

**The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of
Australia Inc.**



Federal Conference

Motion Update 2024

May 2025

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Introduction

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust) annual Conference was held on the 24th and 25th July 2024 in Sydney NSW. At the conference, 87 motions were presented across eight portfolios. All motions have been actioned since the conference.

This Motion Update reports on the progress of these actions across all Portfolios since conference, some responses are yet to be received, however we will keep members informed as further developments come to hand.

Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)

[2024 Motions: A1, A2, A3](#)

Increasing the AIC Allowance and Alignment with the CPI Education Sub-Index:

The [AIC](#) allowance should address the out-of-pocket expenses rural and remote families face when sending their children to school via distance education, boarding schools, or by establishing a second home to access education. It is crucial to note that, despite the increasing costs of education in geographically isolated areas, the AIC allowance has not seen a significant increase in recent years.

Boarding Schools:

Many rural and remote families are required to send their children to boarding schools for secondary education, especially in regions where high schools are unavailable. The gap between the AIC Boarding Allowance and actual boarding fees continues to widen, straining the financial burden on rural families. Boarding fees increase annually by 4-8%, yet the AIC is only indexed according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which does not reflect the real cost escalation.

On October 24, 2024, The Hon Amanda Rishworth, Minister for Social Services acknowledged that while the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is indexed annually to the CPI to maintain its value, it is not set to cover a specific percentage of boarding costs.

"The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is intended to help with the additional costs incurred by [geographically isolated](#) families to access schooling. It is not set to covering a particular percentage of boarding costs. The basic boarding allowance is indexed annually in line with CPI increases to ensure it maintains its relative value"

On the 9th of December 2024, we received confirmation of the [2025 AIC rates](#):

Basic Boarding Allowance; increased by 3.79% to \$10,338.00

Additional Boarding Allowance; increased by 3.81% to \$2,965.00

In November & December 2024 I asked State and Territory Boarding Portfolio leaders to help me collect data. I called for members input, with a survey sent out by the Boarding Portfolio, that enabled me to collect current and relevant data to support the notion that the current BBA is not sufficient.

Costing Challenges:

The biggest challenge is documenting the actual costs families incur when sending their children to boarding schools, especially for families in geographically isolated areas who have no alternative options. In February 2025, during a face-to-face delegation in Canberra, ICPA Federal Council asked Senator The Hon Matt Canavan to help estimate the financial impact of a \$4000 increase in the AIC Boarding Allowance. The preliminary costing suggests that this would decrease the fiscal and underlying cash balances by approximately \$23.7 million to \$24.3 million over the 2024-25 Budget period.

Mr. Canavan, and we have been given permission to *"Please feel free to share this widely with other ICPA*

members”

The costings which have just been released by the Parliamentary Budget Office, can be found at:
[Increase of the Assistance for Isolated Children \(AIC\) boarding allowance | pbo](#)

Second Home Allowance:

The AIC Second Home Allowance helps families set up a second home in a nearby town so their children can attend school. This option is essential for families who live hundreds of kilometres from the nearest school and face a tough decision: either send their children to boarding school or establish a second home. Expanding this allowance can support the educational needs of students in rural and remote areas.

Distance Education:

Families who choose distance education must create a home-based schoolroom, purchase additional learning materials, and print resources provided to mainstream students. They also incur significant travel and accommodation costs for school activities. The AIC Distance Education Allowance provides partial relief for these costs but needs to be increased to address the growing financial strain on rural families.

Objectives:

Federal Government departments must continually review and amend legislation to ensure rural and remote families can access financial assistance through the AIC program. A unified approach across all states is needed to support students who must live away from home to access education. Additionally, there should be recurrent funding for both government and non-government school term hostels, and capital funding to support these institutions. Commonwealth school funding models must support geographically isolated students, regardless of the education type.

Recommendations:

- **Increase the AIC Allowances** across all categories and ensure the allowances are indexed to the CPI Education Sub-Index.
- **Review the AIC Scheme** to ensure it adequately meets the needs of geographically isolated students.

Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) Exemption

[2024 Motions: A8, S2](#)

FBT Exemption for Schools/Boarding Facilities:

Summary: The current FBT policy negatively impacts the cost of education for isolated students by imposing unnecessary taxes on boarding school staff accommodation. Removing the [FBT on residential accommodation](#) for essential supervisory staff would help reduce the costs incurred by some boarding schools, particularly in metropolitan areas. This exemption would lower the overall fees charged to families, making education more accessible.

The **Australian Boarding Schools' Association (ABSA)** estimates that the FBT on staff accommodation adds around \$2000 per student. Removing this tax could significantly reduce the financial burden on families who rely on boarding schools due to geographical isolation.

FBT Exemption for Employers Assisting Employees:

Employers in geographically isolated areas should be exempt from FBT when providing financial assistance to employees for their children's boarding school fees. The current tax burden makes it difficult for rural and remote families to afford education for their children, even with employer assistance. Removing this tax would help level the playing field for children in rural areas, ensuring they have equal access to education.

Recommendations:

- **Introduce a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) Exemption** for schools and boarding facilities that provide on-site accommodation for essential supervisory staff.
- **Introduce FBT Exemptions** for employers assisting employees in geographically isolated areas with boarding school costs for their children.

Extended Information: Over the past 9 months there have been countless emails to and from ABSA, dozens of Boarding Schools, Boarding Portfolio and many direct face to face opportunities to discuss the removal of the FBT on accommodation provided to essential live in boarding staff. ICPA (Aust) were able to send multiple letters to Ministers and Senators to outline this issue and show the breadth of support we have received. With the Federal Election looming, we are now considering our next move and will ensure that after the election results are clear, ICPA will then be able to move to the next phase of our advocacy; calling for this motion to be supported Federally.

Disability Support at Boarding School

[2024 Motions: S3, S4](#)

ICPA(Aust) advocates for additional financial support to schools catering to students with disabilities from rural and remote areas. Many of these students are left to navigate the complexities of boarding school without adequate support, and financial assistance is crucial to meet their needs. The “[Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)” must be amended to address the unique needs of students with disabilities who live in residential settings to access education.

ICPA(Aust) calls for:

- **Additional financial support** for boarding schools catering to students with disabilities from rural and remote areas.
- **Amendments to the Disability Standards for Education 2005** to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities in boarding settings are properly addressed.

Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (CRSP)

[2024 Motions: A9, A10, A11](#)

Summary: ICPA(Aust) strongly supports the continuation and expansion of the [Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program](#) (CRSP), which assists students from rural, regional, and remote areas with boarding fees. Feedback from ICPA members highlights the program’s positive impact, but many families feel the need for broader assistance, as the financial burden remains significant.

The key objectives of the CRSP are to:

- *Assist students from rural, regional and remote areas with boarding fees in order to provide a quality education option where local alternatives may not exist or be suitable.*
- *Provide additional financial support to families who are unable to afford boarding school fees and associated costs even with existing government support, with the intention to reduce family's financial contribution towards boarding school fees.*
- *Provide a supported boarding experience for students and families from low socioeconomic status backgrounds or experiencing financial hardship...*

On the 6th November 2024 ICPA(Aust) received a reply from the Assistant Minister for Education, Regional Development, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry with some comments included regarding the CRSP pilot.

“...The Government also understands there may be limited secondary school options in regional, rural and remote Australia, with many families relying on boarding schools for the best possible education outcomes. I appreciate the advice you have provided to establish the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Programme pilot and your feedback on the program as part of its initial evaluation. I also note your correspondence to the Prime Minister expressing ICPA’s strong support of the program...”

The Australian Government is continuing to review the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program. Federal Council eagerly await the findings and recommendations from this report and will share them with members via our website and other digital platforms.

Recommendation:

- **Expansion of the CRSP** to support more families in need.

Access & Timing of AIC Payments

[2024 Motion: A7](#)

Summary: ICPA(Aust) has worked with Services Australia to explore improvements in the AIC payment system. A proposal to change the payment structure to allow for three payments instead of four for families with Year 12 students is under consideration. This adjustment would help ease the financial strain on families as their children approach the end of secondary education.

ICPA(Aust) recommends:

Recommendation:

- **Allow AIC payments to be made in either 3 or 4 instalments**, depending on the family's needs.

