



ICPA NT State Conference and AGM
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ALICE SPRINGS

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ICPA NT

2024 State Conference

Portfolio Reports

[Boarding & Allowances Portfolio Page 2](#)

[Communications & Distance Education Portfolio Page 4](#)

[Early Childhood Portfolio Page 5](#)

[Rural & Remote Schools Portfolio Page 6](#)

[Special Needs Portfolio Page 7](#)

[Tertiary & Training Portfolio Page 9](#)

Boarding and Allowances Portfolio

2023 Boarding & Allowances – Portfolio Team

Melissa Kerr, Kerrie Scott, Catherine Atkins, Bec Osmotherly

Seven motions were carried under the Boarding and Allowances Portfolio at the 2023 State Conference, with lots of discussion around enrolment funding models, Back to School Vouchers, Ochre cards, and the Student Assistance Scheme (SAS).

The Student Assistance Scheme policy and guidelines and the complexity of the application process have been a continual frustration for members for years. With the introduction of GrantsNT in 2023, the SAS application has been simplified, there has been a decrease in complexity, and allowances have been grouped to decrease the burden on applicants. Zone allowances still remain an issue for some families in 2023.

2023 Motions: Boarding and Allowances

CARRIED

- That ICPA NT lobby the NT department of education to provide student assistance scheme funding via an enrolment base model rather than state based.
- That ICPA NT request that the Department of Education review the current policy for the back to school voucher scheme to allow for more flexibility for GI families enrolled in SODE.
- That ICPA NT lobby the Department of Education to review their policy for Back to School voucher scheme to be more applicable to GI students within NT families.
- That ICPA NT lobbies the Department of Education to pay (reimburse) the fee for the issue or renewal of Ochre cards for home tutors.
- That ICPA NT lobby the NT Department of Education for an increase in all allowances within the Student Assistance Scheme, including the kilometre travel rate, to more closely reflect the cost of travel, especially in light of the number of kilometres our members travel on dirt roads to access education.
- That ICPA NT encourage the NT Department of Education to improve the Student Assistance Scheme application, re-application and processing systems and ensure the scheme subsidies and assistance is appropriate to the needs of isolated students. That the Grants NT program is promoted through the Schools of the Air, and how to use it, if in fact, every student assistance scheme is accessible through the program as promised and ensure appropriate to Geographically Isolated families.
- That ICPA NT reiterate to the Department of Education, and the Minister for Education, the necessity of interstate boarding for geographically isolated students due to the lack of boarding schools and boarding facilities available to non-indigenous students within the NT. We request the continued review of all boarding and travel allowances to support interstate boarding students adequately and fairly in order to ensure these children can complete their compulsory secondary schooling.

After the 2023 ICPA NT State Conference, Council met with the Department of Education (“DoE”) to discuss the new Student Assistance Scheme (“SAS”) policy and guidelines and the application process through GrantsNT.

Most families agree that the application through GrantsNT has made the entire process much simpler and easier to use. Key feedback from members has been the determination of the zones does not take into account the difficulty of access. Many families are now eligible for the interstate boarding allowance. This was a major win for ICPA NT last year, and has been positively received by many families of geographically isolated (“GI”) children who are educating their children in other states.

A lively and robust discussion was had between members again in January and February 2023 that although the SAS policy and guidelines are a vast improvement, the argument still exists that ICPA NT are requesting appropriate assistance for access to education, and because of the unique circumstances of GI students the allowances must meet the individual needs and abilities of the GI student.

The mission statement of the Education Act 2015 is -

An Act to provide for the availability of education in the Northern Territory and in particular to provide for the access of all children and young persons to education programs appropriate to their individual needs and abilities, and for related purposes.

ICPA NT advocated that the NT Government’s position that it is “preferable all students should attend school within the NT, including boarding school”, is untenable and that instead their policy should work to keep families in the NT. We are aware many NT boarding students receive significant and ongoing NT Government support under the (Indigenous) Transition Support Unit to attend education opportunities across Australia. This should be available to all GI students in the NT, indigenous and non indigenous.

ICPA NT advocates that ALL geographically isolated families should be supported to choose a school with the best fit and necessary support for both the student and family.

A discussion was had with Qantas about a capped affordable concessional airfare to travel to and from boarding school, within the NT and interstate. Currently, only residents of Alice Springs can access the resident fares for return flights to Darwin or Adelaide.

