



Specific Education Needs Portfolio

2024 Conference Report

Portfolio Leader: Miffy Waugh

Welcome to the Specific Education Needs Report. It has been an education for me over the past year, learning about the issues faced by rural and remote students with Specific Education Needs and their families. This is an area that is very new to me.

Remote Australians Matter

Soon after Federal Conference, I attended the inaugural Remote Australians Matter (RAMs) conference in September 2023 held at Charleville, along with Tracy Alder. It was a terrific gathering of many health professionals across the board and other attendees from across Australia. Health professionals too are struggling with the rural and remote health issues our members face.

There was an “Open discussion on rural and remote experiences of healthcare” and areas of ICPA member interest include:

- Access to health services
- Impact of crisis and emergencies on rural communities as linked to health
- mental health and wellbeing
- maternity

During this discussion Federal Council broached the subject of access to specialists and wait times to see health services, as well as telehealth and allied health. This was a major issue across the board. Federal Council looks forward to monitoring the progress of the Remote Australians Matter organisation as they endeavour to make a difference in the remote health space.

National Rural Health Commissioner's - Consumer Advisory Group (CAG)

Throughout the Council year, I have attended the National Rural Health Commissioner's - Consumer Advisory Group (CAG) chaired by the Commissioner, Dr Ruth Stewart. It is described as a “forum to support and inform the work of the National Rural Health Commissioner to further understand consumer experiences of rural and remote health care and explore rural health topics.” Federal Council has had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of a range of topics during these meetings including:

- Access to health services
- Waiting lists
- Cost of health services
- Availability of health services
- Turnover of health professionals
- Travel to receive health services

2023 Conference Motions

Over the last year Federal Council has sought action on the motions that were submitted at Conference in Darwin, including:

- Federal funding for access to specialists
- MBS number specifically for telehealth
- Early childhood intervention funding
- Federally funded health clinics be accessible for all

Letters were sent to the Minister for Health, Hon Mark Butler MP and the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Government Services Hon Bill Shorten MP.



In a response received from Minister Butler regarding access to specialists, the difficulty that many communities are facing in attracting and retaining health professionals to provide local primary care services were acknowledged and a range of current measures which the Federal Government has in place to attract and retain health workers were outlined, including:

- A key measure announced in the Budget, will support free GP consultations for 11.6 million children under sixteen. This increase to the bulk billing incentive will take effect from 1st Nov 23.
- From 1st January 2024, a new Workforce Incentives Programme Payment- the Rural Advanced Skills payment – will be available to GPs with advanced skills in a range of disciplines (including child health and mental health) that practice in rural and remote locations.
- a historic \$6.1 billion investment in Medicare to lay the foundations for significant reform to general practice and access to primary care for all Australians. Further information can be found at: www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/incentives-and-support-forgps-and-general-practices-in-mm-locations.
- The National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030 (Action Plan) outlines the Government's approach to improving health outcomes for all children and young people. The Action Plan recognises the difficulties experienced by communities, in accessing health services because of social, geographical and other determinants.
- The National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Children's Strategy) is guiding the Government's investment for supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of children and families across Australia. The Government is currently implementing several key recommendations in the Children's Strategy, including the creation of a national network of Head to Health Kids Hubs (mental health and wellbeing centres), and providing access to integrated, multidisciplinary care for children 0-12 years and their families with outreach to improve access to regionally dispersed families.

From 1 March 2023, several improvements will be made to M10 (face-to-face) and M18 (telehealth equivalent) items of the MBS currently available for children with potential complex Neurodevelopmental Disorders (such as Autism Spectrum Disorder) and other eligible disabilities, including:

- the eligible age limits will be increased from under 13 years old for assessment, and under 15 years old for treatment, to under 25 years of age for both.
- there will be an increase in the number of allied health assessment MBS services from four to eight per lifetime.
- inter-disciplinary referrals between allied professionals will be supported during the assessment phase to facilitate timely diagnosis. Fourth, the list of eligible disabilities will be expanded to include Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Lesch-Nyhan Syndrome & 22q deletion syndrome.
- expansion of access to include stuttering and Speech Sound Disorder to the list of eligible disabilities under these M10 items and this is currently being considered.

The final report for the “Working better for Medicare” review will be delivered by 30 June 2024. ICPA (Aust) looks forward to the outcomes of this review.

ICPA (Aust) continues to address the issues that affect rural and remote students with specific needs. Case studies are always welcomed Please contact the Specific Needs Education Portfolio with recent case studies and issues as they arise to provide up-to-date facts and information to strengthen our advocacy.