all. It also means that a consumer is reliant on one platform for all their communications, instead of the traditional landline and satellite internet, where if one service is down usually the other remains.

Another issue of concern is that remote families on the outside of the 3G mapping have been able to get 3G with the use of boosters, but because they are outside the mapping, there is no guarantee by Telstra that they will get 4G. In many instances, users with 3G Boosters, over the years have removed their landline service because having access to mobile connectivity gave them suitable voice call access. There is now uncertainty and risk that these people could be facing the reality of a reduced voice service or no voice call service with unlikelihood of reconnecting their landline due to ageing HCRC infrastructure.

It is concerning that the Universal Service Obligation for a baseline landline has deteriorated because of the 3G 4G switch.

Telephone

A17. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to request the Minister for Communications to ensure Telstra meets their Universal Service Guarantee of providing quality, efficient, and reliable voice services to rural and remote premises to access education, including fixed address pastoral leases, remote communities, and remote roadhouses.”

Explanation:

Through the Universal Service Guarantee, Telstra are paid by the Australian Government to ensure all Australians have access to a standard telephone. With the announcement that Telstra would be phasing out landline services in the coming years it's important that they are replaced with the same quality and reliability as provided in metropolitan areas. Including no delays and interruptions such as those experienced when using satellite phone systems. It is essential that these services be efficient and reliable during all Australian weather conditions with appropriate backup power supply to ensure students can access education/schooling without interruption. In areas where a mobile network has already been established, it's important that these are upgraded to current standards such as 4G or 5G, and the area covered in maintained or improved.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

A18. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government for a **Geographically Isolated Education Supervisors Subsidy (GIESS)** for all families that have to school their children in distance education settings due to residing in remote and geographically isolated locations.”

Explanation:

For Years ICPA has lobbied the State and Federal Government for **Distance Education Teaching Allowance** however it is obvious that the government does not see home tutors as teachers. However as part of our obligation with School of the Air (SOTA) and distance education centres, at least one adult must be present in the classroom with our children while they are learning online and deliver half of the student's curriculum and in some cases all the curriculum issued to our students.

The home tutor must be present to commit six to eight hours a day in addition to the necessary preparation time. This role requires dedication and commitment and can be seven years per student.

The home tutor must be capable and confident in delivering the distance education program so that their students can achieve educational parity with their peers in face-to-face schools who have daily access to professionally trained teachers and support staff.

Distance education delivery is impossible without home tutors responsible for the face-to-face delivery of educational support, supervision, and evaluation of their students.

While distance education tutors spend about the same time as teachers in a face-to-face school preparing daily lessons, teaching, and supervising their students, they receive no remuneration for their work.

For geographically isolated families, the role of home tutor usually falls on the mother. This means they are unable to fully participate, or must juggle, other day-to-day work, either in the family business, on the property on which the family lives or elsewhere, often foregoing their own careers and earning capability to teach their child/ren enrolled in distance education.

Families that choose to employ a tutor or governess do so at a considerable cost and finding a suitable governess/tutor is often difficult in isolated areas.

In recent years the roles women assume in the operation of family businesses in rural and remote areas have changed, so performing the position of home tutor multiplies their workload. This adds pressure on other family members and may require the employment of additional staff.

The vital and compulsory role of the home tutor should be remunerated through an allowance, one which recognises the essential work are required to perform.

While the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance helps geographically isolated distance education families with some of the incidental expenses of educating their children, this does not include covering the cost of someone to teach the children in the home classroom.

Under the AIC Guidelines, the AIC DE Allowance was not established to cover costs for providing a tutor in the distance education home classroom. The table below shows the average financial loss and implications of a mother or other family member undertaking the distance education home tutor role.

Family member as geographically isolated distance education tutor	
Average hours per day	6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year
Average years spent as DE tutor for one child	8 years (Kindy/preschool plus primary school)
Average total hours spent tutoring one child	9600 –12,800 hours
Minimum Wage	\$23.23 per hour
Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	\$223,008 - \$297,344
Superannuation @ 11% foregone	\$24,530 - \$32,707

Source: Isolated Children's Parents' Association Inc (Australia) Distance Education Portfolio 2023 -24 Briefing Paper.

A19. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government to establish an allowance / subsidy for families in recognition of the cost families bear in providing the compulsory home tutor when educating students via distance education.”

Explanation:

Katherine Branch thanks ICPA (Aust) for your continuing pursuit of this motion. We acknowledge the move away from calling this a DETA. It is the intent of recognition and recompense that is important to our branch, not the name.

For many students living in remote regions, their only access to schooling is to study by distance education. It is compulsory that distance education children be supervised by an adult - the distance education tutor, who must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program. The cost of providing this supervision is a major burden to the family, whether they are paying someone or by the loss of income incurred when a parent (usually the mother) gives up paid employment to provide this supervision.

There is no specific award which applies to this position thus a home tutor falls under the miscellaneous award which starts at a minimum \$48,118 per year (excluding time required for preparation outside of school hours) plus the cost of providing full board and accommodation.

A20. South Australia State Council**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) supports all State Councils in their efforts towards the creation and implementation of a state government funded allowance for distance education supervisors.”

Explanation:

For many years Federal Council have been working tirelessly in their efforts to see a federally funded allowance for distance education tutors/supervisors be created. Despite their efforts, there has been little headway made, with the feedback from the Federal Government often indicating because education is the responsibility of states, then the funding of such an allowance should also be the responsibility of the state.

With thoughtful consideration and discussions between Federal Council and all State Councils it was decided that perhaps it was time to shift the focus away from a federally funded allowance and have State Councils begin their campaign for the creation of an allowance that would support families who are employing a supervisor for their distance education classroom and their students.

With the guidance and support of Federal Council and a strong advocacy campaign from the states, there is a very real possibility that an allowance of this nature can be implemented by state education departments across country.

A21. Western Australia State Council**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates the Minister for Education when meeting with state education ministers to come up with a uniform solution that adequately remunerates or recognises supervisors in the distance education classroom.”

Explanation:

It is a requirement of state Distance Education (DE) and Schools of the Air (SOTAs) that a supervisor be present to support the delivery of the DE curriculum. No supervisor means no access to education, so this allowance is helping to address barriers of access to education for rural and remote families.

This is a long overdue allowance that is so important to rural and remote families. This issue goes to the heart of equitable access to education, which is every child’s right and speaks to the value and support for women’s equality in the remotest parts of Western Australia along with the sustainability of rural and remote communities and the vital industries they facilitate and support.

In 85% of instances, the mother is the supervisor in the geographically isolated distance education classroom. She is therefore taken out of the workforce, forgoes an income and relevant financial benefits and performs a role out of necessity for many years of her life so her children can access a compulsory education.

In some circumstances it is not possible for a mother to take on the supervisor role therefore geographically isolated families endure the excessive costs and challenges of providing a governess to fulfil the position.

Other families make the difficult decision to send their very young children to boarding school for their primary school education or relocate to a second home for their children to access mainstream schooling, when it is unmanageable for the mother to sacrifice her position in the workforce or the prospect of employing a distance education classroom supervisor is not possible. The latter option removes the family from their primary home, property and local community for the majority of the year.

We are calling for all education ministers, federal, state and territory, to come together and provide a distance education supervisors allowance that adequately covers the cost of the full-time position.

A22. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Education to establish a ~~Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)~~, **uniform solution** in recognition of the essential role that the home tutor plays in educating students via distance education."

Explanation:

An introduction of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), as financial recognition of the essential work a supervisor/home tutor performs in Distance Education classrooms, would help alleviate the pressure placed on remote families, whose only option is to home-school their children via Distance Education. It is a government requirement under the Distance Education Schools Guidelines that students enrolled in Distance Education schools have appropriate supervision, and these guidelines state that this may be an employee or parent. In many cases, a parent, usually the mother, is forced to forgo paid work on the property, community or outstation where they live, due to the need for them to stay home and teach their children. This in turn strips the family of a second income, and places further financial pressure on families who educate their children via Distance Education. This can amount to a family paying a home tutor between \$25,000-\$50,000 per year, depending on salary/wage agreements.

On top of the wage a home tutor is paid, in many cases, home tutors are also living with the family, and have all food, board and other sundry expenses such as internet, paid by the family as part of their wage package. If the family employs a home tutor to deliver Distance Education lessons and provide support and supervision, the family is effectively paying award wages for a child to receive a public education.

We would like to suggest that DETA be incorporated into the existing AIC framework. If a family is eligible for AIC, it is extremely likely that they would also be eligible for DETA, and combining DETA into the AIC would streamline the application process.

A23. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)**DEEMED COVERED BY A19 + A22**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government to create a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to acknowledge the role the home tutor performs when educating students through distance education."

Explanation:

The service provided by home tutors in the delivering of education to students in rural and remote Australia who have no choice but to be educated via the distance education mode of delivery needs be acknowledged. home tutors provide what the government simply cannot cost effectively supply and as such should be recognised and remunerated fairly.

A24. Western Australia State Council**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates to provide a clause to the In-Home Care Program in order to employ an individual/s to assist with supervising school-aged students in geographically isolated classrooms."