Extended Information: Over the last several months since our 2024 Federal Conference, we have received some positive feedback during multiple online meetings from Services Australia regarding implementing this payment structure. Services Australia described that 'the system needs to be upgraded'. They have been working behind the scenes to see if a 'system upgrade' will support the option of the AIC payment to be made in 3 payments instead of 4, for families with Yr. 12 students. As you can appreciate, this is an intricate and complex process for Service Australia, and they continue to work through the solutions for us.

During our face-to-face delegation in Canberra in February 2025, ICPA (Aust) Federal Councillors Anna McCorkle (Meeting Lead), Melissa Kerr, Jennifer Ruska and myself, Amber Driver had the opportunity to meet with 8 representatives from Services Australia and the Department of Social Services.

Collectively their roles included: National Manager of Student, Parenting & Concessions Programs Branch Payments, Director & Assistant Director ABSTUDY/AIC, Payments Team: AIC and Abstudy, Branch Manager Department of Social Services, Director of Student Concessions and Payments, Payments Team: AIC and Abstudy, Department of Social Services Student Concessions and Payments. While they continued to agree that the seemingly simple 'system upgrade' was more complex than just clicking a button, they did ask if taking action on this motion would negatively impact any of our members.

We were able to then explain our voting process during the Federal Conference and that this motion was carried with full support of its attending members, who in turn, represent the entire ICPA membership. In addition, we were able to draw attention to families with children in Yr. 12 to be able to select an option for their AIC payments to be made in 3 or 4 payments.

Review & Update Forms and Eligibility Criteria

[2024 Motions: A4, S1](#)

Summary: ICPA(Aust) has worked successfully with Services Australia to **resolve issues (Motion S1, 2024)** related to families with businesses in rural and remote areas. These families are now eligible for AIC assistance, even if their postal address had previously been an obstacle.

ICPA (Aust) recommended:

- **Review and amend the “[No reasonable access to school](#)” clause** to ensure that travelling families with businesses can access AIC assistance without further complications.

- **Review and amend Rule 3** in the AIC application to remove unnecessary ongoing requirements once the initial criteria have been met.

Extended Information: The Boarding Portfolio has successfully been able to **RESOLVE** Motion S1, within 5 months of the 2024 Federal Conference.

New guidelines have been set by Services Australia to ensure that travelling families with businesses, that service rural and remote locations, are now eligible to receive AIC as their postal address is no longer going to negatively impact their application. This information was also shared via the Federal Focus on 13th December. I strongly urge any family that is still having issues with this to PLEASE reach out to ICPA Federal Council. Services Australia are more than willing to work with families personally to resolve current issues with this motion. Following the conference, I set about writing letters to the Minister of Social Services, Minister of Education & Assistant Minister of Education to ask for an **amendment to Rule 3 (Motion A4, 2024)**

Here is an excerpt from my letter:

"... In its current form, the existing criteria for eligibility for funding under Rule 3, no allowance is made for the fluctuating state of rural road 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. Unpredictable road conditions in rural and remote Australia provide a level of uncertainty and impracticability for families in seeking educational equality for their children. Once the 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..."

The Solution - The proposed amendment for Rule 3 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 '

Once approved the application should remain valid for the child's remaining schooling years (unless the child changes residential address)..."

On the 24th October 2024 ICPA Australia received a reply from The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister of Social Services, in reply to your motion:

"Thank you for your recent letters outlining concerns about matters impacting the ability of rural and remote students to access appropriate education, as raised by your members at the Isolated Children's Parents' Association Federal Conference in July. I appreciate the ICPA's role in advocating on behalf of rural and remote families..."

...On behalf of the ICPA, you also requested consideration for changes to the Assistance for Isolated Children's (AIC) Scheme Reasonable Access Criteria (Rule 3)...

As you know, applicants for AIC must first establish eligibility for the relevant allowance by demonstrating geographic isolation or a special need of the student. These circumstances are then validated toward the end of the year by Services Australia in the end of year review. This intends to capture any change of circumstance and includes travel distance and conditions under Rule 3.

*Where the student's attendance at school is no longer affected for at least 20 school days in a year, AIC payments under Rule 3 are no longer payable. **Where a pattern of disruption is likely to consistently prevent access for at least 20 days, AIC can be paid in recognition of historical disruptions.** For example, historical weather reports showing impassable roads for at least 20 school days would satisfy AIC evidence requirements under Rule 3...*

I appreciate the concerns you have raised about the impact payments under my portfolio are having on rural and remote families' access to education. I trust this information is of assistance"

Communications Portfolio

Communication issues continue to be raised at ICPA Federal Conferences, and this area remains a focus and dedicated effort by Federal Council.

ICPA (Aust) continues to engage with key communications stakeholders. This ensures we are able to raise both ongoing and more time-sensitive topics and issues. ICPA (Aust) also continues our involvement in the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Consumer Consultative Forum, where we have the opportunity to raise members' issues. ICPA (Aust) also participates in regular meetings with NBN Co and Telstra. We also engage with the Regional Tech Hub on a regular basis and are able to assist members with communications needs through this channel.

Below is a summary of progress in the portfolio to date for 2024-2025.

Internet Access

Members continue to raise the necessity for adequate internet access commensurate to the educational needs of geographically isolated students. Following the 2024 Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, citing all motions carried at the conference, underpinned by an overall request that adequate internet access is available for all rural and remote students with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost of the services.

Correspondence received acknowledged that access to reliable communications is an essential service and understands there can be significant technological challenges and opportunities in maintaining connectivity in regional communities. The Minister referred to the Government's \$480 million to improve both mobile and broadband coverage across Australia.

School Student Broadband Initiative

Additionally, the Minister made reference to the improvements to the SkyMuster Plus Premium Plans and the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) which is providing a free nbn internet service to 30,000 eligible families until June 2028. The Government has also committed to funding free Community Wi-Fi in over twenty remote communities around Australia.

LEOSats

In response to the introduction of LEOSat technology, Gavin Williams confirmed nbn released a closed RFI (request for information) last year to further understand the offerings of various low earth orbit satellite providers, including the advantages and challenges of different LEO constellations. This is their first step in examining how to best meet the needs of people who live and work in their present satellite footprint. They are continuing to work on this endeavour and can confirm that the principles outlined in 2024 Federal Conference motions feature in their thinking.

The Minister has confirmed that NBN Co has received responses to its closed RFI from several suppliers and is currently undergoing a detailed analysis and evaluation of these responses. The process is still ongoing, and the Government is engaging with NBN Co throughout this process and fully supports the thorough consideration of this opportunity.

Additionally, the Australian Government has established a Low Earth Orbit Satellite Working Group to consider the range of issues and opportunities related to LEOSats and hybrid solutions. Consideration for all options includes how best to meet the safety, security, sovereignty and sustainability needs of all

Australians, ensuring the regulatory and policy settings are fit-for-purpose so these new technologies can be easily adopted.

The government has announced a significant trial of fixed voice and Low Earth Orbit Satellite (LEOSat) connectivity. This is a notable step forward for consumers, particularly in regional areas. With direct to handset connectivity anticipated to provide mobile phones with voice and text capabilities in the future, these trials may inform future universal service policies. As part of the trials, the reliability and quality of voice calls will be tracked and impacts of weather conditions on services will be tested.

Emerging developments in technologies associated with LEOSats is providing opportunities to enhance rural and remote communications and provide increased choice and opportunities for ICPA members, both in the area of telephony and internet. Federal Council will continue to raise awareness of members' concerns and issues at every opportunity.

Telephone

In rural and remote areas, telephone connections remain a significant and essential part of the communications services relied on by residents. Understandably, at the 2024 conference, ICPA members again requested for services to be reliable, fit for purpose and maintained at a fully functioning standard.

Universal Service Obligations

Our correspondence from Minister Rowland reiterated that Telstra has regulatory and contractual obligations to provide fixed phone services, nationally. Furthermore, Telstra is generally required to provide USO (Universal Service Obligation) voice services using pre-existing copper connections. However, not all premises will have previously had a copper connection that can be re-used, or the connection may have degraded. In these cases, Telstra would still need to provide a USO voice service using an alternative technology.

The USO applies nationwide, but for regional areas, Telstra is required to report publicly each quarter against a number of key indicators and provides performance details to the Department and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). These data reporting requirements include service availability, connection timeframes, faults and outages, repair timeframes and appointment timeframes at the exchange service area level. It also provides national complaint and customer contact handling data. Quarterly reports can be downloaded from Telstra's [Regional Service Performance page](#).

Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO)

At the inaugural Comms Day Regional and Remote Forum in Canberra on 26 February 2025, Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, addressed conference and provided more detail on the Government's recent announcement of the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) which has the expressed objective to facilitate competitive coverage. Additionally, that D2D (direct to device) SMS and voice obligations are to be implemented by late 2027. D2D will complement existing terrestrial networks, and current programs still have government commitment.

Improved Services

The value of ICPA (Aust) was clearly demonstrated by the Kindon Branch motion that was carried at the 2024 Conference. In attendance was Lyndall Stoyles, Telstra Group General Counsel & Group Executive Sustainability, External Affairs & Legal (SEAL) who took a particular interest in this motion which has resulted in a positive outcome, not just for Kindon State School but also other schools within Queensland. Telstra has been partnering with the Department of Education (DoE) to deliver an uplift of bandwidth to schools throughout Queensland including Kindon State School. In some instances, Telstra

continued to work with the DoE to augment existing services to boost the current data network experience to ensure each school can continue to deliver quality educational outcomes.

Telstra worked with the DoE Enterprise Technology Services Project Team to upgrade existing services to the impacted schools below including, for example, via the installation of Telstra's Enterprise Grade Starlink service. These services were ready for students to return in term 4, 2024 or early at the start of term:

- Kindon State School
- Bymount East State School
- Grosmont State School – Telstra has been advised by the DoE in QLD that this school does not currently have enrolled students. As a result, Telstra will perform technology upgrades at a time advised by the DoE
- Wyandra State School

ICPA (Aust) contacted the Minister for Communications and Telstra to ensure that when major network disruptions occur in rural and remote areas for greater than 24 hours an alternative temporary network needs to be supplied, by Telstra, to the town/area to ensure a lack of disruption to students' education.

Telstra's response was that while the vast majority of outages are resolved within a day or two, it is not practical or possible for them to link the development of a temporary solution to the duration of an outage alone — the travel time to site may exceed the expected restoration time, and/or there may be competing demands for deployable assets in other locations. Telstra claim they focus on restoring services as soon as possible and strive to support their customers.

3G Closure

Following the 2024 Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) wrote to the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, citing concerns regarding the impact the closure of the 3G network may have on rural and remote families, and what procedures are in place should the transition to 4G not provide the 'equivalent or better coverage'.

It was quite evident from the Minister's response that the Government was relying on the public statements by both Telstra and Optus that there will be no loss of coverage following the 3G network switch off together with other rhetoric regarding published coverage areas and independent testing.

3G is now gone and as we all know, it certainly has not provided an 'equivalent or better coverage' for a number of consumers. Members have reported, and continue to report, a lack of 4G coverage where there previously was 3G coverage and call dropouts in existing 4G areas. These concerns are continually raised with Telstra at a federal level and with the Minister for Communications. ICPA (Aust) has met with Telstra on numerous occasions to convey our members' issues as well as providing case studies to Matt Healy, Senior Advisor, Minister for Communications.

On 17 December 2024, the Government held the '3G switch off lessons learned roundtable' with the telecommunications industry; 4G case studies detailing issues were provided by ICPA (Aust) to the Minister for Communications Senior Advisor, Matt Healy. More recently cases studies were also forwarded to ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) at the request of the Communications Minister seeking information on consumer experiences of the 3G shutdown.

Telstra have launched their [3G Helpline](#) to further support customers who need more help with the transition. Telstra will work with customers 1:1 to troubleshoot their issues. For some, this may be quite straight forward with device setting updates, upgrading to a blue tick device or installing a Go Repeater. For others, it may require escalating it to their colleagues to better understand what the network experience is in that specific location so they can provide advice:

<https://www.telstra.com.au/exchange/telstra-3g-network-shutdown--accessing-support-and-transitioning>.

Key information:

- Customers can call 1800 990 853 between 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday AEDT.
- Different device types and the diversity of Australia's landscape mean that each customer's experience is unique, which is why they want to work directly with each customer to help troubleshoot.
- The helpline is staffed by a team of agents with deep knowledge on the transition to help troubleshoot why mobile experience may have changed.
- [Telstra/3G closure](#) is their main hub with guidance for customers to self-serve some of the basic troubleshooting: <https://www.telstra.com.au/support/mobiles-devices/3g-closure>

Telstra have not put a timeframe on how long the helpline will operate for. They will continue to review the volume and types of calls and make their decision on longevity as things progress.

However, I have expressed to Telstra that the location of these support services on their website is far from user friendly and needs to be prominent on their Telstra.com.au home page. This is being investigated.

Contact through the 3G support services is the first step to providing a one-on-one solution and is the means by which Telstra assess their success/failures, so I encourage anyone who is having issues to phone the support line. This is a difficult ask as most consumers experience with contacting Telstra is not good. Of the calls made to the support line coverage dropout is the most complaint and technical issues with repeaters such as TGOs incorrectly set up the second.

ICPA (Aust) is especially keen to receive feedback from members who have accessed the 3G support hotline. We are also more than happy to be contacted at any time for more information or clarification regarding the actions being taken around this issue.

Telstra offer the following steps you can take to get the best out of 4G and 5G coverage.

1. Always update your phone's software. Check your software is updated and network settings are correct, then set your network to automatic. **TIP:** To make sure you have the latest software update, power cycle your phone by turning it off for a few minutes and then turning it back on. This forces the phone to refresh its network settings and will bring up the latest software update available.
2. In a regional, rural or remote area? For optimal coverage, Telstra recommend a Bluetick device. You can also consider getting [coverage extension devices](#) for home or on the road.
3. Ensure your Telstra Go Repeater or Cel-Fi Go is set up for 4G. Make sure it is [configured correctly to boost 4G signal](#).
4. Check your location on Telstra [coverage maps](#). Telstra 4G coverage is equivalent to sites previously covered by 3G on Telstra maps but remember that these maps are a guide only.

Remember, fewer bars of coverage on your new phone does not mean less service – there are no 4G standards for signal bars.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (RRAT)

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, chaired by Senator Matt Canavan, undertook a Senate enquiry into the shutdown of the 3G mobile network and have made three recommendations of particular interest is Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 1:

The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a program to help customers that have lost mobile phone coverage since the 3G shutoff. This program should be co-funded between industry and government and be for the purpose of purchasing connectivity equipment for use by residents in rural and remote areas. For example, subsidies could be provided to purchase:

- *boosters for buildings and vehicles.*
- *Starlink or other low-earth orbit satellite equipment, including access to mobile phone by Starlink services; and*
- *replacements for equipment rendered obsolete by the 3G shutdown.*

Given that most people are already addressing 3G coverage issues at their own expense I am not sure that the Government will instigate a program of reimbursement. However, technologies will continue to change so I will log this recommendation for future endeavours.

Federal Council will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues at every opportunity and ICPA (Aust) encourages members to raise with us specific connectivity challenges to ensure that future developments are meeting the needs of rural and remote families accessing education.

Curriculum Portfolio

With no curriculum-related motions raised at the 2024 Federal Conference, Federal Council has continued to focus on maintaining strong engagement with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Our priority is to ensure that the needs and perspectives of rural and remote students are considered in any decisions affecting the Australian Curriculum. We remain actively involved in ACARA's regular stakeholder meetings through our participation in the Parents and Principals Peak National Bodies group and have contributed feedback on key issues relevant to rural and remote education.

While NAPLAN results represent just one measure of student performance, they continue to highlight the significant gap in educational outcomes for students living in rural and remote areas. These results reinforce the urgent need for greater support to ensure these students have access to a truly equitable education. ICPA (Aust) remains committed to working closely with ACARA, all levels of government, and key education stakeholders to advocate for the specific needs of geographically isolated students.

Distance Education Portfolio

Within the Distance Education (DE) portfolio, ICPA (Aust) continue to advocate through letters, delegation meetings with Ministers and Senators, meetings with the Department of Education, the Regional Education Commissioner and valuable stakeholders.

Below is a summary of progress in the portfolio to date for 2024-2025.

At the 2024 Federal Conference, held in Sydney, one of the main issues that was highlighted in the Distance Education motions that were presented was requesting that supervisors teaching in a DE setting be remunerated.

Following the Federal Conference, Federal Council decided to take a new direction with the supervisor allowance, while still considering the significant advocacy efforts made over the past 30 years.

