



2025 Boarding Schools Federal Conference Report

Amber Driver

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder”

‘Isle of Beauty’ Thomas Haynes Bayly. 1844.

Thomas H. Bayly never got to see how his phrase captured people’s imagination and grew into a popular saying, as he died 10 years before the poem was published.

In 2017 I re-wrote this saying when I sent my first child off to boarding school at age 11;

“Absence makes the heart ache and days feel longer”

Personal Note:

Any parent of a child who has attended or is attending boarding school is instantly impacted when reflecting on a boarding school journey. There is a physical and emotional reaction when you allow yourself to feel the gravity & realisation that your child will be living away from home, for months at a time, at a boarding school. You will not be there to nurture and love them, watch them grow, learn, play sport, interact with their new peer group, help with homework or observe their emotional space and well-being as they learn to navigate a new life so far from home and experience new activities, culture, events, and city life for the first time.

For our family, geographical isolation dictates that sending my children away to Boarding School is a necessity. Attending boarding school is the only way that they will access a full, well rounded, secondary education and like our family and many ICPA members, there is simply no other choice.

Over the past 12 months I have been on a steep learning curve as I navigate the incredible workload and advocacy work the ICPA (Aust) Federal Council seems to complete with ease. I have tried to provide you with a comprehensive ‘snapshot’ of the direction I have taken to advocate for all of the motions listed within the Boarding Portfolio. Member contributions, support and guidance are warmly received as I endeavor to resolve more of your issues in my second term as the Leader of the Boarding Portfolio.

ICPA Members Matter:

For many of our ICPA members, the decision to send our children away to boarding school in order to access a secondary education is not a choice. Many of our members have NO access to secondary school.

ICPA Members want their issues resolved, and they need to gain traction on the solutions they put forward year on year at the Federal Conference. Our members need results to remedy the issues faced in the Boarding Portfolio. Delivering solutions to the issues we have been lobbying the Federal Government for is long overdue.

The Government ‘weighs in’ on the conversation:

In recent correspondence from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (April 2025) it was stated that “The Government is committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of socioeconomic background or geographical location has access to a high-quality education.”

Here-in lies the problem, families in rural and remote Australia are slipping through the ‘access gaps’ and we need the Federal Government to stand by their own words and take action on our basic, fundamental,



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education asks. Boarding School is not a luxury, nor is it a business cost to gain a Tax Benefit... There are families living and working across Australia who are 100's of kilometers from a town or school.

Quoted from the Australian Government, Department of Foreign affairs and Trade "Since 2010, it has been mandatory in all States and Territories for students to complete Year 10 and participate full time in education, training or employment, until they are at least 17 years old."

Education is a mandatory, Australian Government requirement. When children are not given access to a secondary or senior secondary school in the town, region or remote location where they live, boarding school becomes their only option. Access to Compulsory Education needs to be affordable and adequately address the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by rural and remote families to access equitable educational opportunities for their children.

POLICY: Boarding Schools, School Term Hostels, and Second Home Arrangements

The ICPA advocates for the recognition of boarding schools, school term hostels, and second home arrangements as legitimate forms of educational access for students from rural and remote areas who need to live away from home to receive primary and/or secondary education.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)

Increasing the AIC Allowance and Alignment with the CPI Education Sub-Index: The AIC allowance should fully 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. The Gap between the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance and the actual costs of boarding continues to widen, increasing the financial burden on rural and remote families. The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is indexed according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which does not reflect the real cost escalation. There are approx. 13,391 rural and remote boarders and approx. 4000 meet & receive the AIC BBA allowance criteria. In 2024 the average cost of boarding was \$25,166.00 (not including tuition and other expenses)

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.

Costing Challenges: The biggest challenge is documenting the actual costs families incur when sending their children to boarding schools, especially 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.

In March 2025, The Hon Matt Canavan, provided ICPA with official costings to identify the costs to Treasury. 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.

ICPA Thank Matt for his continued support in this area – we are calling on all members of Government to take action and implement one of these options:



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Summary of proposal: The proposal would increase the Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme by \$4,000 per year. The proposal has 2 options:

- **Option 1:** Annual indexation of the BBA would be in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as per the current arrangements. \$23.7 million over the 2024-25 Budget forward estimates period
- **Option 2:** Annual indexation of the BBA would be in line with the CPI Education subgroup (CPI Education). The Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) would also be indexed to the CPI Education. The proposal would commence on 1 January 2027 and be ongoing. \$24.3 million over the 2024-25 Budget forward estimates period.