Explanation:

As the current parameters of the In-Home Care Program revolve around early childhood and preschool aged care, families of geographically isolated students are unable to access the program to fund a

distance education classroom supervisor despite the program being a natural fit for this type of childcare.

As it is a requirement of state Distance Education (DE) and Schools of the Air (SOTAs) that a supervisor be present to support the delivery of the DE curriculum, it is our belief that better support should be offered to students in the form of a paid distance education classroom supervisor.

If families of geographically isolated students had access to the financial assistance offered by the In-Home Care Program distance education classroom supervisors could be properly remunerated and as such we believe we would see an improvement in students' educational outcomes.

A25. Far North Queensland Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Department of Education to ensure Schools of Distance Education are meeting their legal obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* and international treaties so that the learning and well-being needs of every rural and remote student are properly met at their level wherever they live."

Explanation:

Schools have legal obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards). The DDA and the Standards are federal laws that protect the rights of students with disability. The DDA supersedes all state and territory legislation. Further, Australia is a signatory to international treaties including the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* that protect human rights and have agreed that all children including those with a disability can access education and training to reach their full potential.

Since 2008, Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) in Queensland have experienced huge increases in enrolment. For example, from 2008 to 2018 one SoDE had a 415% increase in enrolment and another SoDE a 505% increase. A large proportion of these increases are due to medical enrolments moving to distance education for help as students are not able to access suitable education to meet their needs in mainstream face-to-face school settings. For one particular SoDE in Queensland, in 2021 medical enrolments were 24% of total full-time enrolments and in 2024 are 32.5% of total full-time enrolments. SoDE are not adequately equipped and resourced for this changing demographic in terms of the mindset of school leadership, school policies, level of understanding of medical conditions and their complexities, as well as suitably qualified staff and access to disability workers and professionals to appropriately support the needs of these students. This is despite them making up a third of full-time home-based enrolments. What is happening in practice does not always meet the standard Education Queensland has set, let alone legal obligations under the DDA, the Standards and international instruments. Geographically isolated students with disability and specific learning needs are "doubly disadvantaged" in this system.

The DDA states that:

Indirect disability discrimination occurs when a person with disability

- is required to comply with a requirement or condition but they cannot comply because of their disability, and
 - that requirement or condition is not reasonable in the circumstances.
- ... a failure to make reasonable adjustments to assist the person with disability to meet requirements or conditions is indirect disability discrimination.

Case Study 1

A geographically isolated distance education student was assessed by teachers and the parent was advised that their child was intellectually impaired. The school never followed up on the assessment,

with the odd teacher making adjustments to the student's learning program. Later, when the student was diagnosed with visual processing disorders the parent sent reports to the school but no adjustments were made to the student's learning program, the only additional support provided being reading lessons with a teacher aide. Despite the parent/home tutor contacting the guidance officer and support staff, no direct learning support was provided and no one really took responsibility to provide support, despite the huge pressure put on the student and home tutor that the student meet expectations for each year level.

Case Study 2

A rural and remote student with multiple medical diagnosis has been subjected to indirect disability discrimination from the school where they are enrolled. An early PLR stated only how the parent/home tutor should support the disabilities and did not include any specific requirements of teachers. Some individual teachers made necessary adjustments but none seemed to know about or follow through with recording those adjustments via the NCCD*. No teachers seemed to be aware that there was a PLR in place. The home tutor approached the school's Special Education Services for additional supports for their child, explaining that they had to do school seven days a week to get through the work and it was placing enormous strain on their family. They were told they needed to just submit work returns and assessments by the due date and let their child fail in order to get supports. For a student that is intellectually capable of succeeding, this is very damaging to mental health. In another example, a drama assessment required students to watch a video with sound turned off and analyse non-verbal communication. The home tutor contacted the teacher to explain their child is autistic and is specifically disabled in reading non-verbal cues and this task was not a suitable assessment. The teacher explicitly said there would be no adjustment.

Case Study 3

A rural and remote student suffering from trauma and anxiety, and later diagnosed with ADHD, had a teacher in year 6 refuse to mark an assessment that was submitted late. The parent/home tutor was in regular contact with the teacher so was aware of the student's condition. The parent/home tutor had not applied for an extension 'as a precaution' as to do so for every formative and summative assessment for every subject is an unreasonable expectation on home tutors/parents. When the home tutor requested the teacher provide additional support to the student in a short one-on-one tutorial session they were told "that's the home tutor's job" and they didn't have the time. This was a reasonable adjustment to support the needs of the student but it was refused. In another instance, when the student questioned the new format for on-line lessons (increased 45 mins to 1hr), the teacher proceeded to tell the student that they had to attend the lesson for the full hour or they would get a D. Later, when one-on-one tutorial support was requested of the teacher to help understanding of live lessons, the student's concerns were dismissed and they were told to watch the lesson recording. This heightened the student's anxiety and they have since disengaged from the subject.

Case Study 4

A geographically isolated distance education family with two children who previously had been provided learning support were advised by the school that the system for supporting students with learning support needs had changed and it was now up to the subject teacher to decide whether the child needed learning support. Despite reports and evidence from previous years, it got that difficult to get support that the parents/home tutor gave up in the end.

Case Study 5

A rural and remote parent of a student with multiple medical diagnosis has had to fight the school year after year for access to case management and support for their child despite an established history and multiple specialist reports. Without these supports and reasonable adjustments for their child's disabilities, the learning environment is not equitable. There is a lack of knowledge amongst

teaching staff on how to support students with ADHD and autism, yet they decide who gets support and what reasonable adjustments, if any, are provided.

*The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

References: <https://www.nccd.edu.au/wider-support-materials/australian-law-0?parent=%2Fdisability-standards-education&activity=%2Fwider-support-materials%2Four-rights-0&step=0>

S7. New South Wales State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) asks the Minister for Social Services to provide funding for a Distance Education Supervisors Subsidy (DESS) to be paid per term to eligible families for safely and actively supervising students in a home classroom.”

Explanation:

Currently, children in a distance education home classroom are supervised by a governess (supervisor), parent, or grandparent and there is currently no financial assistance in this supervision. This having many social, emotional and financial impacts on rural and remote families.

Some of these factors include:

- Partners working solo in roles that for safely require two people
- Takes a secondary income from a family home which is much needed, as remote families face higher cost of living due to location
- Mothers who have no other option but teach their own children are feeling the emotional and family strain. Teaching your children requires fulltime supervision from 8am-4pm, 5 days a week, often they are required to work for the farm before and after school hours creating 12-14hr days
- Without financial help, retaining and enticing workforce in remote areas is hard as often families will move jobs and areas once the children are school aged as it is cheaper for their children to attend school in a town.

When children are attending online lessons with a teacher, it is unsatisfactory to think that the teacher on the other end of the computer hundreds of kilometres away is able to supervise children safely and effectively, they still require supervision. How is a teacher on the other end able to deal with the following situations:

- Medical emergencies
- Behavioural issues
- Poor concentration

In Australia all children are said to be able to access a free public education, but for remote students/families studying via public distance education is not true. Having a governess (supervisor) is an expense and to take a family member out of the work force is not free of financial impacts. We implore the federal and state governments to work towards an outcome suitable for each state.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early Learning

A26. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government for geographically isolated pre-compulsory students, who are enrolled in a distance education program, to be granted the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance.”

Explanation:

Under the current guidelines, part time distance education students are ineligible for the Distance Education (DE) component of the AIC Allowance, which means families enrolled in the 4-year-old programme must bear the costs of maintaining and setting up the classroom in that first year of schooling. This first year is often extremely costly for families.

The AIC DE Allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the schoolroom. The schoolroom must be set up and maintained the day the child begins their education. Full-time or part time, the child needs a schoolroom.

A27. Katherine Branch (NT)

DEEMED COVERED BY A26

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate the Federal Government for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to be extended to include geographically isolated pre-school students enrolled in a distance education programme.”

Explanation:

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has universal access to a quality early childhood education program. The desired outcome is to increase enrolment and improved attendance.

From

website

https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3_05_part_2_education.pdf

“The Australian Government is providing funding to support continued universal access to 600 hours per year of preschool for children in the year before they start school. The Preschool Reform Agreement (2022–2025) aims to improve preschool participation and outcomes, including improved enrolment and attendance. Preschool funding is an ongoing commitment, with funding amounts from 2026 to be published once future funding arrangements are agreed.”

The Services Australia website regarding the AIC Allowance states that the minimum age is 3 years and 6 months old.

“Your child needs to be at least the minimum primary school entry age for your state or territory. They must also be under 19 on 1 January of the year of study.

Or they need to be any of the following:

- at least 3 years and 6 months old and living away from home due to a health condition or disability
- under 20 on 1 January in the study year, with a disruption to their education, such as illness
- under 21 and studying at primary or ungraded level and getting [Disability Support Pension](#), or [Parenting Payment](#) single
- doing tertiary study and under their state or territory minimum education or training requirements age.”

When claiming the AIC Allowance, the applicant is notified that a Northern Territory resident must be turning 6 years old between 1st of January to the 30th of June to be eligible for the AIC Allowance. Some students are already in Year 1 by this age and have been attending a school-based learning program,

for two full years.