We have been developing two potential approaches to move forward with a supervisor allowance:

Firstly, the Commonwealth government acknowledges Geographically Isolated (GI) students as a priority cohort and introduces a 5th student-based loading to the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This would be a **Geographically Isolated Student Loading**.

Currently, there are four student-based loadings in the SRS:

- Student with disability loading
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading
- Socio-educational disadvantage loading
- Low-English proficiency loading

The Department of Education (DoE) calculates the GI loading for each school annually, based on the geographical location of the GI student. This funding is then directed to the state and school where the student is enrolled.

The DE school of the GI student receives the funding based on the student's geographical location. The DE school then uses this funding to employ or provide an allowance for the supervisor who will oversee the student's studies, as set by their DE school teacher.

The second option focuses on each DE school's policy regarding the supervision of students studying via DE. This approach would require each state and territory to engage with their Departments of Education to raise awareness of this issue. Federal Council will also endeavour to highlight the policy wording to the DoE and stakeholders.

Federal Council has met face to face with the DoE twice regarding the supervisor allowance—once in October 2024 and again in February 2025. During the recent meeting, we discussed the SRS where Meg Brighton, Deputy Secretary of Schools at DoE, explained that GI students are currently included under the school size and location loadings. We asked if GI students could be identified as a separate student-based loading and added as a priority cohort. Meg informed us that there will be an SRS review as part of the national enablement initiatives in 2027, during which ICPA (Aust) will have an opportunity to provide input. However, adding a 5th student-based loading would require a two-pronged approach, including both state and federal involvement to ensure that funding is passed on to DE schools for a supervisor allowance.

In December 2024, Federal Council met online with Regional Education Commissioner the Hon Fiona Nash, where we highlighted the need to recognise GI students as a priority cohort within the SRS. Fiona Nash has indicated her willingness to discuss possible ideas to progress the Supervisor Remuneration. She is able to attend the 2025 Federal conference.

Another issue presented at the 2024 Federal conference was for Schools of Distance Education to meet 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.

During the face-to-face meeting with representatives from the DoE, the responsibility of DE schools in ensuring the well-being and meeting the needs of all students was discussed. The Assistant Director for Disability, Inclusion, and Student Services shared the following key information:

1. **Disability Standards for Education 2005:** All schools in Australia, including Schools of Distance Education, are required to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. This ensures they can access and participate in education on equal terms with students without disabilities, as stipulated under the Disability Standards for Education 2005.

2. **Resources for Educators:** The Australian Government has developed resources to assist schools and teachers in understanding their legal and professional obligations toward students with disabilities. These resources are available online at www.nccd.edu.au/dse.
3. **New Training Modules:** The DoE will soon begin developing online training modules for school teachers and leaders, focusing on the Disability Standards. These modules will be freely available to all schools, supporting educators in understanding and fulfilling their obligations under both the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005.

In February 2025, Federal Council met again with the DoE regarding this issue. Meg Brighton (DoE) explained that providing education tailored to each child's needs is a key part of the Disability Standards requirements.

- Teachers are responsible for determining the abilities and needs of their students, as they are best placed to understand each individual's requirements. This reform is part of a new funding agreement that focuses on equity and excellence. New online resources on the Disability Standards will be available for staff, offering flexible access outside of teaching hours.
- If any issues arise, families are encouraged to contact the DE provider directly. If they are dissatisfied with the outcome, they can escalate the matter to the DoE.

Federal Council will continue to advocate for these issues and all DE issues outlined in the DE policy. We welcome feedback and information from members. Case studies are crucial to our advocacy efforts, so please don't hesitate to reach out if you have a member who can provide a case study. I am happy to work with them to present their case.

We look forward to welcoming members and our stakeholders to the Federal Conference in Adelaide on July 30th and 31st, 2025.

Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio

The Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Portfolio has addressed the motions passed at the 2024 Federal Conference, through consultation with the federal government departments and ministers and collaboration with other stakeholders including the Department of Education In Home Care Team, Social Services, Attorney General, The Parenthood, Thrive by Five and The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

Early Childhood Education and Care issues continue to be raised at ICPA Federal Conferences, and these recurring issues remain a focus of the dedicated effort by Federal Council. Correspondence was sent to relevant ministers and issues raised through our delegations and departmental meetings.

2024 saw the culmination of some major research in the ECEC. The final Productivity Commission report [A path to universal early childhood education and care](#) was published in September 2024. Government is currently considering and planning implementation around this report while also considering findings from the [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission child care price inquiry](#) and the Jobs and Skills Australia, Capacity Study, [The Future of the Early Childhood Education Profession Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Capacity Study](#) which delivered 28 findings and 41 recommendations.

Submissions completed

- Supporting Strong and Sustainable Regions Review of Regional Migration Settings June 2024
- Wage Justice for Early Childhood Education and Care Workers (Special Account) Bill October 2024

- In Home Care Guidelines Review February 2025
- Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care (Three Day Guarantee) Bill February 2025

Engagement with external stakeholders

In Home Care Quality and Safety Project – ACECQA

Minderoo Foundation Thrive by Five Rural and Remote Group member and supporter

The Parenthood - Access for Every Child Coalition member and contributor

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for pre compulsory geographically isolated (GI) distance education (DE).

Historically, responses from Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, have focused on the federal government funding the States to provide the pre-compulsory education therefore, they should support the geographically isolated students with that funding. Recent advocacy with regard to the AIC for pre compulsory schooling geographically isolated distance education students has been directed toward the federal Education Department making a requirement of the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) that State Education Departments allocate the appropriate funds from the Pre School Reform Agreement funding toward the geographically isolated distance education students allowance similar to AIC DE. Federal Council enjoys and very much values a constructive relationship with federal Education Department and will continue seeking this path of reform in order to achieve the AIC for pre compulsory GI DE students.

Universal access to ECEC for rural and remote children

The Australian Government is replacing the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Activity Test from 5 January 2026 to guarantee at least 3 days of subsidised ECEC each week for children. From January 2026, all families will be eligible for at least 72 hours of subsidised ECEC per fortnight (3 days per week), regardless of their work status. Families can still get 100 hours of subsidised ECEC per fortnight if they meet activity requirements or have a valid exemption. Families caring for a First Nations child will be eligible for 100 hours of subsidised ECEC per fortnight. This Three-Day Guarantee will support universal access to ECEC and help ensure more children are school-ready.

The introduction of the Three-Day Guarantee is in response to The Productivity Commission's final report, *A path to universal early childhood education and care* (released September 2024), making it clear that the children and families most likely to benefit from ECEC are the least likely to attend. This will bring more certainty of cost for families. Families earning over \$533,280 in the 2024-25 financial year will not be eligible as per the current settings. The Australian Government will invest \$426.7 million over five years from 2024-25, including implementation costs for Services Australia, to guarantee eligibility for at least 3 days of subsidised ECEC each week for children who need it.

In Home Care (IHC)

Following the [full review of IHC](#), published in 2023 it has seen what seems like very small reforms on the surface. The IHC review highlighted to the Education Department that there was no mechanism to monitor or ensure quality of care or safety of children and carers within the IHC program. The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) were commissioned to create an IHC Quality and Safety Framework to support IHC providers and educators in meeting their obligations with regard to the safety of children in their care. This framework is in the final stages of development and is supported by a series of training webinars to guide IHC educators. As a result of this framework and training, a permanent exemption for the Certificate III qualification requirement has been introduced for educators working in remote and very remote parts of Australia with support of the IHC Service and the ACECQA webinars.

In Home Care availability for supervision of distance education home school rooms has been raised at every opportunity. In February 2025 the Federal Council contributed to a review of the IHC Guidelines and the Inquiry into the Early Childhood Education and Care (Three Day Guarantee) Bill submission which both suggested that the words ‘except where care is being provided in a remote or very remote location’ could provide the flexibility required in these settings.

Explanation of this issue from the current IHC Guidelines.

Distance education and home schooling

There is no eligibility to CCS during the time a child is engaged in, or taking part in a formal schooling program, including distance education or home schooling. This is a legislative provision that applies to all approved care types.

CCS is payable for school aged children who are absent from school for any reason, as long as no formal schooling takes place during the IHC session of care and IHC eligibility requirements are met.

Children can complete homework during a session of IHC.