Council discussed this with the Chief Minister and Minister for Education in November 2022 and were advised to take the matter up with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

ICPA NT continues to advocate for concessional travel intrastate and interstate for GI boarding school students.

The Department of Education CE advised ICPA NT to clarify and revise their motions regarding Back to School Vouchers and they are prepared to revisit this at a later date. She also said new satellite communications to schools and communities is on the agenda, but they are waiting for the technology and the funds to progress this further.

Federal Motions

Update from Federal Council:

ICPA Federal Council has multiple motions to continue to lobby for an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance to more closely reflect the real costs of educating GI children. The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is not even covering 50% of the average boarding fee for Australian students.

ICPA Federal Council had numerous meetings with Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament in 2023 advocating on behalf of all State Councils on this matter.

Communications & Distance Education Portfolio

Portfolio Team Moira Lanzarin, Dannyelle Haigh, Constance Woods

No motions were put forward under the Communications Portfolio at the 2023 Conference.

The first two of the Distance Education Portfolio motions (re cost of school internet) could equally have been considered Communications and as such the two portfolios work together.

MOTION: Katherine Branch

Carried

That ICPA NT ensure the NT Department of Education subsidises the full amount of school room internet to families and remains a key participant and advisor to the Department of Education during negotiation of service needed and during the transfer from the STARS network to an NBN / Starlink or alternative.

MOTION: Alice Springs Branch:

Carried

That ICPA NT lobby the NT Government and Department of Education to ensure that internet costs (as per the STARS network) for Geographically Isolated children enrolled and attending schools of distance education be the direct monetary responsibility of the Department of Education as this is consistent with the Education Act.

MOTION: Katherine Branch

Carried

That ICPA NT continue to relay the importance of Northern Territory Schools of the Air to all relevant Ministers and Government departments.

These motions were discussed with both the Honourable Eva Lawler, then Education Minister; and Karen Weston, head of the Education Department. Assurance was given that the monthly rebate of \$165 would continue and that negotiations were in place for a Low Earth Orbit replacement.

Unreserved commitment to the NT Schools of the Air was heartily given. This was reinforced in our joint meeting of Education and Chief Minister.

Federal Council kept the NT and other states involved and up-to-date hosting several Zoom meetings re Communication developments.

Early Childhood Portfolio

2023 Early Childhood Portfolio Team - Kiya Gill, Jacinta McInneray,

Juliane Vlach, Danyelle Haigh

The lack of early learning playgroups and programs in Central Australia continues to be a challenge for geographically isolated families in this region. Only one motion was presented at our 2023 State Conference

2023 Motion: From Alice Springs Branch

That ICPA NT lobby the relevant Government Departments for an increase in their funding grant to deliver early education playgroups via an auspice partnership in Central Australia for Geographically Isolated children.

Whilst ICPA hasn't been successful in fulfilling this motion we continue to build a strong partnership with the Department of Early Years and Primary and Alice Springs School of the Air and are working together to deliver some new programs in the early childhood space.

A highlight has been the implementation of a Families as First Teachers playgroup that is held four times a year during every in school. Attendance at these playgroups has been incredible with 15 or more children participating in a range of activities from singing, dance, arts and crafts, that support developing fine motor skills, language development, social skills and interaction. This has been an important program in Central Australia and we hope the playgroup continues to develop and grow into the future.

We worked with Families as First Teachers to trial a playgroup at Ti Tree school in 2023. Unfortunately despite best efforts this playgroup wasn't successful. It highlighted the need for playgroups to be mobile and outside of core business/school hours to attract geographically isolated families.

Another positive initiative has been Alice Springs School of the Air increasing preschool hours from 15 to 20 during in-school weeks. This provides students an opportunity to access additional time with their teacher and classmates to enhance their social skills and optimise play and learning opportunities.

RAISEducation in partnership with ICPA Alice Springs delivered nine early learning playgroups across Central Australia in 2023 with funding for the program sourced through grants. These playgroups were a highlight for families in the region with many traveling 100s of km for the opportunity to participate in face to face play. Unfortunately this funding was a one off with no recurring funding committed for programs in 2024.

Playgroup NT is supporting RAISEducation to deliver early learning playgroups across Central Australia under the federally funded Helping Families Learn and Grow with Playgroups (FLAG) stream of the Children and Parenting Support (CaPS) program. This initiative will be a welcomed relief for many geographically isolated families who otherwise would go without.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library continues to be a great program that is delivered to geographically isolated children (5 years and under) across the NT thanks to KICS. KICS are still needing financial support to distribute the program and we hope they secure recurring funding for it soon.