Setting up the classroom for distance education delivery for Pre-schoolers costs the same, if not more, as for the first year of compulsory schooling. The number of children accessing this pre-compulsory year by distance education is not huge. For example: Katherine School of the Air (KSA) has had a structured Pre-School Program in place for over 20 years and currently (Sem 1 2024) has 18 enrolments. On average KSA enrolments have been around 20-25 each year. The Northern Territory Government already recognises this cohort of students by making available half of the “NT Correspondence Site Allowance – Preschool” to assist all four-year-old children that are enrolled in pre-school with the Alice Springs and Katherine Schools of the Air.

Extending the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to include these students will ensure greater and more equitable participation in Early Childhood Education by rural and remote students. Distance education students could benefit enormously from a minute portion of the billions of dollars allocated to early childhood education and care, including the funding intended to ensure the system is more accessible, affordable, and fairer for families.

A28. Western Australia State Council

DEEMED COVERED BY A26

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government for geographically isolated pre-compulsory students, who are enrolled in a distance education program, be granted the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance.”

Explanation:

Under the current guidelines, part-time distance education students are ineligible for the distance education (DE) component of the AIC Allowance, which means families enrolled in the 4-year-old programme must bear the costs of maintaining and setting up the classroom in that first year of schooling.

Early childhood education is a materials/resource heavy time which translates to expensive. This coupled with the costs associated with setting up a classroom for the first time means that many families are under undue financial pressure at an already stressful time in the isolated education journey.

A29. South Australia State Council

DEEMED COVERED BY A26

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government for geographically isolated pre-compulsory school students enrolled in a registered preschool education program to be eligible for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance.”

Explanation:

The AIC Distance Education Allowance is designed to aid families with additional costs to ensure their children can access education despite geographical isolation. This support should extend to children enrolled in pre-school programs.

Pre-school education is crucial for a child's academic and social development, including those in remote areas. Families in these regions face significant costs setting up home-based classrooms and traveling long distances for face-to-face pre-school experiences. These experiences are essential for enhancing learning and socialization in preparation for primary school.

Research consistently highlights the long-term educational benefits of pre-school programs. Supporting geographically isolated families in providing these early learning opportunities fosters educational equity. Including pre-schoolers in the AIC scheme will help bridge the gap in educational access and outcomes for isolated children, promoting fairness and inclusivity in our education system.

While it is encouraging to see increased access to pre-school at the state level, children in remote areas still face significant accessibility challenges compared to their regional and city-based peers. Full-time or part-time, regardless of age discrepancies, every child needs a schoolroom.

A30. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates for universal access to early childhood education and care to include all children living in rural and remote Australia.”

Explanation:

Evidence shows that the first 5 years in a child’s life are the most important for creating opportunities to thrive and be successful in later life. It is the most important educational opportunity we can give our children. All children, regardless of where they live, should be able to access high quality early childhood education and care.

Childcare**A31. Katherine Branch (NT)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education amend the In-Home Care rules for families in remote areas to allow:

1. An educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time
2. An educator to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family(ies) under In Home Care.”

Explanation:

The reason for this is that there are often multiple families employed by and living in the same location in remote areas (for example pastoral stations, tourism and conservation operations). Due to the remote location all staff and the educator live at the same location. Allowing an educator to care for children from more than one family in these circumstances solves the practical problem of limited accommodation - accommodating more than one educator is likely to be difficult.

It also provides the opportunity for a greater range of people to be employed in these areas (including single parents) who would otherwise be unable to take these jobs as they would not have access to childcare. By potentially increasing the number of children living at a location, all children will benefit from the social interaction.

Allowing an educator to care for their own children would also increase the range of people available as In-Home Carers in remote areas. It is extremely difficult to find appropriately skilled people willing to live in remote areas. Allowing someone with their own child to be care for other children at the same remote location would be of great benefit.

Example 1

A single mother applies for a station hand position. She is highly qualified and prior to becoming a mother had extensive experience working on remote cattle stations. The owner of the station she has applied to also has a small child and already employs an educator through IHC. There is suitable accommodation for the mother and child but not enough for another educator. By allowing that educator to also care for the station hand’s child, the station hand gets a job for which she is qualified for (it is also difficult to find good station hands so expanding the pool of people who could take these jobs is important) and both children have access to good quality childcare and a playmate bringing valuable social interaction.

Example 2

A man applies for a station hand position on a remote cattle station. He and his partner have a toddler. There are no childcare facilities within 200km. The managers of the station also have a toddler. By allowing the employee's partner to become the In-Home Carer (dependent on obtaining the relevant qualifications etc) the manager's child has access to high quality care, the manager(s) can concentrate on their jobs, the station hand is not separated from his partner and his partner has a fulfilling job.

The rules around Family Day Care provide a starting point for a structure to determine the appropriate number/age of children and how the CCS would work in this situation. Further consultation with families living in remote areas with young children would be required to refine these structures to ensure they are practical and suitable for their situation.

A32. Walgett Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers to remove the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test to include all children living in rural and remote Australia."

Explanation:

We would like to support Thrive by Five in their effort to have the government remove the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test. Currently the hours of subsidised care you can get per fortnight depends on the hours of recognised activities you do such as work, study or volunteer work.

As a result of this activity test some children are excluded from Early Learning which is not only detrimental for the child but also stops parents from being in a position to seek or take on work. As highlighted by Thrive by Five, it is difficult for parents to get a job without childcare, and if you do not have a job it is difficult to afford childcare.

The issue of access to childcare is already a huge issue in remote areas, that often have limited childcare options, but the activity test complicates the access issue further.

We acknowledge that working parents need to be able to access childcare to support workforce participation, but regardless of whether your parent/s work, study or volunteer the fact remains that every child has a right to an education regardless of their background or parent/caregivers' employment status or volunteer hours.

It is particularly important for the children in low income, single parent families and socio economically disadvantaged backgrounds that their disadvantage is not compounded due to lack of access to child care.

Education and Care in the Early Years is extremely important laying the foundations for social and emotional development, early learning and working towards being truly ready to start school. The 0-5 years of age is an ideal time for learning and identifying areas that the children may need further assistance with and subsequent referrals to specialists such as speech pathologist, occupational therapist etc.

The activity test needs to be removed to ensure every child has equal access to Early Childhood Education and Care.

A33. Wentworth Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education to include the following wording '*except where care is being provided in a remote or very remote location*' in A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 – 85BA Eligibility for CCS and Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rule 2017 – Section 8."

Explanation:

The following are the requirements:

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999**85BA Eligibility for CCS**

(1) An individual is eligible for CCS for a session of care provided by an approved child care service to a child if:

- (c) (ii) is not provided as part of the compulsory education program in the state or territory where the care is provided **(Proposed motion wording to be inserted here)**

Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rule 2017

Section 8 - 1 (f) where during any part of the session, the child is attending school, or engages in a formal schooling program (including a home schooling or distance education program) **(Proposed motion wording to be inserted here)**

A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 in its introduction states that IHC supports families' workforce participation and early childhood education and care requirements where other approved child care services are not available or appropriate.

That is, the government supports families' participation in the workforce unless you live in a remote or very remote location and your child's only access to schooling is via government approved Distance Education. Then, the government expect you to forgo any participation in the workforce and to supervise you child's schooling for the entirety of their primary schooling years.

This is a government enforced roadblock to productivity across remote Australia and is yet another example of the failure of policy to assist families, community and productivity thrive in remote locations and it needs to be changed. Rural and remote agricultural communities that feed our nation will not flourish or grow without equitable assistance in educating these isolated children.

A34. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates for sufficient funding from streams such as the Community Childcare Fund (CCCF) Sustainability stream (or any other funding streams that may be similar), be made available for services in remote and very remote locations to meet their operational costs which are unable to be met through the Childcare Subsidy (CCS)/Parent Fee model."

Explanation:

Services providing Childcare Subsidy Model childcare are currently capped at the maximum amount of CCCF Sustainability funding they are able to apply for (\$200,000 pa) despite the operational gap they are able to demonstrate, which is often significantly larger. The same cap applies to services in regional areas as in remote and very remote locations, and the only longer-term funding is in the CCCF-Restricted pool, which services may not be eligible for. Remote & very remote services have to meet significantly higher staffing & operational costs – such as providing housing for teachers and meeting the pay parity gap for teachers to attract and retain adequately qualified teachers. Early Childhood Services in remote and very remote locations should be able to provide a service with teachers and staff at the same level as their city cousins - our children are worth no less, and often have significantly more vulnerabilities according to the AECD (Australian Early Childhood Development) Census Data.

Mobile Early Childhood Services

A35. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant minister to establish funding to deliver Mobile Early Childhood Services to geographically isolated children, aged 0-5 years, who are currently without access to any such service because of where they live."

Explanation:

Geographically isolated families that reside outside of the "remote community footprint" have been without access to any early learning childhood services prior to preschool for more than a decade as has many remote communities in our region. Early education is a vital tool in all children's development, along with being a foundation for learning, it is how they build confidence, interact with others, and learn important social and emotional skills. It is also an opportunity for parents to come together, share stories and support one another.