ICPA (Aust) Recommendations:

- Increase the AIC Allowances across all categories and ensure the allowances are indexed to the CPI Education Sub-Index.
- Requesting an urgent increase to the AIC Boarding Allowance of at least \$4000 to cover at least 55% of the average boarding fee followed by indexation to the CPI Sub Index: Education to truly reflect the costs of education.
- Seeking an increase to Second Home Allowance
- Review the AIC Scheme to ensure it adequately meets the needs of geographically isolated students.

Correspondence In:

24th October 2024, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP (MC24-010874)

“... 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...”

6th November 2024, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm (MC24-009322)

“Thank you for raising your concerns regarding the application for Assistance for Isolated Children, (AIC) ... Minister for Social Services and the Department of Social Services are best placed to discuss any changes to the AIC scheme and ECEI funding...”

27th November 2024, Stakeholder meeting with Services Australia & ICPA FC to inform us that new guidelines have been set to support and resolve Motion S1, 2024. (see below)

9th December 2024, Assistant Director of Abstudy & AIC Programs, Services Australia.

Email received confirming the [AIC 2025 Payment Rates](#) and also that families who travel will be able to supply a POBox as their primary postal address. (Motion S1. 2024) Motion S1 is now resolved.

30th April 2025, The Office of The Hon Matt Canavan, Pre-Election Media Release (in part):

“...An elected Dutton-Littleproud Coalition Government will commit \$40 million towards increasing the Basic Boarding Allowance paid under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme, delivering much-needed support to rural and remote families across Australia. The scheme helps parents and carers with the costs of sending their children to boarding school when there is no school close to home. Leader of The Nationals, the Hon David Littleproud MP, said the rising cost of living under Labor was impacting families



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from geographically isolated areas, who are forced to make significant sacrifices to be able to send their children to school... Under the Coalition's plan, the boarding allowance will increase by an extra \$4,000 per student from \$10,338 per year to \$14,338 per year for two years commencing 2025-26. After the first year of additional funding, a Coalition Government will undertake a review of the financial impact on isolated families. This review will inform decisions about future payments beyond the initial two years. While the review is underway, the Coalition will change the indexation factor to the CPI Education sub-index for the 2026-27 year. Shadow Minister for Regional Education Darren Chester said an increase to the boarding allowance is a critical component of closing the gap in educational outcomes between regional and metropolitan students. "The increased Boarding Allowance will help ease the financial burden and support more young people to get a quality education and thrive," Mr. Chester said.

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. There are only 2 Boarding Facilities in the Northern Territory and combined, they offer 615 beds, yet there are over 1200 secondary Students in the NT, due to geographical isolation, who need a boarding school. Half of the Children in the NT must travel interstate because there aren't enough beds in their own state. The gap between the AIC Boarding Allowance and actual boarding fees continues to widen, straining the financial burden on rural families. Boarding School fees increase annually by 4-8%, yet the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance only increased by 3.79%

On October 24, 2024, the 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 recent increase of 3.79% to \$10,338.00 (Basic Boarding Allowance) and 3.81% to \$2,965.00 (Additional Boarding Allowance) is insufficient given the rising costs of boarding school.

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 kilometers 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.

Access & Timing of AIC Payments:

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:

ICPA (Aust) Recommendation: Allow AIC payments to be made in either 3 or 4 instalments, depending on the family's needs.

Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) Exemption

1. FBT Exemption for Schools/Boarding Facilities:

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



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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.

2. 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.

28th November 2024, A letter was sent to ABSA for them to distribute to their membership of Australian Boarding Schools asking support for Motion S2 2024.

4th February 2025, a second letter was emailed to multiple Ministers and Senators showing the support ICPA (Aust) received from Australian Boarding Schools in relation to Motion S2 2024.

6th February 2025, The Hon Sarah Henderson, Senator Shadow Minister Education confirmed that the correspondence was received.