A number of tasks are outside the scope of the program including:

- *Household chores such as cleaning, shopping, and meal preparation, unless incidental to caring for the child/children in the session of IHC.*
- *Multi-care (i.e. where care is provided for children from more than one family).*
- *Where the primary purpose is to provide other support services, including parental support, disability support, allied health, or respite care.*
- *Supervision of formal schooling, including distance education and home schooling.*
- *Education and care provided by a family member, except where exemptions apply.*
- *Education and care provided by unqualified educators, except where exemptions apply.*
- *Transport only (i.e. the session of care cannot be only for the purposes of transporting children)*
- *Any other activities unrelated to education and care.*

It is not clear at this stage how geographically isolated (GI) families accessing ECEC via IHC will be catered for in receiving the Three Day Guarantee. [The Early Education Service Delivery Price project \(SDP\)](#) will provide a data-driven understanding of the reasonable costs of quality ECEC service delivery and following that research project, a plan will be devised around delivery of IHC within the three day guarantee. The SDP project will take up to two years as the Department of Education works with a technical expert to complete the project, which will be underpinned by a significant data collection and sector consultation piece. The project will ensure the Government can understand the reasonable cost for providers to deliver quality ECEC services throughout Australia – including where costs vary by cohort or location. The Government has committed \$10.4 million in 2024-25 for the Early Education Service Delivery Price project.

Funding to meet operational costs of rural and remote ECEC centres

In the 2024-45 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) the Government announced their plan to build a universal ECEC system by expanding access to quality ECEC across Australia. The Australian Government will invest \$1 billion to establish the Building Early Education Fund to build ECEC centres. The Fund, which will build and expand around 160 ECEC centres in areas of need, including the outer suburbs and regional Australia, includes:

- \$500 million in targeted capital grant rounds focused on quality not-for-profit ECEC providers and state and local governments to establish new services and increase the capacity of existing ECEC services. Grants will be targeted to priority and underserved markets, including regional locations and the outer suburbs. Where possible, services will be located on or near school sites.

- \$500 million provisioned for future Commonwealth investment in owning and leasing a portfolio of early childhood education and care centres to increase the supply of services, with \$2.3 million over two years from 2024-25 to undertake a business case to inform final design.

These extra ECEC services are needed to underpin a future universal early education and care system recommended by The Productivity Commission in its inquiry into Australia's ECEC system, showing an undersupply of ECEC places was a barrier to ECEC access for families across Australia. It recommended the Commonwealth invest to address these service gaps, including through grant funding and by retaining ownership of services.

The Fund is expected to support around 160 new or expanded ECEC services. It is estimated that this investment will result in around 12,000 more ECEC places for Australian families in areas of need.

Priority areas will be determined by analysis of a variety of sources, including data on supply, need and disadvantage. The Government will work with state, territory and local governments and with communities to inform identification of locations. More information on locations will be made available in the coming months.

While this funding is centred at new services the Government has committed \$10.4 million in 2024-25 for the Early Education Service Delivery Price project aimed at gathering an understanding of the reasonable cost for providers to deliver quality ECEC services throughout Australia – including where costs vary by cohort or location. This project should then inform future funding.

Following our most recent meetings in Canberra, Senator Fatima Payman, a Senator for Western Australia wrote on behalf of ICPA (Aust), to the Minister for ECEC, Dr Anne Aly MP regarding ECEC staffing challenges with a detailed reply received from the Minister late in March 2025. This is a valuable contribution to ICPA advocacy and such support from Senator Payman is much appreciated.

ECEC Teacher Pay Parity

A reply from the Minister for ECEC, Dr Anne Aly MP, in response to correspondence sent to Senator the Hon Murry Watt, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in September, detailed the Government's commitment to improving retention rates by supporting a wage increase for the ECEC workforce via the Worker Retention Payment and by strengthening the ability and capacity for the Fair Work Commission (FWC), to order pay increases for workers through the Secure Jobs, Better Pay Act 2022. This process has facilitated a 4.6% pay rise from July 2022, a 5.75% pay rise from July 2023, and a 3.75% pay rise from July 2024.

The Worker Retention Payment grant program has \$3.6 billion available for the Early Childhood Education and Care worker retention payment to support a 15% wage increase for ECEC workers, whose employer meets the criteria, over two years from December 2024. This small wage increase does very little in closing the pay parity gap, however, might retain some ECEC staff in their roles while further work on wage increases can be completed. Through 2023/24 the Fair Work Commission (FWC) has completed a [gender undervaluation priority awards review](#) which found that historically the work of child carers engaged under the Children's Services Award 2010 (Children's Award) has been subject to gender-based undervaluation and the data suggests this undervaluation persists. The FWC concluded that variation to the minimum wage rates is justified and necessary. Through submissions to the FWC review the United Workers' Union (UWU) seeks an increase in the Children's Award so a children's services employee at level 3.1 is entitled to a rate from \$1,032.30 to \$1,269.73 per week (a 23% increase). The ACTU supports the UWU's application. There is a [7338 page](#) document compiled of all the data and submissions to the review which was completed in December 2024. The expectation and hope is that, in two years, when the Worker Retention Payment Grant Program ends and ECEC staff have had their 15% pay increase over that time, the Children's Services Award 2010 (Children's Award) will have been modified adequately to meet and appropriate award rate for ECEC workers. The concern is that, while fees are capped in

services receiving the Worker Retention Payment, it is assumed that once that grant program is closed, fees will have to rise to cover the increase in award wages for ECEC workers.

The Government received the final Productivity Commissions inquiry into ECEC report in September 2024 and continue to consider the findings and recommendations alongside other key reviews, including the Competition and Consumer Commission's final report and the Jobs and Skills Australia's ECEC Capacity Study final report.

Throughout 2024, the Government commissioned a review of targeted programs that support studies and placements of potential educators and teachers in regional, rural, and remote areas as part of the [National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, Shaping Our Future](#). This is a 10-year national workforce strategy partnership between all governments. A key action within the Strategy involves reviewing and streamlining international qualifications for the purposes of skilled migration to create more opportunities for overseas-trained educators and teachers to enter the sector. This action is led by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). An [implementation tracker](#) showing the progress of this ten-year strategy shows it is mostly on target.

Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Visa Employment List

The addition of governess/home tutor/nanny and au pairs to the Working Holiday Visa (subclass 417), of the WHM program as eligible employment under the list 'Plant and Animal Cultivation in Regional Australia' was included in correspondence to the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs the Hon Tony Burke MP in September 2024.

Following our most recent meetings in Canberra, Senator Fatima Payman, a Senator for Western Australia wrote on behalf of ICPA (Aust), to the Assistant Minister for Immigration, the Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP regarding specified work requirements under the WHM program with a detailed reply received from the Minister late in March 2025. Of note, Assistant Minister Thistlethwaite explained the exemption introduced on 1 January 2024, allowing WHMs to work for the same employer in certain occupations, including teachers, for more than six months without seeking permission, providing work in any one location does not exceed six months. The reply from Assistant Minister Thistlethwaite referred to the Australian Government's Migration Strategy which aims to evaluate regional migration settings and the WHM program. Key actions from the Strategy are to consider how best to ensure migration supports development objectives in regional Australia while protecting migrant workers from the risk of exploitation. Again ICPA (Aust) value Senator Payman's support and advocacy with this issue.

An ICPA (Aust) submission was lodged to the Department of Home Affairs, [Supporting Strong and Sustainable Regions Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper in June 2024](#) which contributed to the [The Australian Government Migration Strategy](#).

In raising this issue in delegation meetings in February 2025 a suggestion was made to try a different type of visa to achieve more skilled in-home carers available for rural and remote ECEC. The addition of in-home care workers to the core skills list under the Skills in Demand visa (subclass 482) might be an achievable way to bring more trained ECEC workers to Australia.

The motions presented in 2024 continue to highlight longstanding issues that rural and remote families face when accessing early childhood education and care. ICPA (Aust) continues to engage with key ECEC stakeholders and raise awareness of these issues at every opportunity.

Rural Schools

Within the Rural Schools portfolio, ICPA (Aust) continue to raise issues through letters and at delegation meetings of ongoing asks and specifically suggesting experienced teacher incentive opportunities.

Below is a summary of progress in the portfolio to date for 2024-2025.

ICPA (Aust) was included as a stakeholder in the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) Ministerial Reference Group. The National School Reform Agreement is a joint agreement between the Commonwealth, states and territories to lift student outcomes across Australian Schools.
<https://www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system/review-consultations/ministerial-reference-group>

Federal Council participated online and in person in these discussions and reiterated that we looked forward to continued involvement.