Case study: As a mum of two geographically isolated children Kiya knows firsthand the importance of having these services available to all families, no matter where they choose to live. In Kiya's circumstance her sense of what was 'normal' became misguided as they weren't exposed to other children regularly. It wasn't until their daughter was 6 months old that they noticed she had some challenges with her feet. Had they been able to interact with other children of a similar age they may have become aware she was behind in her development sooner and accessed early intervention treatment earlier.

Early Childhood Education and Care - Other

A36. Bourke Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates for funding to support the infrastructure needs of community based early childhood education providers to deliver childcare and preschool services in remote towns."

Explanation:

There are currently limited opportunities for community based early childhood services to gain the required capital funding for significant infrastructure needs to meet demand in remote communities. This affects rural, remote and geographically isolated children, because they end up in "childcare deserts" where early childhood services are not provided.

The cost of infrastructure in remote locations is significantly higher than regional and metro settings yet there is no appropriate funding mechanism.

A37. Bourke Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the relevant federal ministers for funding to be sought to address Early Childhood Teacher pay parity to assist with access to early childhood education in rural and remote communities."

Explanation:

Pay parity of Early Childhood Teachers is a significant issue. An Early Childhood Teacher completes a four year degree course. In a remote early childhood service, an experienced Early Childhood Teacher can expect a salary of around \$106,500. If they maintain National Schools Education Authority (NSEA) proficient accreditation and elect to work in the Public School System, at a Connected Communities School, such as Bourke, in a rural and remote location, the additional benefits they would get compared to working as an Early Childhood Teacher would tally to \$148,671 per annum and includes:

	Childcare	School
Base Salary	94,478.80	157,842
Directors Allowance	7,745.92	
Educational Leader Allowance	4,253.32	
Recruitment bonus		20,000
Rural & remote relocation support		8,000
Rural Teacher Incentive (Includes value of rental subsidy)		25,000
Stamp Duty relief (not paid if rental subsidy paid)		
Retention benefit		5000
Experienced Teacher Benefit		10,000
Climatic Allowance		3000 (approx.)
Additional Personal leave days		
Additional Annual leave value in \$ terms		26,307
TOTAL	106,477.24	255,149

- Significantly shorter contact hours per week
- Professional mentoring by other Teachers
- Structured Professional development programs (\$10,000 pa)
- In addition to the above, there is also the impact on superannuation to be considered.

Early Childhood services are significantly limited in their budgets. It is important to find long term solutions to address pay parity of Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote locations.

A38. Louth Branch (NSW)

DEEMED COVERED BY A37

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the relevant federal ministers to amend the lack of salary parity between four year trained early childhood teachers and four year trained primary and high school teachers working in rural and remote Australia.”

Explanation:

Currently, the pay gap is so significant it is impossible to recruit and retain teachers in early childhood centres and new recruits often use early childhood jobs as a stepping stone into the primary school sector.

A39. Far North Queensland Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government to change the Working Holiday Maker Program to include governess/ home tutor/ nanny and au pairs as possible employment opportunities for people in rural and remote Australia.”

Explanation:

People in rural and remote Australia are significantly disadvantaged when it comes to employment. The Working Holiday Visa currently allows rural employers to offer 88 workdays for visa extensions to those wanting to apply for second or third year visas. However, the current system does not include employment roles for governesses/home tutors/ nannies or au pairs. By revising the Working Holiday visa regulations, we could include further employment opportunities for rural and remote families and

businesses, helping them to fill these roles which would then allow parents of these rural and remote families to return back to the workforce on their own properties. *In support of the Meekatharra Air Branch (WA) motion A29, brought forward at the 2023 Federal Conference in Darwin.*

RURAL SCHOOLS

A40. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government for funding to be sought to further incentivise experienced teachers to take up contract and long term rural, regional and remote positions.”

Explanation:

Students from rural, regional, and remote areas are facing, at times constant, disruptions to their education in the form of teacher shortages. Teacher retention in rural areas can be problematic and even in those schools where teachers are committed long term their ability to access vital professional development days, long service leave and even sick days is limited due to the lack of relief teachers and/ or support staff. It is not uncommon for small schools to have only two classroom teachers across all year levels and minimal funding for additional support staff such as Education Assistants (EAs) or Library Technicians. When one teacher is away from the classroom the other teacher must take the whole school and/or EAs are being asked to step in and take classes. In some cases teachers are being called in without completing their training which effects the students and teacher alike. Additionally the mental health of teachers is becoming increasingly worrisome due to their burdensome workload.

The states all have varying incentives to encourage teachers to rural schools however it has been our experience that these incentives are not always well advertised and experienced teachers often think these are graduate positions only when they are actually open to all teachers. As well as federal funding we suggest the Federal Government run an advertising campaign to get teachers into the bush pitched at experienced teachers and their families.

Additional Incentives to those already on offer could include:

- Financial incentives for short term or contract work in the regions
- Increased childcare rebates for teachers with young families wanting to take up rural positions
- At present only high school teachers are allowed in on special visa's, this could be extended to primary teachers also
- Clear potential for permanency
- Increased potential for permanency in the city after completing a set amount of time in a rural, regional or remote school.

SCHOOL TRAVEL

A41. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Social Services to apply the framework used for ABSTUDY to geographically isolated children as identified with the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) to obtain transport between their home residence and the educational establishment they attend.”

Explanation:

Students who fit this Category should be able to book tickets by Air or Road at any point during the year without being subject to inflation caused by peak tourist season, holidays, limited tickets, and any number of other reasons ticket prices fluctuate.

There are geographically isolated families whose children attend schools interstate or intrastate that have all their travel costs covered and/or organised; home to the closest airport, then airport to interstate school. There are examples of how such a policy mechanism can work through allowances such as ABSTUDY.

We would like to suggest that this existing framework (used by agencies such as ABSTUDY, to book and secure travel for students) be extended to all geographically isolated families when travelling between their home residence and the educational establishment they attend. At the very least to secure capped student travel fares.

A42. Namoi Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government contacts rural/ remote local councils and make school bus routes a priority for repairs, maintenance and edges being mowed."

Explanation:

The state of some rural/ remote roads is very bad at the moment. Priority should be given to the school bus routes to ensure safety for the school buses and their passengers.

S8. Northern Territory State Council

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Qantas to extend the Resident Fares Scheme for travel for geographically isolated students."

Explanation:

The Northern Territory has a large number of geographically isolated students living remotely with their families who need to attend educational institutions interstate to complete their education. The Northern Territory has a very limited number of boarding school places available for students, therefore, a large number of families have no choice but to send their children to boarding schools interstate. Choices for tertiary and trade training are equally limited. NT residents can access the Qantas Resident Fares but only for flights from Alice Springs to Darwin (return) or Alice Springs to Adelaide (return). These are useful and much appreciated but more options are needed.

There are a large number of families not even living close to Darwin (up to approx. 1,000km away) that have children studying interstate in locations such as Townsville, Charters Towers, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney, Adelaide, and Melbourne who need to drive up to 1,000km and then fly from Darwin but have no access to resident fares.

There are two/three airlines operating from Darwin, and during the hugely popular 'dry season,' parents are competing with tourists for flights that can range from \$300 - \$3,000 one way to get children to and from boarding school. There is no consistency for reasonable fares for parents, particularly during the peak dry season.

S9. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to work with Qantas to enhance the Frequent Flyer Resident Fares program to enable families to use multiple eligible departure and return points within the Resident Fares program to better suit the needs of rural and remote students attending educational institutions."

Explanation:

Currently students based near both Cloncurry and Mt Isa are unable to book a resident fare leaving from one location and returning to the other depending on the best option for families at the time. Resident fares should be able to be booked departing from one eligible location and returning to a

different eligible location, within the Resident Fares program. Due to unpredictable weather it is sometimes necessary to have access to multiple eligible locations within the resident fares program.

S10. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to work with Qantas to establish a discount code that would enable all rural and remote students to attend their educational facilities without the added burden of exorbitant flight costs.”

Explanation:

The Julia Creek Branch understands and thanks Qantas for their Resident fares program, however this only encompasses a very limited amount of Qantas customers in Northern Queensland, Northern Territory and North Western Australia. It is also only for an allotted amount of seating per flight. Rural and remote students located within New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia are currently unable to access these discounted fares. These students and their families are also paying high prices every year to transport their children to school.

Case Study

Currently students who live on Lord Howe Island have no option but to fly Qantas to attend their secondary education. With the average flight costing over \$600 per student. One Lord Howe Island family is paying over \$3500 per term to send their 3 children to school. This is just the cost to get them to Sydney, some students are then required to fly onward to their chosen school.

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS**A43. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)****CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government and relevant bodies for increased federal funding to improve rural and remote school’s access to specialists who can diagnose students with learning disabilities and offer ongoing education and support to students and their teachers.”

Explanation:

Despite the funding that is currently available many small rural schools find it difficult to access professional support for students with intellectual disabilities and learning difficulties. We are asking that the Minister for Education and the Ministers for Health and Aged Care and for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories work together to actively support professionals such as speech therapists, education support and mental health specialists to work in regional, rural and remote schools by providing them with appropriate placements that include accommodation and transport.

