



2026 Specific Education Needs Portfolio

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In 2025/2026 the Specific Education Needs Portfolio continued to advocate for fair access to education, health, and support services for geographically isolated children with learning, developmental, and disability needs. Following the 2025 Federal Conference in Adelaide, correspondence was sent to Ministers, Government Departments, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), health agencies, and other relevant stakeholders regarding the motions carried by Conference.

While responses have been received to several motions, many of the concerns raised by members remain unresolved and continue to be important advocacy priorities for ICPA (Aust).

NDIS Supports and Service Delivery

Access to appropriate NDIS supports remains a major challenge for many rural and remote families. ICPA (Aust) advocated for NDIS participants attending boarding school to be able to use funding for individual support workers within boarding facilities. A response from the NDIA outlined current pricing arrangements and travel provisions but did not directly address the request for individualised boarding support.

Concerns were also raised about changes to NDIS travel allowances and their effect on rural and remote service delivery. The Agency advised that travel remains claimable and that higher loadings continue to apply in remote and very remote areas. Still, concerns persist about reduced service availability and the ongoing viability of service delivery to isolated communities. ICPA (Aust) will keep advocating for practical NDIS solutions that recognise the unique circumstances faced by rural and remote students and their families.

Early Childhood Early Intervention

Accessing Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) services remains difficult for many families living in geographically isolated areas. The NDIA acknowledged that workforce shortages, distance, and infrastructure challenges continue to affect service delivery in remote communities. Information was provided about dedicated support teams and initiatives designed to improve access to providers and services.

While these measures are promising, many families still report difficulties accessing and using available funding. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for practical improvements that ensure children can access early intervention supports no matter where they live.

Speech Pathology and Allied Health Services

Conference highlighted the ongoing shortage of speech pathology and allied health services available to rural and remote students. Correspondence to Government outlined the need for targeted funding to improve access to speech pathology services, particularly for students enrolled in distance education who may have limited opportunities to access support through traditional school-based programs.



Responses acknowledged workforce shortages and pointed to existing workforce development initiatives. However, they did not address the immediate need for dedicated speech pathology services in rural and remote communities. ICPA (Aust) continues to seek practical solutions that improve access to allied health services and reduce the delays many families face when seeking assessments and therapy.

Access to Health and Paediatric Services

Timely access to specialist paediatric services remains one of the most common concerns from families across rural and remote Australia. Correspondence regarding access to federally funded health clinics and specialist paediatric services resulted in responses outlining existing outreach programs, workforce strategies, and specialist training initiatives.

While these programs aim to improve long-term service availability, they do not address the immediate barriers many families face when seeking assessments, diagnosis, and ongoing specialist care. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for better accessibility, shorter waiting times, and greater equity of access for geographically isolated children.

Supporting Students Transitioning to Boarding School

One of the most positive developments from the 2025 Conference has been progress toward creating a resource for families of children with specific education needs transitioning to boarding school. ICPA (Aust) has begun discussions with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and other stakeholders to develop practical information and guidance for families navigating this important transition.

For many rural and remote families, boarding school is the only option for secondary education. Ensuring families have access to clear information about supports, services, and available assistance will help students and families make informed decisions and achieve successful transitions. Work on this project is ongoing, and ICPA (Aust) looks forward to continuing collaboration with ABSA and other organisations to bring this valuable resource to completion.

Looking Ahead

The issues raised through the Specific Education Needs motions show the continued challenges geographically isolated families face in accessing education, health, and disability supports. While progress has been made in raising awareness of these concerns, significant work remains to achieve fair access to services regardless of location.

Federal Council will continue to engage with Government Departments, the NDIA, health providers, education stakeholders, and advocacy organisations to ensure the needs of rural and remote students with specific education needs stay firmly on the national agenda. ICPA (Aust) thanks branches for their continued support, feedback, and case studies. The experiences shared by families provide valuable evidence that strengthens advocacy and helps drive meaningful change for rural and remote students.