A Summary report can be found here: <https://www.education.gov.au/review-inform-better-and-fairer-education-system/resources/better-and-fairer-education-system-consultation-paper>

The above report echoes the concerns of many members. Attraction and retention of teachers in our rural, remote and regional schools is difficult due to the complexities of the environment they find themselves in. The report acknowledges that some schools find it hard to attract and retain skilled teachers, these schools are often in rural, regional, and remote locations.

The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (December 2022) was developed by all education ministers across Australia. This plan is well underway and is designed to attract teachers in all areas of education, both in the metropolitan and rural areas. There are five priority areas – two that deal directly with improving teacher supply and keeping the teachers we have.

ICPA (Aust) is encouraged that all governments are finally recognising the shortage of teachers in our schools and are putting plans in place to address this worldwide concern. Unfortunately, it is rural and remote schools that are often at the wrong end of the supply chain when teachers are deciding which school best meets their needs and metropolitan schools are often favoured over rural and remote schools for teaching placements.

Incentivising experienced teachers into rural, regional & remote positions

The Rural Schools portfolio received one motion from the Goldfields Eyre Branch in Western Australia at the Federal Conference in Sydney in 2024, again reiterating the need for national awareness and incentive programs.

A letter was sent to the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP in September 2024 acknowledging the national teacher shortage and requesting the Federal Government continue to explore options for incentive programs to attract experienced teachers to rural, regional, and remote schools. Responses from Assistant Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisolm, acknowledge the shortfall and reiterate steps are being taken by the Federal Government to address needs across the board. *“Through the National Teacher Workforce Action by Education Ministers in December 2022, all governments are working together to implement 27 actions to support the teacher workforce. This includes incentives such as the Commonwealth Scholarships Program and the expansion of the High Achieving Teachers program. The Government offers further incentives for teachers to relocate to remote schools by reducing the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debts of teachers in very remote schools. There are 2 types of assistance waiver of indexation on HELP debts or a reduction of accumulated HELP debts.”*

The Commonwealth Teaching Scholarship Program and special measures to reduce the HELP debt for teachers in very remote areas of Australia were announced in 2023.

During our May 2024 delegations to Canberra, Federal ICPA Council confirmed our support for the Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships, however also raised concerns that this is a missed opportunity for rural and remote schools. ICPA (Aust) believes this scholarship could be an excellent opportunity to

include a rural and remote school teaching position as part of the qualifying criteria, or an extra financial incentive if teaching in a rural and remote school was undertaken. Federal Council requested the Federal Government consider including a rural and remote incentive into the scheme.

More information on these programs can be found on the following links.

<https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-scholarships>

<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-loan-program/reduction-help-debts-teachers-very-remote-areas>

In response to ministerial letters in 2024, ICPA (Aust) acknowledged that while State Governments are responsible for employing teachers and have varying incentives to encourage teachers to rural schools, 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 requesting federal funding for national incentives that would address teacher shortages nationwide and better support States, ICPA (Aust) advised that a Federal Government run advertising campaign pitched at experienced teachers and their families to encourage them to “go bush” would also be beneficial.

Paid Pracs

Members of ICPA Aust. welcomed the Federal Government’s announcement that students studying to be a teacher, nurse, midwife or social worker would now be eligible to receive \$319.50 per week while on a compulsory practicum placement. During Canberra delegations in May 2024, ICPA Federal Council also requested that paid practicums be extended to include students in the allied health areas as we can see that this would have a significant impact in supporting rural and remote schools.

While advised by some ministers that this was unlikely to happen it was suggested that a HELP reduction type scheme would be more beneficial to attracting university graduate students to rural and remote schools. ICPA (Aust) has appealed to the Federal Government to explore options for such a scheme.

Skilled Visas

One potential tool to address the national teacher shortage sits within the immigration portfolio - Australian work visas for teachers and early childcare educators from overseas. Education providers have the option to sponsor educators and teachers to work in Australia via a **Temporary Skill Shortage visa (subclass 482) or Employer Nomination Scheme (subclass 186) visa**. At present the category of Primary School Teacher (ANZSCO 241213) is on the STSOL (short term skills occupational demand list) and not eligible for application under subclass 189 (MLTSSL; Medium- and Long-Term Strategic Skill List). All primary teaching applicants must be state sponsored under the subclass 190 or 491.

ICPA (Aust) has written to The Hon Tony Burke MP - Minister for Home Affairs, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Cybersecurity and Arts - requesting the Federal Government consider including Primary School Teacher into the MLTSSL list and also consider a secondary quota with rural and remote placement conditions for all teachers. The response from Minister Burke’s office is below:

“The Government remains committed to supporting the education sector to address workforce shortages, including in regional Australia. Applications for employer sponsored visas for teachers in regional Australia are currently being processed as the first priority, along with applications for occupations in the education sector across Australia, see:

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-processing-times/skilled-visa-processing-priorities> .

While I acknowledge that the Skilled Independent (subclass 189) visa is not available for primary school teachers, there are a range of other visas available including regional visas; the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (provisional) (subclass 494), employer sponsored stream and the Skilled Work Regional (provisional) visa (subclass 491) which is a State or Territory nominated visa for primary school teachers. On 7 December 2024, the Government replaced the Temporary Skills Shortage (TSS) visa with

the Skills in Demand (SID) (subclass 482) visa. The Core Skills Occupation List (CSOL) applies to the Core Skills stream of the new SID visa, of which Primary School Teacher (241213) is included. This list also applies to the Direct Entry stream of the permanent Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) (subclass 186) visa, see <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/Visa-subsite/Pages/work/skills-in-demand-482-landing.aspx>”

ICPA (Aust) will continue to follow the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan and the National School Reform Agreement. We invite members to contact Federal Council with any further information or case studies.

Additional PACER Rebates to Continue in 2025

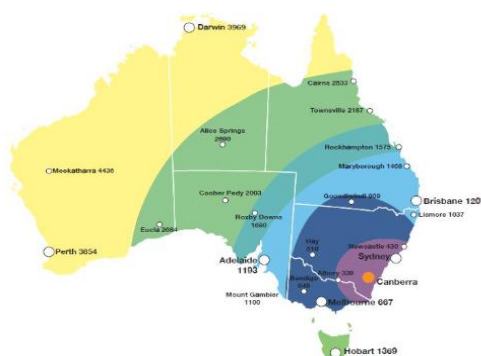
While no changes have been made to account for remoteness and ease of access to transport options, the temporary 50% increased PACER rebate rate (2024) will in the very least going to continue throughout 2025.

The rebates are per student travelling and are based on schools' distance to Canberra (as the crow flies!) The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) is an initiative of the Australian Government which provides financial assistance for students in Years 4-12 across Australia to travel to Canberra, the nation's capital. To be eligible, schools are required to participate in PACER approved programs with at least three of the four Mandatory PACER Institutions booked when submitting an [Online Application](#).

2025 PACER ZONES WITH ADDITIONAL LOADINGS

FOR SCHOOLS WITH ICSEA 1000 OR LESS AND REGIONAL OR REMOTE SCHOOLS

ZONE	DISTANCE (KMS)	2025 REBATE PER STUDENT	ADDITIONAL LOADING SCHOOLS ICSEA 1000 OR LESS	ADDITIONAL LOADINGS TO ATTRACT PARTICIPATION FROM REGIONAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS		
			50% ICSEA 1000 or below	150% Outer regional	200% Remote	250% Very Remote
0	0 - 149	\$5	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
1	150 - 499	\$30	\$15	\$45	\$90	\$75
2	500 - 999	\$45	\$22.50	\$67.50	\$90	\$112.50
3	1000 - 1499	\$90	\$45	\$135	\$180	\$225
4	1500 - 1999	\$150	\$75	\$225	\$300	\$375
5	2000 - 2999	\$300	\$150	\$450	\$600	\$750
6	3000 +	\$510	\$255	\$765	\$1,020	\$1,275



NOTES:

* Zone 5 includes all students from Tasmania because of air/sea travel expenses.

Remote islands get an extra \$120 for additional costs.

The additional 50% rebate amount still applies as shown in column 4 of the table.

For more details, visit the PACER website (www.Pacer.org.au)

We encourage all members to keep up the pressure for modifications to remote areas in these zones. We would love any case studies to support our argument.