In Western Australia it has become a requirement for families to travel to Perth or utilise telehealth to access specialists, when previously the specialists have travelled to the regions. We believe this “footprint reduction” strategy deployed by the Health Department is affecting remote children whose families do not have the capacity to travel to seek diagnosis and treatment, as a result children are slipping through the cracks without appropriate diagnosis and intervention to assist them with their learning. Funding is required to incentivise specialists wanting to take on permanent positions in rural centres ensuring continuity for teachers, students and their parents. If the specialists were readily available in regional centres, it would be easier for families to travel to them and more likely that the same specialist would remain in the position giving children continuity of treatment.

A44. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Federal Government commits to a set intervention period of no more than six months from diagnosis of students with learning disabilities to commencing treatment.”

Explanation:

Often when geographically isolated and rural students are diagnosed with learning difficulties the wait time to see a specialist is significantly longer than their metropolitan equivalents and can be months or even a year. This extended wait time can have negative long-term effects academically especially when dealing with children under five. It is also affecting rural and remote teachers and other students who are often dealing with these issues in the classroom without assistance.

A45. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to remove NDIS Providers ability to charge cancellation fees to remote and geographically isolated NDIS recipients for telehealth services **relevant to educational needs** when they do not cancel their appointment within seven days of delivery.”

Explanation:

Remote and geographically isolated NDIS recipients who have no option but to use their funding to receive telehealth appointments at access therapy are currently being charged full appointment fees when they are unable to attend appointments due to loss of power or unstable internet services.

Case Study

A Family whose son uses telehealth appointments to access speech and occupational therapy has had to use over \$1000 of the child's NDIS Capacity building funding on fees for the 2022-2023 year due to loss of power or unstable internet services on scheduled appointments. Being unable to contact their NDIS provider due to these conditions to cancel these appointments they are automatically billed for the missed appointment. The family does not know when they will be without power, or Internet let alone having seven days' notice to contact their provider. These billed missed appointments must be declared to the NDIS as a missed or unattended appointment, possibly affecting the child's next review.

A46. Bourke Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates for improved rural and remote access and utilisation of Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) funding, currently managed through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).”

Explanation:

Many remote and geographically isolated children are missing out on essential allied health supports due to the ability to access or utilise funding administered through NDIS for Early Childhood Early Intervention. In Bourke the NDIS Early Childhood Partner was McKillop, and they had around seven staff supporting Western NSW. McKillop Family Services has withdrawn, and the workload has been transferred to National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) staff. Remote areas also have a significant underutilisation of ECEI funding, as when children's needs are identified, there are often no allied health services available to support them. Evidence shows that accessing Early Intervention supports improved educational outcomes.

TERTIARY

Access Allowance

A47. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the relevant ministers expand the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to include those rural and remote students who do not go directly from secondary education to tertiary.”

Explanation:

Rural and remote tertiary students struggle with the financial commitment of accessing University away from the family home, especially those who have done a year or two working since school as they do not qualify for the Tertiary Access Payment funds.

Some Universities require the students to have at least 2 gaps years to gain experience before they can apply and enrol in the course. These students are then not eligible to apply for the TAP funding even though they must move away from the family home to attend University.

A48. Tambo Branch (QLD)

DEEMED COVERED BY A47

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for the inclusion of students who take one gap year in the eligibility criteria for the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP).”

Explanation:

Many students who are eligible for the TAP have spent up to six years at boarding school in order to access secondary education. Often those students who wish to continue to tertiary education, need a break for one year after an extended time away from home and family at boarding school. It is not an unreasonable expectation to increase the TAP eligibility to those students who wish to take one year off from study in order to refresh themselves for the tertiary years to come.

Youth Allowance

A49. Kindon Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies relevant ministers to urgently review the Youth Allowance payment rate and seek an immediate increase to reflect the rising costs of living for geographically isolated students who have to reside away from home to access a tertiary education.”

Explanation:

The cost of living for university students has surged dramatically due to a confluence of housing shortages, escalating rent prices, and rising commodity costs. Many students struggle to secure affordable housing, often facing stiff competition for limited rental options, which drives prices even higher. Additionally, everyday expenses such as groceries, transportation, and utilities have also seen significant increases, further straining students' financial resources.

With strict criteria to access both dependent and independent Youth Allowance, families of these students are struggling to assist their children make ends meet while they study full time. Often a part time job is unobtainable due to heavy study workloads.

This economic pressure not only affects their academic performance but also their overall well-being.

A50. Western Australia State Council**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Minister for Social Services for greater flexibility for regional, rural and remote students to qualify for independent Youth Allowance to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity to complete a tertiary qualification."

Explanation:

In response to the Australian Universities Accord Report (Review), as part of the May 2024 budget, the Albanese Labor Government has set an overall tertiary education attainment target of 80 per cent of working aged people by 2050.

The Review summary recognised that:

"Raising tertiary education attainment to these levels will not be easy. It can only be achieved by making the higher education system far more equitable. The current under representation of people from disadvantaged groups must end."

Regional, rural and remote people were considered a disadvantaged under-represented group in the Review.

It is well-known that the lack of financial support is a barrier to RRR students completing tertiary education. One of the five key messages from the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy 2019 (Naphthine Review) was:

"there is insufficient support for RRR individuals who want to participate in tertiary education. Improving financial support is a necessary part of increasing access to, and completion of, tertiary education."

The Australian Universities Accord Report (Review) acknowledged that:

"Income support payments for students have not kept pace with wages or the needs of students and need to be adjusted to prevent cost-of-living pressures deterring people from studying. This is exactly the sort of thing Australia must avoid. The changes proposed by the Review are not only large, but they are also urgent. They must get underway as soon as possible."

The Review findings include:

"Every Australian should have the opportunity to experience the life transforming benefits of tertiary education. This is vital for Australia's future. Only by expanding access to tertiary education to currently under-represented groups – including people from ... regional, rural and remote students – can the nation meet its projected skills needs."

Recommendation 15 from the Review:

15. That to reduce the cost-of-living pressures on current students and remove the financial barriers to commencing study, the Australian Government improve access to income support for those who need it most and consider how to ensure the level of support is adequate to meet basic living standards while studying by:

- a. increasing the Parental Income Free Area for Youth Allowance from \$58,108 to \$68,857 per family and indexing it to the higher of the Consumer Price Index and Male Total Average Weekly Earnings, recognising that the current income-free area has not kept pace with growth in wages
- b. expanding income support eligibility and providing pro rata student payments to students who study part-time (between 50% and 74% of a full study load)

and that, due to the complexity of social security payments, the Minister for Social Services works with the Minister for Education to address the problems the Review has identified by

commissioning further technical analysis, with a report back to the ministers by early 2025. Such work should follow the principles below:

- i. student income support payments should continue to be focused on those most in need of support, and eligibility criteria should be regularly monitored to ensure the level of support is adequate to meet basic living standards while studying
- ii. student income support payments should continue to allow students to undertake reasonable amounts of work while studying, including through arrangements such as the income bank
- iii. student income support payments should follow an education-first principle where the policy intent is to reduce roadblocks to tertiary education participation and enable retention, success and completion
- iv. student income support payments should reduce the barriers facing students deciding whether to commence their study, focusing on the largest barriers of financial security and other responsibilities (such as working, caring and family)
- v. eligibility criteria for youth payments should take into account the specific needs of regional students, including the extra costs of relocation and that, once they leave home to study, many are effectively independent.

The Review is also concerned that independence testing arrangements are disadvantaging school leavers who need to move away from home to study. It referenced the Napthine Review which also found insufficient income support to participate in tertiary education is a key driver of lower participation and attainment outcomes for people from regional, rural and remote areas, and recommended more flexible pathways to demonstrate independence for Youth Allowance purposes for these students.

The Napthine Review indicated its preferred approach, would be:

“to see all students who relocate from a regional, rural or remote area automatically considered independent. The specific challenges regional, rural and remote students face in accessing higher education, and the extent to which the student income support system is doing enough to reduce these barriers, warrants further consideration.”

It also stated:

“Providing this support is not about providing welfare assistance, but rather removing a barrier that constrains the aspirations of students and prevents them from having the opportunity to successfully undertake higher-level tertiary education. In an ideal world, all RRR students and families would have access to support through Youth Allowance or some other mechanism to meet the additional costs associated with relocation. This would provide greater fairness and equity and ensure students are not deterred from undertaking study by the additional costs they may incur because of where they live. The Advisory Group’s preferred approach, if it were possible, would be to allow all students who relocate from an RRR area to automatically qualify as independent for Youth Allowance purposes. This would incorporate all tertiary qualifications that span at least one year. Students could also be provided with a one-off “relocation allowance” at the beginning of their course....”

The introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) has been a welcomed support as a relocation allowance. However, it is evident that more needs to be done. Improved financial support will encourage greater participation and help increase the number of students from RRR areas successfully completing their studies.

While there have been some significant improvements to financial support for RRR students over recent years, the costs associated with tertiary education still deter some students from studying and create additional pressures for them and their families.

A51. Katherine Branch (NT)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates for the removal of the parental threshold from the independent Youth Allowance for students applying under rural and remote work criteria."

Explanation:

Rural and remote students can be eligible for independent Youth Allowance before they turn 22 if (i) their parental home is in an inner regional, outer regional, remote or very remote area (ii) they need to move away from your parental home to study and (iii) they have worked since leaving secondary school. Students also need to have either: earned 75% or more of the National Training Wage Schedule rate in any 14-month period or worked at least 15 hours a week for at least 2 years. The current parental threshold is \$160,000 reducing by \$10,000 for other dependent siblings.