7th February 2025, The Office of Hon Matt Canavan advised that:

"... I note that Senator Rennick mentioned the FBT issue you raised in the Senate yesterday afternoon... I can confirm that I have sent a request for an updated costing based on an increase of the boarding allowance to \$4000. It may take some weeks for that to be completed, however we will share that with you when received."

Correspondence In:

14th March 2025, Office of Senator The Hon Mat Canavan.

"...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](#) Please feel free to share this widely with other ICPA members..."

22 April 2025, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (MC25-011842)

"Thank you for your letter regarding Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for Schools with Boarding Facilities. The Prime Minister has asked the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to respond on his behalf. Firstly, thank you for drawing the Isolated Children's Parents Association concerns to our attention. The Government is committed to ensuring that every child, regardless of socio-economic background or geographical location, has access to a high-quality education. Education can play an instrumental role in improving outcomes for children and youth, especially those in regional and remote areas. This is why the Commonwealths Recurrent School Funding model provides extra funding in the form of a loading for schools in regional and remote locations, calculated through a school's Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) score.

The FBT plays an important role in maintaining the fairness and integrity of Australia's taxation system. It is designed to place employees with access to fringe benefits on a more even footing with employees whose remuneration consists entirely of salary or wages. As you are aware, there are existing FBT concessions for



remote employers (and by extension their employees) for certain housing related benefits... I trust this information will be of assistance”

ICPA (Aust) 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.

Disability Support at Boarding School

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 meeting 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) work towards resources for students with specific needs to be made available and funded in boarding schools including resources for mental health programs in boarding schools and provision of additional resources to Boarding Schools for students with disability.

Correspondence In:

22nd October 2024, the Hon Bill Shorten MP (MC24-003027)

“... In addition to the reform program to improve the NDIS, the NDIA (National Disability Insurance Agency) has a National Remote Services Branch, which is responsible for providing essential services to support people with disability who live in geographically isolated locations in Australia. This includes children and their families. The branch works with a range of partners and other government agencies - State and Commonwealth - to develop the relationships and connections that the agency needs to support delivery of the NDIS...”

6th November 2024, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm (MC24-009322)

“...I appreciate the concerns you have raised regarding the added financial burden for geographically isolated families in meeting the needs of students with a disability while residing in a boarding facility. The Government has undertaken significant work to implement recommendations arising from the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards including support for educators to meet their obligations and new co-designed resources for students with disability and their families on their rights. The next review of the Disability Standards will occur in 2025. For your information, the Disability Standards do not set out funding arrangements, they are a legislative instrument made under the DDA to clarify the obligations of education and training providers ... Students with disability attract SRS based funding to their school or system and their school may also attract funding from other loadings depending on the students or the their school’s circumstances. For example, the school location loading provides extra funding for schools in regional and remote locations. It recognises it generally costs more to educate students in regional and remote schools than in city based schools...”

5th February 2025, email from, Assistant Secretary, Inclusion and Disability Branch, Australian Government Department of Education:

“...The Australian Government Department of Education has published a new information resource on the Disability Standards for Education 2005, the standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students



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with disabilities and their parents and caregivers. This resource was designed by and for young First Nations people with disability, with the help of First People's Disability Network Australia and Children and Young People with Disability Australia: [Our right to learn and play](#).

My team and i are more than happy to answer any questions you may have about our resources for students with disability and their families...”

26th May 2025, email from Rosemary White, Assistant Director, Regional and Equity Policy, Wellbeing and Equity Branch, Improving Student Outcomes Division, Schools Group, Australian Government Department of Education;

“...has added the ICPA and your contact details into their list of stakeholders to contact when and if the work progresses...” re: stakeholder input for Additional support (financial) needed *for schools* to care for a student with a disability (from rural and remote areas) who have no choice for the education other than boarding school. An amendment to the "Disability Standards for Education 2005" that encompasses the needs of students with a disability who reside in a boarding facility for secondary education due to not being able to access a local school because of isolation.

ICPA (Aust) Recommendations:

- 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)

ICPA (Aust) members support the continuation and expansion of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (CRSP), which assists *some* 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 and does not include all eligible children to receive the much needed assistance.

Correspondence In:

6th November 2024, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm (MC24-009322)

“...I appreciate the advice you have provided to establish the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program 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...”