We participated in the Northern Territory Department of Education Preschool review in 2023 highlighting the challenges geographically isolated families face in the early years space. We also touched on the In Home Care Commonwealth program which we hope in time will become more flexible to meet the needs of geographically isolated families.

One of the highlights this year has been the inclusion of preschool in the Northern Territory Student Assistance Scheme. We thank the Northern Territory Government for recognising the importance of preschool and financially supporting geographically isolated preschool students.

NT State Counselors attended the early years Little People Big Dream Conference in Darwin which was a successful networking opportunity. In April 2023, Our President Moira warmly welcomed Samantha Page and Janet William-Smith from Early Childhood Australia to her family's Coodardie Station Mataranka. ICPA NT and ECA began a strong partnership that will, over time benefit our geographical isolated families and communities.

Rural and Remote Schools Portfolio

Portfolio Leader Melissa Kerr

There were no Rural and Remote Schools motions brought forward in 2023 from NT Branches, however Rural and Remote Schools were kept well on the radar and informal discussions were held with the Department of Education, Principals, families, and NT Council of Governments Schools Organisation (NT COGSO).

Meeting with ICPA Australia Small Schools portfolio leader and each State portfolio leader during the Federal Conference in Darwin, it is glaringly obvious that no matter what part of rural Australia we reside in, we all have such similar issues we are advocating on for our State.

Highlights from Federal Council include -

Lobbying the Federal Government for funding to incentivise experienced teachers to take up contracts and long term rural, regional and remote positions.

Expensive airfares continue to be a concern for many families. We continue to request for capped fares for GI children who travel away for their education.

The Chaplaincy Program in Schools is currently in review. We are hopeful the program will continue. ICPA Australia was invited to participate in the evaluation, which we did in the form of a short answer question paper and case studies.

A motion for a federally funded motion sensor device to be installed on all school buses to ensure that no young GI child could be left on a bus by installing sensor devices that sense sound and movement, to detect and alert drivers if young children have been left on the vehicle. This Federal motion was shared with the NT Department of Education who is now checking this issue for NT school buses.

Special Needs Portfolio

2023 Special Needs Portfolio Team

Suzanne Wilson, Jacinta McInnerney

There were no Special Needs Portfolio motions brought at the 2023 annual conference. However, throughout 2023, the portfolio continued to advocate for the issues raised in 2021/2, at delegations and at any available opportunity with relevant stakeholders. Further, the portfolio sought ways to highlight the challenges our members have with accessing allied health services. The inaugural Remote Australians' Matter (RAM) Conference provided such an opportunity, as detailed below.

Remote Australians' Matter (RAM) Conference

Suzanne Wilson and Alice Springs President, Danyelle Haigh had the privilege of attending the inaugural Remote Australians' Matter (RAM) Conference in Charleville, Qld in September 2023, on behalf of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of the Northern Territory.

The conference brought together people who live in remote Australia, the advocates who support them, and the politicians and advisors who make decisions that impact their remote lives. It was an opportunity to communicate, connect, and harness the collective wisdom in the room.

The keynote address by the National Rural Health Commissioner Adj Professor Ruth Stewart reported that remote Australians have higher rates of smoking, sugary drink consumption, arthritis, asthma, and diabetes than urban Australians. She also emphasized the importance of primary care in rural and remote areas, noting that "A greater emphasis on primary care can be expected to lower the costs of care."

Remote Healthcare Models

The conference featured three presentations on remote healthcare models:

- Dr Sara Renwick-Lau, GP at Mallacoota Medical Centre, spoke about the Mallacoota model, which is a pioneering remote model that has addressed equity and access issues in the community. Mallacoota is a remote coastal village close to the Victorian/New South Wales border. The major centres are 6 hours away and the nearest hospital is a 2-hour drive.
- June Councillor, CEO of Wirraka Maya in Port Headland, spoke about the Wirraka Maya model, which is an Aboriginal community and Aboriginal funded model that welcomes non-Indigenous patients, who make up 12% of their patients.
- Sheryl Lawton, CEO of CWAATSICH in Charleville, spoke about the CWAATSICH model, which is an Aboriginal corporation that follows a holistic approach which includes traditional healing. Unlike much of the NT, they also welcome non-Indigenous patients.