Parental income should not enter independent Youth Allowance criteria at all. Rural incomes are so fickle, even being given three financial years of parental income to choose from cannot always give these students a fair assessment of the ability of this family to support a tertiary or training student. These students clearly demonstrate independence through working for a least a year and leaving home to study. They take a gap year because they need to be financially independent but that can also place them at risk of being one of the statistics: students who take gap years are less likely to continue to further education. Any hurdles to these rural and remote students qualifying for independent Youth Allowance, such as Parental income thresholds, threatens their tertiary education.

A52. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government to change the eligibility criteria for independent Youth Allowance, so that those rural and remote students who choose to save or invest their earnings during the working period prior to attending University are not disadvantaged by the Liquid Assets criteria."

Explanation:

Students who choose to save their earnings during their gap year should not be disadvantaged due to the Liquid Asset Waiting Period. Many students work hard to save their earnings but instead must use their savings to support themselves and pay rent while attending university until the Liquid Asset Waiting period is fulfilled.

The Liquid Asset Waiting Period applies if the applicant has more than \$5500 in liquid assets prior to application for Youth Allowance and means waiting a number of weeks based on the amount of liquid assets. It tapers from \$5500 to \$11,500 meaning there may be a maximum 13 week waiting period before Youth Allowance payments begin.

Fellow students who earn the amount required to be considered eligible for independent Youth Allowance but spend everything they earn, are eligible for the allowance straight away but those who have saved and have money in the bank are not eligible for the allowance until after the required waiting period, and therefore not eligible for Rent Assistance either until payments begin.

A53. Louth Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Social Services to increase Centrelink Rent Assistance payments, to reflect the rising costs of rent for geographically isolated students who have to live away from home to access a tertiary education."

Explanation:

Obviously regional, remote, and very remote children need to factor in rent to their study plans. Rent is the biggest component of a student's costs and is often prohibitive therefore to study for example in a larger city or may mean that a student has to work so much that their course suffers.

A54. North West Branch (SA)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) liaises with the Department of Social Services to find a solution to wait times and difficulty contacting Services Australia regarding Youth Allowance applications for rural and remote students."

Explanation:

Students and families are struggling to contact a real person when they try and liaise with Services Australia regarding Youth Allowance. Is there a possibility of having a dedicated rural and remote telephone line, similar to the one that we access when contacting Services Australia regarding the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance.

Case Study

One of the children in our branch has returned to university to study nursing, online via Charles Darwin University. She has applied for Youth Allowance and submitted the information required in late February, but she needed to go back in and change something on the form. For weeks she rang and tried lots of different responses but the end result was always - "Thank you for calling "and the call was disconnected.

We contacted Kate Thompson, Tertiary Portfolio leader, and the response she received from Services Australia was to complete another form, highlighting the corrected areas and resubmit it.

We were unable to complete another form or amend the current one as suggested, as Services Australia says there is an application in progress. So we have progressed no further in our application for Youth Allowance. Also when we tried calling it still hung up on you when all of the options were selected.

Update: In June the old application was deleted and she was able to successfully complete a new application for Youth Allowance. She is now able to apply for rent assistance and has received a health care card.

A55. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)**AMMENDED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Federal Government through Services Australia recognises the adversity geographically isolated students face when living away from the family home to access a tertiary **education and recognises them as independents for Youth Allowance purposes**

A55. Mt Isa BOTA (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Federal Government through Services Australia recognises the adversity geographically isolated students face when living away from the family home to access a tertiary education and recognises them as independents for Youth Allowance purposes **when they do not qualify for dependent Youth Allowance.**"

Explanation:

We suggest that the Federal Government could do this by:

- Allowing geographically isolated students to automatically access Youth Allowance and Rent Assistance as independents so that students can focus on the task at hand and complete their studies without having to work several part-time jobs to earn enough to establish themselves as independent
- Increasing the amount that they can save for going to University as the current limits are discouraging students from saving
- Allowing eligibility for Assistance for Isolated Children and Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) to carry over into Tertiary Studies if commenced immediately following school - or eligibility for these payments automatically qualifies students for Youth Allowance and Rent Assistance. Our students have already endured six years boarding away from home. They are expected to live independently to attend these educational institutions – and this should be recognised.

S11. Mt Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Education to amend the timing of payments of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)."

Explanation:

A very remote student in our branch relocated 1,800km to commence studying a full-time nursing degree in Toowoomba Queensland. The student applied for TAP in January and was advised that her claim would be finalised within a week of the Universities census date, approximately 21st March or Week 6 of her course. The TAP Program Guidelines 2022-2024 say that the TAP first instalment for outer regional, remote and very remote (or single instalment for inner regional applicants) is *"to be paid 42 days (six weeks) after the qualifying tertiary course commencement date, after*

- *your enrolment is confirmed*
- *the final decision to approve the instalment is made."*

As of 6 May, which was 12 weeks after commencing her course, her application still had not been processed. If the Assistance for Isolated Children Distance Education Allowance and Boarding Allowance can be paid to isolated families, the week prior to the commencement of school term, why can't the Tertiary Access Payment be paid to students once they have accepted their University offer? On the Services Australia website it says the TAP is *"A payment to help students with the cost of moving from regional or remote areas for tertiary study. The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a one-off payment of up to \$5,000. It's to help eligible students with the cost of moving to study."*

S12. Mt Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Social Services and Services Australia to reduce the claim processing times for the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)."

Explanation:

A very remote student claimed for the TAP on 28 May and was advised that "We expect to finalise your claim between 26 August 2024 and 2 September 2024." That is a claim processing period of 12-13 weeks and unacceptably slow. At the 3 June 2024 Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2024-25, the Services Australia CEO tabled documents that showed from the period 1 January 2024 to 1 May 2024 68.1% of Tertiary Access Payment Claims took longer to process than the agreed timeliness standard.

<https://www.aph.gov.au/->

[/media/Estimates/ca/bud2425/Social_Services/02_TabledDoc_ServicesAustralia_ResponseToSenatoRsRequest.pdf?la=en&hash=2648D391C4BD550FD918E8BAB026044C45EAA97A](https://media/Estimates/ca/bud2425/Social_Services/02_TabledDoc_ServicesAustralia_ResponseToSenatoRsRequest.pdf?la=en&hash=2648D391C4BD550FD918E8BAB026044C45EAA97A)

S13. Mt Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education to add the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to the list of scholarships that are exempt from the Youth Allowance Income Test."

Explanation:

Currently the Youth Allowance personal income test allows for up to \$9,724 per year in scholarships received to be exempt from the income test. Some scholarships including Commonwealth Scholarships and the Relocation Scholarship are exempt from the income test and yet the Tertiary Access Payment isn't. A student from remote Australia who is fortunate enough to receive a University Scholarship or Bursary (many of which give preference or are targeted at students from regional, remote and very remote areas) will find that combined with the \$5,000 TAP payment that they exceed the scholarship threshold, and this affects their dependent Youth Allowance payment rate.

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/income-from-scholarships-for-students-and-pprentices?context=43921>

Tertiary - Other**A56. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)****LOST**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to commence a ~~pilot~~ program to waive the HECS debt for new university education degree enrolments where graduates are willing to hold a teaching position in a remote area for a period equivalent to their tertiary education."

Explanation:

Programs of this kind have the possibility of enticing new teachers into rural and remote areas that they may previously not have considered. Having them hold the teaching position for the equivalent of the course time allows them to form relationships and strong bonds within communities within those isolated towns. With the cost of living increasing, removing one of the financial burdens on a new teacher would be a hard offer to turn away.

A57. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to waive the HECS debt for primary and secondary teachers who have or are willing to take up geographically isolated teaching positions in Australia's rural and remote schools for a minimum of three years."

Explanation:

This kind of program could attract seasoned teachers into isolated communities, potentially bringing their families which increases school sizes and funding and adds to local communities.

A58. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education and the Federal Department of Education, for the reduction of HECS fees when an education, allied health or medical/nursing student chooses to do their compulsory placements hours in remote and geographically isolated areas."

Explanation:

Attracting new Teachers, Speech therapist, Occupational therapists, nurses and early childhood educators to our remote and isolated areas is becoming exceptionally difficult. The government needs to find new ways of enticing TAFE and University Students to these areas, allowing them to see these options for their future employment. Allowing higher education students to decrease their HECS debt

with the compulsory hours of UNPAID work they must undertake to complete their course will give them a glimpse into a rural and remote lifestyle.

The Julia Creek Branch understands the government has implemented a similar program. However, this program is means tested and will ONLY pay the student \$319.50 a week or \$8.40 an hour over a normal pay week of 38 hours. The current basic casual award rate is \$29.04.

A59. Rankins Springs Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education and the Federal Treasurer to change the timing of HECS-HELP debt indexation applied to compulsory repayments."