6th February 2025, Meg Brighton, Deputy Secretary of Schools at DoE - stakeholder meeting with ICPA.

Meg provided an update on the CRSP; still under review, it is not listed in the next budget (no CRSP offered in 2025). Future CRSP will depend on the outcome of the review.

Key objectives of the CRSP are to:

- Support students from isolated areas with boarding fees where local education options are limited.
- Reduce the financial burden on families, particularly those in low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Provide more comprehensive support to all families meeting the criteria, not just a select few.



ICPA (Aust) Recommendations:

- Expansion of the CRSP to support all families' children who fit the criteria.

Review & Update Forms and Eligibility Criteria

ICPA (Aust) has worked successfully with Services Australia to resolve issues 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) continues to monitor the 'Review and amend Rule 3' in the AIC application to remove unnecessary ongoing requirements once the initial criteria have been met. We would like Members to reach out if they are still experiencing issues to have their AIC approved under Rule 3.

Correspondence In:

24th October 2024, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP (MC24-010874)

"... you also requested consideration for changes to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme reasonable access criteria (Rule 3) and increases to the Basic Boarding Allowance amount and ongoing indexation arrangements. 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...."

Moving Forward:

This year (2025), the Boarding Portfolio has received 9 Motions from Branches in NSW, QLD. South Australia State Council, Queensland State Council and Federal Council also submitted motions in the Boarding Portfolio. Some of the issues are complex and it will take time, patience, skill and dedication to resolve them. Other motions presented appear to be very simple and fast to solve. Some of the issues have been raised at this forum since the 1970's - and we continue to work diligently, as your elected Federal Council and say we have not managed to enact change... yet.

There is no doubt that ICPA (Aust) possess grit and determination needed to continue to advocate, as volunteers, on your behalf, and we need your support for the long haul. Not just today and tomorrow, ICPA (Aust) hear you loud and clear, we understand your plea for help.

We need to take your passion and lived experience to the people who are tucked away in shining city offices, where there is a public high-school round the corner, a bus run and access to sporting facilities a stones through away – they are the people who write and change legislation, they have access to the data that shows the how many rural and remote families have no secondary school within reach.

ICPA Members – Take Action:

What are the challenges you face when accessing equitable education for your child.

1. Send ICPA (Aust) your 'case study' / 'your story'



2. Offer to share your story in the news and across our media campaigns
3. Write to your local elected member and federal member of Parliament and tell them what your issues are.

2024 - Motion Snapshot:

(A1, A2, A3. 2024)

Ongoing.

Restore the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance *to cover at least 55% of the average cost of boarding* as was its intent when established in 1973 by Kim Beasley, Minister of Education under the Whitlam, Labour Government.

(A4. 2024)

On Notice.

Member input required if applications have been rejected due to Rule 3.

Review and amend Rule 3 in the application for Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) from SY040 to remove the continuing requirement once the initial requirement has been met.

(A7. 2024)

Ongoing.

Member case studies are required to support this motion.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) payments available, as an option, of three payments instead of four, for families with Year 12 students.

(A8. 2024)

Ongoing.

Member case studies are required to support this motion.

Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding school.

(A9, A10, A11. 2024)

Ongoing. Continue and expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program pilot.

(S1. 2024)

RESOLVED in 2024

Review the “No reasonable access to school” conditions to better cater for travelling families whose core business is located in geographically Isolated areas.”

(S2. 2024)

Ongoing.

ICPA (Aust) is working with multiple stakeholders to resolve this issue.



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To implement an exemption for schools/boarding facilities providing on site living facilities for essential supervisory staff from Fringe Benefits Tax on that accommodation.

(S3. 2024)

Ongoing.

For additional support to schools for student with a disability from Rural and remote areas, who have no choice for their education but to go to boarding school.

(S4. 2024)

Ongoing.

Include an amendment into the 2025 review of the “Disability Standards for Education 2005” that encompasses the needs of students with a disability who reside in a boarding facility for secondary education due to not being able to access a local school due to isolation.”

References:

[Map of schools located in the Northern Territory | Teach in the Territory](#)

[The Australian Education System - Foundation level](#)

Correspondence received from: Ministers, Prime Minister & Cabinet, Federal Government Departments.