Joint Council Portfolio catch-up

In November, ICPA State and Federal Rural School portfolio leaders met over zoom to give updates and discuss possible supportive actions moving forward. The team also discussed the introduction of a new curriculum for teacher education at universities, the positive outcomes of a trial program conducted by the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE), and the potential for Prac students in WA to stay in residential colleges for rural and remote placements. Other topics included the challenges and solutions related to schools' facilities, the department's efforts to address housing issues for staff in rural and remote areas, and the ongoing issue of workload for principals in small one-teacher schools.

Louise Martin (Federal President) shared her experience at the first-ever parent roundtable meeting with the Minister for Education, where she highlighted the issue of declining NAPLAN results and the need for better-skilled teachers in rural areas.

Thank you once again for continuing to bring federal issues in the Rural School space to our attention. We look forward to seeing representatives from branches in Adelaide in July.

Specific Education Needs Portfolio

Motions presented at the 2024 Federal Conference in the Specific Education Needs Portfolio addressed the following issues:

- Improving rural and remote schools' access to specialists who can diagnose students with learning disabilities and offer ongoing education and support to students and their teachers.
- A commitment to a set intervention period of no more than six months from diagnosis of students with learning disabilities to commencing treatment.
- Addressing inequity in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by removing NDIS Providers ability to charge cancellation fees to remote and geographically isolated NDIS recipients for telehealth services when they do not cancel their appointment within seven days of delivery for circumstances outside of their control due to their geographic location.
- Improved rural and remote access and utilisation of Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) funding, currently managed through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
- Improved rural and remote access and utilisation of Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) funding, currently managed through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

ICPA Federal Council wrote letters to the relevant Shadow Ministers and Ministers for each motion; Minister for Health, Minister for Education, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Minister for Youth and Minister Assisting the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Federal Council have only received replies from the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme in regard to the letters sent regarding the NDIS.

Motion A45

To remove National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Providers ability to charge cancellation fees to remote and geographically isolated NDIS recipients for telehealth services when they do not cancel their appointment within seven days of delivery.

Minister Shorten (who has since resigned from Parliament) replied that whilst he agrees that for people living in rural and remote areas telehealth may be the only option to access allied health and that they face additional difficulties accessing telehealth due to circumstances outside of their control, he states in his reply-

"The NDIA encourages providers to reschedule appointments to avoid charging a cancellation fee. These details, including pricing cancellation policies should be discussed with the participant or their authorised representative prior to the service being delivered and payment being paid. The NDIA also monitors claims for cancellations and may contact providers who have a participant with an unusual number of cancellations."

"The NDIA recommends participants have a service agreement in place, so participants and providers are clear about what each party has agreed to. It should be a collaborative process where prices and processes can be negotiated between the participant/participant's representative and the provider more information on service agreements can be found on the NDIS website at <https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/working-provider/connecting-participants/service-agreements>"

Motion A46

Improved rural and remote access and utilisation of Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) funding, currently managed through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Minister Shorten replied that he is:

“Acutely aware of the need to improve access to critical early childhood early intervention services for children living in remote areas. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has a range of strategies currently underway which set the foundations for improving its service to children and their families in rural and remote areas but there is much work to do”

He also stated that:

“Significant changes were also recently made to the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 to get the scheme back on track to support the people with disability that it was originally intended to support, this includes making sure that early intervention paths are in place that can better support children and their families to receive supports within the NDIS that are aligned with their individual support needs.

These changes are in response to the independent NDIS review and also informed by key recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission. The NDIS review observed that there are continuing issues in accessing allied health supports in regional and rural parts of Australia and that Governments, as market stewards should be more active and flexible to help ensure NDIS markets work for everyone everywhere.”

From motions presented and discussions at conference, it is clear that accessing allied health support, in particular for diagnosing and providing timely intervention for learning disabilities, is a huge issue affecting people in all rural and remote areas. The negative impact and repercussions of delayed diagnosis and intervention makes this an urgent issue that needs addressing by all sectors involved in providing allied health in Australia, including both public and private sectors. ICPA (Aust) endeavours to continue our advocacy in this area.

ICPA's involvement in the Office of the Rural Health Commissioner Consumer Advisory Group provides a great opportunity to hear the issues at the forefront of health reform in rural and remote Australia and to share our members' stories. You can find more about the Office of the Rural Health Commissioner at - www.health.gov.au/our-work/onrhc .

ICPA (Aust) Federal Council thanks branches for continuing to bring motions to conference raising the issues affecting their members. We are always looking for member stories and case studies to support ICPA advocacy. If you have a story or a case study to share, please contact our Specific Education Needs Portfolio Leader.

Student Travel

The Student Travel portfolio continues to actively engage with government departments, agencies, and industry partners to advocate for the needs of geographically isolated students and their families. We are pleased to provide the following updates on travel related motions raised at the 2024 Federal ICPA Conference in Sydney.

Department of Social Services Meeting & Travel Survey Initiative

In late February 2025, ICPA Federal representatives met with the Department of Social Services to discuss the financial challenges faced by our members. During these discussions, it was recommended that we collect additional data to further illustrate these challenges.

To support this effort, the Travel Portfolio has developed a state-based survey to gather essential data on travel-related costs. This information will not only strengthen ICPA Federal advocacy but will also be available to state branches for use in addressing related state-level concerns.

Enclosed with this update is State-specific QR codes and survey link's for members to access. We encourage all members to participate and share widely to ensure comprehensive and accurate data collection.

Motion A42 - Rural and Remote Road Accessibility

ICPA Australia extends our sincere appreciation to the ICPA Namoi branch for raising Motion A42 at the 2024 Federal ICPA Conference. Your advocacy for ensuring rural and remote roads remain accessible for students traveling to their places of education is invaluable.

In response to this concern, ICPA Australia sent a letter in early September 2024 to the Hon. Catherine King, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, and Local Government, emphasizing the need for greater collaboration with local governments to improve road conditions in rural and remote areas.

Minister King has since responded, acknowledging the importance of this issue. She highlighted the Australian Government's commitment to regional road infrastructure, including:

- A \$120 billion Infrastructure Investment Pipeline (IIP)
- A \$1.9 billion allocation over four years for road maintenance
- A doubling of Roads to Recovery Program funding to \$1 billion annually from 2027-2028
- Increased Black Spot funding to \$150 million per year
- The introduction of the Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program

These initiatives demonstrate a significant commitment to improving road safety and accessibility for rural and remote students. ICPA Australia will continue to monitor progress and advocate for further improvements where needed.

Motion S8 - Expansion of Qantas Resident Fares Scheme

ICPA Australia appreciates the submission of Motion S8, advocating for an extension of the Qantas Resident Fares Scheme to benefit geographically isolated students. We raised this matter in discussions with Qantas in late February 2025.

Qantas confirmed that the program is heavily utilized, with over 100,000 resident fares accessed in January alone. However, they have advised that, at this stage, there are no plans to extend the program beyond its current framework. Despite this, ICPA Australia remains committed to this advocacy and will continue engaging with Qantas to explore possible expansions of the scheme.

Motion S9 - Enhancements to Frequent Flyer Resident Fares Program

While there is no specific update on Motion S9 at this time, ICPA Australia remains engaged in ongoing discussions with Qantas. We continue to push for enhancements that would allow families to utilize multiple eligible departure and return points, making travel more flexible and affordable for students.

Motion S10 - Discounted Flights for Rural and Remote Students

Qantas has expressed interest in exploring the feasibility of a discount code exclusively for rural and remote students. During our discussions, Chris Kwong from Qantas highlighted the Western Australian government's existing model for students in northern WA as a potential template.

Qantas is currently investigating how to logistically determine eligibility and implement such a program. We will keep members informed as further details emerge.

Ongoing Advocacy & Next Steps

ICPA Australia remains dedicated to advocating for practical solutions that benefit geographically isolated students and their families. We appreciate your ongoing support and encourage members to participate in our travel survey and engage with their branches to share feedback on these important issues. We will continue to keep you updated on our progress and any further developments. Thank you for your continued efforts in supporting rural and remote education.