Explanation:

The indexation of Higher Education Loans Program (HELP, or also known as HECS) debts has long been an issue for university graduates. Although HECS has been promoted in the past as 'interest free', the loan has always had indexation applied at the rate of the current CPI at the time of indexation, June 1. Recently, the Federal Government announced that they would implement a recommendation from the Australian Universities Accord where indexation would be set at either the current Consumer Price Index (CPI) or the Wage Price Index (WPI), whichever is lower, backdated to 1 June 2023. This will cancel the 7.1% CPI indexation applied to HECS-HELP debts in 2023, as well as the predicted 2024 increase of 4.7%, dropping the rate applied to both years to 3.2%. This is a very welcome change for university graduates and apprentices who have debt.

Another recommendation from the Australian Universities Accord is to change the timing of indexation. Currently, once a graduate earns above the compulsory repayment threshold of \$51,550, repayments are deducted from wages through the tax system and held by the government until the graduate lodges their tax return when it then applied to reduce the debt. The total amount deducted from wages over the financial year is not applied to the loan until after the graduate lodges their tax return. The unjust issue is that indexation is applied to the debt on 1 June, which is before the repayments have been applied to the loan, disregarding the fact that the graduate has had repayments deduct from their wages over the previous 11 months.

We understand that this is a complex system for the tax office to administer, and that any changes would not be easy to make, but we feel that the timing of the indexation of the debt is unfair. Applying indexation after the repayments have been deducted from the debt would be far more equitable.

This could be remedied by indexation being applied 1 November each year after the Individual Tax Return due date of 31 October. If this indexation date was adopted, any repayments deducted from wages during the previous tax year would be included in the balance of the HECS-HELP debt before indexation is calculated and applied.

A60. North West Branch (SA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations to investigate the real cost rural and remote students face whilst completing compulsory placements during their degree."

Explanation:

We thank the government for introducing a Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) of \$319.50 from July 2025. However, we do have many questions; What is the means tested component of the payment? Do the students who do not qualify for the Australian Government income support still receive the CPP? Is the CPP enough for a student who cannot be paid for their placement period, which can be for months?

Often students have a minimum of six months placement throughout their degree. The recently announced payment is for teachers, nurses, midwives and social workers. There are many other students in degrees that need financial support for their placements.

We have two remote students in our branch who are studying externally while holding full to part time jobs, away from home. These jobs have to be flexible so they are able to leave for compulsory placements for many weeks at a time. Their placement locations are limited to places where they can couch surf or stay with relatives or friends. Paying extra rent for a short time is expensive and not viable for many. For our children who already reside away from home to study, the mandatory unpaid practical placements add an extra financial and emotional burden. as they juggle paid work, study obligations and full-time placement.

A61. North West Branch (SA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations to fast track the commencement date of the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) to 1 August 2024 to help alleviate the financial hardship current rural and remote students are facing whilst trying to complete their degrees."

Explanation:

We appreciate that the Prime Minister is 'proud to be backing the hard work and aspiration of Australians looking to better themselves by studying at University', but why wait another full year to do so.

A62. Western Australia State Council

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates the Minister for Education and Minister for Skills and Training to expand the cost-of-living Commonwealth Prac Payment to include students who are undertaking a vocational education and training or university qualification in the allied health field, in order to help address the shortage of these professionals in rural and remote areas."

Explanation:

In May 2024, the Albanese Government announced it would establish a Commonwealth Prac Payment to support students undertaking mandatory workplace placements required for university and vocational education and training qualifications.

Australians studying to be a teacher, a nurse, a midwife or a social worker will be eligible for this payment.

We acknowledge the skills shortage in these fields; however, our geographically isolated students are also affected by the shortage of services provided by allied health professionals. Without the services provided by these professionals, students' educational outcomes are compromised.

As quoted by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese "Teachers give our children the best start in life, they deserve a fair start to their career", our geographically isolated students equally deserve the best in health support services to ensure they have the opportunity to achieve optimal educational outcomes.

A63. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) seeks **financial** support for regional and rural tertiary students and apprentices who have to undertake placements to complete their qualification.”

Explanation:

A final year Radiography student has to undertake a 12-month full time **unpaid** placement to complete her degree. This student has to relocate to where she has been sent for the placement, to work full time without payment, find and pay for accommodation, transport and support herself for the year with a second job, after being a student for three years.

A64. Charleville Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Federal Government to extend the Commonwealth Prac Payments for practicums undertaken in rural and remote areas especially in the areas of study such as Allied Health, Veterinary Science and Medicine.”

Explanation:

ICPA Charleville Branch thanks the Minister for Education the Hon. Jason Clare and the Federal Government for acknowledging the need for Paid Practicum Placements in the areas of Teaching, Nursing and Social Work, as recommended in the Australian Universities Accord but implores ICPA (Aust) to continue to lobby the Federal Government to widen this list to include other areas of study to acknowledge the huge cost impost that undertaking these mandatory practicums holds.

For students to apply and to accept a practicum in a rural area will often mean paying rent at place of study as well as in the prac location, either taking leave or having to resign from part time employment, travel costs and in general living away from home expenses.

Charleville Branch, like many other branches across Australia, offer a \$300 Bursary to Education Students who choose schools in Charleville or Morven in Remote South-west Queensland to undertake their prac work. This is a small acknowledgement of the costs associated in relocating to a rural and remote area and a recognition that we truly appreciate their interest in working remotely.

Veterinary Science Students, as a mandatory part of their studies must undertake around 54 weeks in total, depending on the University attending, of unpaid placement over the duration of their course. Occupational Therapy students must complete a minimum of 1000 unpaid hours and Speech Pathologists may be required as part of their course to complete a mandatory rural and remote placement.

To ensure that we continue to attract and retain Allied Health, Medicine and Veterinary Professionals to Rural and Remote areas into the future we must be able to provide prac placements that do not impart a significant financial burden on the student.

A65. Charleville Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Federal Government for the ongoing expansion of the Country University Centre’s (CUC) network to enable greater access to tertiary and vocational education for geographically isolated students.”

Explanation:

ICPA Charleville Branch thanks the Minister for Education the Hon. Jason Clare and the Federal Government for the recent rollout of a further ten Country University Centre (CUC) Regional University Study Hubs throughout Rural, Regional and Remote Australia.

Regional University Hubs support regional, rural, and remote students to successfully pursue higher education and vocational studies or training, while remaining in their communities with family, friends, and local employment. By expanding the Australia wide network of these centres an increased number of rural students and communities will benefit into the future.

A66. Queensland State Council**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian Council of Deans (ACDE) to tailor explicit units within Initial Teacher Education to equip graduates with current, evidence-based strategies to support neurodivergent and diverse disability learners present in an inclusive learning environment particularly when teaching in a rural and remote setting where access to specific support is not readily available."

Explanation:

There are approximately 30,000 autistic students within Queensland State Schools alone. Behavioural management and meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners and diverse disabilities in an inclusive learning environment is becoming increasingly more complex for teachers.

ICPA Qld members have raised concerns that a variety of rural and remote classrooms are under resourced in terms of staffing ratios to meet the needs of the students and the capability of teachers to support neurodiverse learners and diverse disabilities. This is particularly difficult in small rural schools where there is very little support on the ground. Without adequate Initial Teacher Education, teachers are not prepared for the challenges of inclusive classroom management, which is arguably contributing to the national teacher shortage and potentially driving teachers away from a long-term career in education. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teaching principals are the most frequent seekers of advice from specific support agencies. This is to meet the complex demands in a remote multiage classroom which have a cohort of neurodivergent students. They are arguably seeking this support because their degree did not equip them with the skills and knowledge to meet the complex needs of these students.

Given this is a nation-wide issue, ICPA Qld is calling upon the ACDE to broaden and strengthen Initial Teacher Education courses to include current, evidence-based units in disability specific areas and appropriate knowledge of the Disability Discrimination Act and Disability Standards for Education.

Whilst, some universities offer Post Graduate courses, it is essential to keep abreast of current research and tailor Initial Teacher Education units accordingly. Capacity needs to be built for teaching graduates to be equipped with the necessary skills to support the diverse needs of students within an inclusive classroom. Graduates require a strong foundation and understanding of inclusive practice and need to be supported with the appropriate practicum to gain classroom experience.

ICPA Qld commends these critical areas being identified as Priority Area 2 (Strengthening initial teacher education) and Priority Area 3 (Keeping the teachers we have) within the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. ICPA Qld would welcome any updates on the progress in the development of national guidelines and strategies focused on inclusive practice to support students with diverse learning needs and disabilities.

S14. Mt Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education to include ICPA Australia as a stakeholder when developing the Program Guidelines for the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) to ensure the unique challenges of students from regional, remote and very remote Australia are considered and included as well as those students wishing to undertake placement in those parts of Australia."

Explanation:

The CPP will be means-tested to target students who need it most. As students from regional, remote and very remote areas have been identified as an underrepresented group within higher education it would be beneficial for ICPA Australia's input into accessibility to this payment for this group of students. Also, the additional costs for students associated with travelling to regional or remote parts of the country to undertake placement needs consideration during means-testing. We don't want students choosing to not complete regional, rural and remote placements due not being eligible for CPP and experiencing placement poverty.

S15. Tasmania Branch (TAS)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to implement the remaining recommendations from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy*, particularly the recommendations pertaining to Youth Allowance, to improve access and affordability for rural and remote tertiary students."

