

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

ALLOWANCES REPORT

Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Leader, March 2025

Table of BAHA Rates 2013 – 2025:

2013	\$2,105
2014	\$2,105
2015	\$2,105
2016	\$2,105
2017	\$2,105
2018	\$1,948
2019	\$1,791
2020	\$1,634
2021	\$1,477
2022	\$1,320
2023	\$1,350
2024	\$1,389
2025	\$1,424

Table of Applications 2014 – 2024:

School Year	Total Applications
2014	1247
2015	1397
2016	1503
2017	1453
2018	1244
2019	1375
2020	1338
2021	1279
2022	1190
2023	1077
2024	1005*

*Applications still being accepted and paid

ICPA (WA) is committed to advocating for a significant increase in the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) to close the gap that rural and remote families currently pay to access a high school education for their children.

Early in 2024 State Councillor Chandra Ridley wrote to the Minister for Education requesting a substantial increase to the BAHA. The response from the Minister is as follows.

“I wish to advise that at this time, the Western Australian Government is not in a position to consider further increases to the BAHA supplement.”

‘The Western Australian Government acknowledges the cost-of-living pressures affecting families throughout the State and has already introduced a range of measures aimed at alleviating this financial strain, including the recently announced WA Student Assistance Payment for every student in Kindergarten to Year 12.

The Western Australian Government has also demonstrated this commitment through a range of election commitments, including improving school infrastructure and the provision of modern science, technology, engineering, and mathematics facilities, as well as allocating resources to support the learning outcomes of regional students.”

Whilst these initiatives are welcome, it does not address the fact that where children cannot access high school, they are left significantly out of pocket paying for residential accommodation and care.

Following the welcome announcements in 2024 for free VacSwim enrolments and pool entry, and free passes for Perth Zoo entry ICPA (WA) wrote a letter to Minister for Education Hon. Dr Buti and Premier Roger Cook, once again calling for a significant increase to the BAHA.

“The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Western Australia welcomes the recent announcements of free VacSwim enrolments and entry for December and January, free zoo passes for everyone and most recently free travel and entry to Rottnest Island this weekend. Free activities such as these have great benefit for Western Australian families, and we wish all that can travel and attend these venues an enjoyable time.

ICPA (WA) would like to point out the difficulties that rural and remote families have accessing such free activities and urge the Western Australian Government to invest in geographically isolated families by increasing the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) by a significant amount to assist families to access a high school education.”

Data tables presented outlined the costs associated with members in different areas of Western Australia to attend VacSwim and the Perth Zoo.

It was clear in the figures provided that the costs associated with participating in VacSwim programs and a trip to the Perth Zoo, along with the ever-increasing costs of living, make such opportunities for our country children more difficult.

Rural and remote families need tangible assistance with the true cost of educating their children. ICPA (WA) is calling upon the State Government to significantly increase the BAHA to better reflect the true cost of accessing education in rural and remote areas of Western Australia. Real support for families who already find themselves out of pocket compared to their metropolitan counterparts to access a high school education would very clearly benefit families.

The 2025 Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance is currently \$10,338 and BAHA for 2025 is \$1,424; the total being \$11,762. Department of Education residential fees are currently set at \$15,536 in Western Australia, leaving a shortfall of nearly \$4,000. This does not consider additional expenses such as kilometres travelled, accommodation required when travelling and days parents and caregivers spend away from work to drive their children to and from a residential facility.

It is imperative that the BAHA is significantly increased to help address this inequity in education.

ICPA (WA) is happy to be contacted for further information to ensure equitable education is available for our regional, rural and remote children and to meet to discuss this matter further. This is also an area that is currently absent from the Draft Regional Education Strategy, and we look forward to seeing its inclusion in the final document.

ICPA (WA) State Council met with Minister Buti again in October to discuss the BAHA amongst other things. Following this meeting another letter was sent, this time highlighting the declining numbers of BAHA recipients over the past eight years. In 2016 there were 1,503 recipients, with just 1,077 in 2023. Case studies were included, clearly outlining the huge gap that is not covered by the BAHA and AIC.

Disappointingly this was part of the response from Minister Buti.

“The State Government acknowledges the financial challenges faced by geographically isolated families and has committed to providing annual increases to the BAHA to ensure that out-of-pocket expenses for students who board at the state’s public boarding facilities do not increase as a proportion of the boarding fee from 2023 onwards.

The ICPA’s proposal to further increase the BAHA must also be balanced against other government priorities across all portfolios and considered in the broader context of prudent fiscal management of the state’s finances. I acknowledge ICPA’s request and will take this into consideration.’

At the time of drafting this report, the state election campaigns were well underway.



The Nationals had pledged to increase the BAHA to \$2,700, Liberals to \$3,000, no word on an increase by the Labor Government.