Northern Territory Travel Survey

Link:

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/s59rrjfi>

QR Code



Queensland Travel Survey

Link:

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/lv5srga6>

QR Code



Western Australia Travel Survey

Link:

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/zpc48cif>

QR Code



South Australia Travel Survey

Link

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/45rfwmwo>

QR Code



New South Wales Travel Survey

Link

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/71boygwj>

QR Code



Tasmania Travel Survey

Link

<https://s.surveyplanet.com/xtsdzeqt>

QR Code



Tertiary Portfolio

There's been some great progress in the tertiary education space recently, especially for students from regional, rural, and remote areas. Several long-standing issues have been addressed, and new initiatives are rolling out that aim to make higher education more accessible, affordable, and supportive for all.

Here's a quick update on what's been happening.

What's New and Changing

1. Changes to the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

Good news for regional students! The \$5,000 TAP is now available to students up to the age of 22 who are starting university for the first time. Previously, students had to go straight from Year 12 to uni, which ruled out those who wanted to take a gap year or work first.

This change means more young people from the regions will be able to access support when they're ready to study.

2. Student Ombudsman Now in Place

An independent Student Ombudsman has been set up as of 2nd February this year. They'll handle complaints and make sure students are treated fairly by their education providers. This was one of the key recommendations from the Universities Accord, and it's a big step forward in giving students a stronger voice and fairer support.

3. Tertiary Education Commission on the Way

A new national Tertiary Education Commission is set to launch in mid-2025. An interim commissioner has already been appointed to get things going. The Commission will help guide long-term planning, funding, and oversight across the university sector. This will work alongside the Regional Education Commissioner, The Hon Fiona Nash, who continues to focus on improving access for students in regional, rural, and remote areas.

4. Paid Practicums Starting Soon

From 1st July 2025, students studying nursing, midwifery, social work, or teaching will start receiving weekly payments during their practical placements. They'll get \$319.50 per week—based on the Austudy single rate—for placements that were previously unpaid.

This is a big win for students who often struggle financially while completing long and demanding practicums.

5. More Regional Study Hubs on the Way

Ten new Regional University Study Hubs were announced on 3rd February, and they're expected to open by mid-year. These new hubs will be in:

- QLD: Clermont, Moranbah, Hughenden
- NSW: Hay, Tumut
- WA: Northam, Kununurra
- SA: Kangaroo Island
- VIC: Hamilton
- TAS: St Helens
- Norfolk Island: Burnt Pine

Once these are up and running, there'll be a total of 56 hubs around the country—helping students study locally with access to support, internet, and academic services.

What I've Been Involved In

Over the past few months, I've been busy advocating for these changes and connecting with key people and groups in the education space. Some highlights include:

- August 2024: Attended the ABSA (Australian Boarding Schools Association) conference in Canberra
- October 2024:
 - Spoke at the Senate Committee hearing on the *Better and Fairer Schools Bill 2024*
 - Took part in work with the University of Canberra's Centre for Sustainable Communities
- February 2025:
 - Participated in the ICPA federal parliamentary delegations in Canberra
 - Held face-to-face meetings with the Department of Education
 - Also met with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

These opportunities have been valuable for pushing forward key issues, especially around access and

equity for students outside major cities.

It's great to see progress happening in areas we've been advocating for over a long time. From financial support for students to new services and more study hubs, we're heading in a positive direction. There's still plenty of work to do, but these changes are a solid foundation for a fairer and more accessible tertiary education system.

Training Portfolio

At the 2024 Federal Conference there were four Training Portfolio Motions presented and carried. Federal Council would like to thank members and branches for the motions that they bring to Conference for discussion. So much of what happens on the conference floor informs and insights conversations that assist with the advocacy Federal Council continues throughout the year. We seek members' experience through case studies wherever possible. As a supporting document they are incredibly influential as ICPA (Aust) takes your recommendations to Elected Members, Ministers, Department Officers and Stakeholder's alike.

Motions focused on the following aspects of Post School Education for regional, rural and remote lifelong learners, each have been highlighted with relevant actions from the Training Portfolio throughout 2024-2025.

[Relocation allowance for regional, rural and remote apprentices.](#)

Following conference, ICPA (Aust) added requests for financial supports for rural and remote apprentices, to the key asks at our delegation and stakeholder meetings in October 2024 and again in February 2025, in addition to recommendations to change the current Living Away From Home (LAFHA) and Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) schemes. During our February 2025 meeting with Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) ICPA (Aust) made requests to meet with the 2024 established and appointed Jobs and Skills Commissioner, to date this has not occurred.

ICPA (Aust) put forth a submission to the 2024 Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System. The release of the review's Final Report in 2025 identified two specific regional, rural and remote Key Issues

The Review identified the following issues that affect Regional and Remote apprentices:

- Apprentices in regional and remote areas often have to travel into major cities, otherwise they are limited to occupations and industries in their region.
 - This issue is exacerbated by low population density, resulting in low levels of enrolment in some courses. This can often result in apprentices working in regional and remote areas having to travel long distances to conduct off-the-job training in another area.
- The need to relocate or to travel long distances for training results in additional costs that apprentices in major cities often do not face.

and made 34 recommendations to Government. Three of these are focused on regional and remote apprentices.

- All Governments work together to provide more financial support to apprentices through subsidies for their travel and accommodation expenses, purchasing tools, and reforms to apprentice support payment to increase the amount and frequency of payment.
- Increase the Living Away From Home Allowance payment and then index payments on an ongoing semi-annual basis in line with the Consumer Price Index, consistent with Youth Allowance.

- Training providers provide more flexible training options for Regional and Remote apprentices such as block release training or with ‘pop up’ training centres.

ICPA (Aust) are awaiting the release of the Governments response to the independent review from Minister Giles’ office (Minister for Employment and Skills) and will continue to advocate for the realisation of the relevant recommendations.

Commonwealth Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA)

ICPA Federal Council has welcomed the first increase to the LAFHA in 22 years that was announced by the Prime Minister in his 22 January 2025 address at the National Press Club. To date the amounts have not yet been published although ICPA (Aust) have been reassured by the Skills and Employment Minister’s office that it will be a ‘significant’ increase.

Also within this address the Prime Minister announced the Key Apprenticeship Program (KAP), also welcomed, yet as a focused allowance for specific industries we have expressed concern that it will not broadly meet the specific needs of regional, rural and remote Australian Apprentices, when they relocate to attain skills and trade certification.

During our February 2025 meeting with Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) ICPA (Aust) raised the intent of the 2024 and previous motions. Following are the agenda items discussed and the relevant responses.

Apprenticeship Support Providers

ICPA Aust

- Acknowledges the lack of a formal mechanism to capture information about apprentices who have relocated.
- Suggests that providers should identify relocated apprentices during the initial assessment process to address potential barriers to completion.

DEWR

- Mentoring by ACAP’s is available to those who relocate – would be considered a complex needs and trigger the on demand mentoring.
- Encourage member families with Apprentices to seek the available mentoring from ACAP’s

Recognition of RRR Apprentices who relocate

ICPA (Aust)

- Clarification of Training Contract not Training Plan
- Raise the idea of capturing the apprentice's home/residential address in the training contract, currently only recorded as RRR if the Employer’s address in one of these location classifications.

DEWR

- The Training Contract is localised, so would need to be individually implemented across each State and Territory. Recommended an alternative option – to work with the Apprenticeship Data Management System (ADMS) team to explore the feasibility of two addresses within the Federally managed system to negate the need to work with States and Territories.

The 2024-25 Training Portfolio year has been focused on current and previous motions, which continue to highlight the difficulties rural and remote students face when choosing to continue with their post school education, particularly as apprentices and trainees. Any further information which may assist in our advocacy, would be most welcome.

Conclusion

As outlined above, since the 2024 Federal Conference, Federal Council has taken a range of actions to progress both current and past issues raised through members' motions. This ongoing work includes written correspondence, formal submissions, media releases, and both face-to-face and virtual meetings with politicians, government departments, and relevant organisations.

Each portfolio will continue to follow up on motions where responses are still pending and will use every available avenue to highlight and advance the concerns of our members. Federal Council remains firmly committed to advocating on behalf of members and will continue to provide updates as developments arise following this motion report.

We warmly welcome all members to the 2025 Federal Conference, to be held in Adelaide on 30–31 July 2025. If you have any questions about the matters outlined in this update or need assistance with preparing motions for the upcoming conference, please don't hesitate to contact your Portfolio leaders. Contact details are available [here](#).

For the latest updates on our advocacy efforts and related matters, please follow the ICPA (Aust) [Facebook page](#) or visit our website at www.icpa.com.au.