Explanation:

The National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy Final Report (Naphthine Review) sole focus was on rural and remote tertiary education and contained 7 key recommendations and 33 actions. To ensure the Federal Government's commitment to rural and remote tertiary education and of improving tertiary education participation and outcomes for students from regional, rural and remote areas, all the recommendations and associated actions must be implemented.

The cost of relocation and ongoing living expenses associated with living away from home and the inability to qualify for student payments including Youth Allowance are two significant barriers faced by rural and remote students accessing a tertiary education and form part of many of ICPA tertiary motions each year. While rural and remote students are appreciative of the recommendation's actions that were implemented in particular the Tertiary Access Payment, the expansion of the Regional University Centres and improving the Fares Allowance, there are other recommendations particularly around Youth Allowance that must be implemented to improve these student's eligibility to student payments and access to a tertiary education.

The recommendations pertaining to Youth Allowance that have not been implemented are:

- access to Youth Allowance as an independent for rural and remote students who successfully complete their first year of tertiary study externally and then relocate to continue study for a further minimum of one year
- the reduction of the earnings required for rural and remote students who are qualifying for independent Youth Allowance under the Concessional Workforce test and
- the review of the changes to the parental means test cut-offs for independent Youth Allowance under the Concessional Workforce test.

S16. Tasmania Branch (TAS)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to prioritise the implementation of the recommendations from the *Australian Universities Accord Final Report* relating to rural and remote tertiary students."

Explanation:

While it is pleasing to see in the Australian Universities Accord Final Report recommendations that the specific needs and challenges that rural and remote tertiary students face when accessing a higher education are highlighted and that some of the issues that ICPA members have highlighted are addressed in the recommendations. Now it is imperative that all the recommendations are implemented, with the rural and remote recommendations being prioritised.

Included in the recommendations that need prioritising are:

- Expansion of Regional Study hubs for both Vocational Education and Training and Higher education
- Tertiary Access Payment measures – the removal of the requirement to commence study within 12 months of leaving year 12 and to change the timing of TAP payments to provide payment prior to relocation
- Improve the student income support by increasing the Parental Income Free Area for dependent Youth Allowance and further review and monitoring of the student payment system eligibility criteria and payments with focus on students with the most need including for rural and remote students being identified as effectively independent once they leave home therefore should be considered as eligible for independent Youth Allowance
- HELP debt indexation timing - change the timing so that amounts withheld are accounted for before indexation is applied to HELP loans.

The implementation of all the recommendations of this Accord review and the previously mentioned Napthine Review will go a long way to making the choice to go onto tertiary study post-school an affordable and achievable option for our rural and remote students.

TRAINING

A67. Richmond Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Federal Government and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to establish a relocation allowance for rural and remote Australian Apprentices who have to relocate from their place of residence to undertake their apprenticeship.”

Explanation:

At present, no relocation assistance exists for apprentices who reside in rural and remote locations and must relocate to access their chosen pathway.

The Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) is a rent assistance payment and can only be accessed once rental status has been proven.

Furthermore, the very few apprentices who qualify for Youth Allowance as a dependent are excluded from the Relocation Scholarship, which is an adjunct payment to Youth Allowance available for higher education study.

There is also no provision for apprentices to receive the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) which provides assistance for relocation costs to access higher education.

The costs of relocation, often hundreds of kilometres away from the family home, are significant and include setting up a home, including rental bond, furniture, linen, kitchen utensils and much more, all on a first year apprentice wage which is extremely low. This is all before even considering the actual cost of living, which continues to increase at an exponential rate.

Whilst our branch is appreciative of the various incentives currently provided for apprentices in trade shortage areas included on the Priority List, we believe a relocation allowance should be provided for all rural and remote apprentices who need to relocate, regardless of their trade, as this is an access issue.

Rural and remote apprentices are highly sought after and valued due to their hands on skills and strong work ethic. Without assistance for relocation, many young people simply cannot access an apprenticeship placement, thereby thwarting the potentially life changing career opportunities and increasing the skills and talent of the Australian workforce.

A68. Bourke Branch (NSW)**DEEMED COVERED BY A67**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for financial supports to Australian Apprentices who relocate from rural and remote regions to commence their employment and trade training.”

Explanation:

The process of relocating away from family and community support, often for the first time is a financially and emotionally difficult time for young apprentices. These young people need to set up a place of residence, live independently including undertaking activities such as shopping and household management for the first time while also commencing a new occupation. Coupled with this, the on-going living costs and that apprentices are on very low wages, often with minimal financial assistance.

Trade pathways are often avoided due to the financial barriers that prevent many rural and remote students from commencing or continuing along this pathway. It was disheartening for a branch family to learn late last year that their son was overlooked for an apprentice position as the employers knew the relocation requirements would make it too difficult for him to sustain the apprenticeship.

Access supports such as Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) are available to tertiary students to offset the high costs of relocation. Despite ICPA (Aust) requests to the relevant department and ministers, Australian Apprentices remain ineligible under the current criteria.

Case Study

My son lives in remote NSW 125km from Bourke in far western NSW. Upon completion of his HSC last year, he decided to apply for apprenticeships. He applied for an apprenticeship based in Wollongong where he had a successful first interview. He was not given a second interview and upon enquiring as to how to improve for his next application he was told that he was a very strong candidate, but they were concerned about his ability to relocate so far from home due to affordability, as the opportunity was 947km away from home.

He successfully gained an apprenticeship in Dubbo which is 500km from our home. He would not have been able to do this financially except that we have a small block of land 20km from Dubbo that has a relocatable basic building on it where he can live. There are no services connected (power or town water). He spends \$120 per week on fuel for a generator to get power and by the time he pays \$100 for fuel for his ute to go to work and food for the week, there is very little left over. Due to low rainfall, 2 weeks ago he ran out of rainwater, and we had to get a truck in, to resupply water (a cost of \$450 which we paid for as he could not afford to).

He has also had the costs of buying tools for his apprenticeship and has spent over \$2500 in the first 3 months on them. He does not have Internet and has limited mobile service where he is located. We have helped through buying household appliances and furnishings to make his situation more comfortable, however cannot afford to support him more than this due to still having twins in Year 8 away at boarding school that we are paying for. There is no way he could have afforded to relocate to Dubbo and rent commercially and still have enough money to buy the basics.

He luckily has a very good employer who helped him get to medical treatment last week when he was sick and also paid for his medication that he needed.

He has met with his ASSN but has had no information about applying for LAFHA despite them being told of his home address. He has only been informed of Apprentice Training Support Payments.

A69. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to amend guidelines, so that the Australian Apprenticeship Support Service (AASS) providers ensure rural and remote Australian Apprentices are fully supported by each provider and are recognised as a Service Specialization within the 2024-2026 AASS contract guidelines."

Explanation:

Recognition that 'rural and remote' are a separate specialization group is required to ensure appropriate assistance is provided so those in need have equity of access to post school qualifications. Bourke Branch appreciates that this has been somewhat addressed in the recent review of non-financial support for apprentices where the four Key Client Groups to be supported by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations contracted AASSs are:

- Australian Apprentices in Remote Australia, along with
- Women in Male Dominated Trades
- First Nation Australian Apprentices
- Australian Apprentices with Disability.

Although the guidelines contain positive changes the latest contract for AASS's has not placed Australian Apprentices in Remote Australia as a Service Specialisation, as it has for the other three Key Client Groups. (section 2.3 of Request for Tenders for AASS 2024-6 document page 29)

Under the new contract commencing July 2024, AASSs will no longer be the provider of the full non-financial support system for Australian Apprentices as was previously the case. Within the new structure our understanding is that if an AASS has not received the contract for specialist areas of support, who is supporting these apprentices who require the specialist support but sit within the geographic area the AASS has been contracted to cover? Should an apprentice require specialist support, it is concerning that if their AASS is not contracted to offer this support they may either not receive the identified supports or will have to navigate contact and assistance from a second AASS.

A70. Bourke Branch (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to extend the data collected on a commencing Australian Apprentices' Training Plan (AATP) to identify those who relocate from rural and remote regions to engage in the trades training."

Explanation:

Many rural and remote students undertake an Australian Apprenticeship without the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN), Employer or Registered Training Organisation (RTO) knowing they have relocated away from family and supports to engage in employment as a trainee or apprentice and Vocational Education and Training (VET).

Prior to an apprenticeship sign up, coordinated by the AASNs, all stakeholders contribute details and information that generate the training plan that is signed off on by all involved parties. The signed plan is then submitted and registered with the relevant state training bodies. To add the apprentices' home address as well as the residential address to the training plan, and to add a Relocation Required option, would allow all stakeholders to see the distance many employees/apprentices have relocated and may also still be travelling considerable distance for the relevant VET delivery.



On the current NSW Apprenticeship/Traineeship – Training Plans there are multiple address options for the Employer, and also for the Training Details (including mode of delivery and training address) but only one address format for the Apprentice requiring a Street Address and Suburb.

Once collected, the relocation data could be part of the financial and non-financial support process, for organisations who collate Apprenticeship data to inform policy and practices in the apprenticeship space. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) could utilise the additional data to build a more informative profile on those who relocate to undertake an apprenticeship – our branch understands that they currently categorise apprentices as rural and remote through the data they do have which is the address of the employer.