Expert Panel Discussions

The conference also featured two expert panel discussions:

- “What are the health needs of remote communities?” At this point it is worth noting that most of the attendees were clinicians or service providers and very few of end-users like our members. The panel was made up of four clinicians and one pre-selected community member. They discussed the challenges facing remote communities in accessing quality healthcare, and the need for culturally appropriate and responsive services.
- “What does quality accessible primary healthcare look like and how do we fund and develop appropriate models for remote Australia?” The panel was made up of four clinicians, one pre-selected community member, and Senator Susan McDonald, Qld Senator and Shadow Minister for Resources & Northern Australia. Some suggestions were: growing your own (clinicians), nurse-led clinics, (but there is a lack of support for them), upskilling, build relationships with polities – 13 or 5% of them come from Nth Australia, making sure medical centres (GPs) can be funded, resourced and staffed. Shockingly 30% of the population (R&R) receives just 3% of the funding!

Idea Marketplace

The conference also included an Idea Marketplace, where delegates divided into ten groups to discuss the key issues in their areas. The aim was to identify the top ten issues in the room, which were then presented to the rest of the audience. Delegates then voted on their priorities using an app.

This provided the opportunity to inform others of our special needs challenges for those living in remote Australia. Unfortunately, our voices were in a minority in this area, with the end result of:

The top three priorities identified by delegates were:

1. Access to quality healthcare, including after-hours care, aged care, and mental health services.
2. A sustainable workforce, including training and development opportunities for clinicians and other healthcare workers.
3. Culturally appropriate and responsive services, including services that are delivered in Aboriginal languages.

Motion to the Federal Government

The conference has since tabled a motion to take to the Federal Government that states: "Every person living in remote Australia has access to a mandated minimum standard of Primary Health Care that aligns with the standard available to urban Australia and is appropriate to their needs."

Conclusion

The RAM Conference was a valuable opportunity for people who live in remote Australia, their advocates, and policymakers to come together and discuss the challenges and opportunities in providing quality healthcare to remote communities. The conference's key takeaways will be used to inform future action on this issue.

The RAM Conference was a significant step forward in the fight for better healthcare for people who live in remote Australia. The conference's key takeaways and recommendations will provide a roadmap for future action on this important issue.

Attending this conference, whilst generalist in nature, provided the opportunity to give our members' perspective not only on remote healthcare as a whole but the challenges faced by our families in accessing early intervention and diagnosis of learning needs and equitable access to all allied health services.

Both Suzanne and Danyelle now sit on different RAM working groups moving forwards providing further opportunity for our members' issues to be raised.

Northern Territory Preschool Review

A submission to the Northern Territory Preschool Review was also another opportunity to highlight the inequities faced by families living in rural and remote locations. Many of these families with under school aged children have limited opportunities for social and play opportunities with other children, therefore early developmental learning issues may not be picked up early on. Mobile playgroups are an excellent platform for families and children to meet, participate in play based learning and discuss concerns. We made a suggestion in our submission that mobile playgroups could also involve access to allied health professionals that support early identification and intervention with additional supports.

In Home Care (IHC) Program

ICPA NT also participated in the review of the In Home Care (IHC) Program. Whilst this review covered several issues that are important to our members, the special needs portfolio focused on opportunities for the wellbeing and early diagnosis of developmental delays in young children. Our aim is for the Program to be made much more flexible to meet the needs of families who reside on the one station or in a very small community setting. ICPA NT believes allowing the one In Home Care educator to provide a quality early learning program to children from more than one family residing in the same remote location, would have enormous benefits for the children's mental health, as well as enhanced opportunities for reaching developmental milestones. Further to this, we acknowledge and appreciate that recruiting and retaining educators, home tutors and governesses to our remote locations will be much smoother, if the location has adequate health services as part of a package to entice people to live and work in the bush.

Tertiary & Training Portfolio

2023 Tertiary and Training Portfolio Team

Susan Wilson and Kiya Gill

The past year has been a busy for the training portfolio as the Home Tutor Program continues to grow and develop. We are excited to share that we had our first home tutor complete their Cert IV in School Based Education Support in 2023!!

Congratulations to Megan Frawley for all her efforts. It's great to see home tutors such as Megan grows and learn from the program and continue to work in Northern Territory remote classrooms.

Two motions were presented at our 2023 State Conference.

2023 Motion: From Katherine Branch

Thank you to ICPA NT and Charles Darwin University for creating training pathways for Home Tutors. It's not only giving the Home Tutor recognition but a pathway towards a career in education in the NT. As well as an introduction with Charles Darwin University should they wish to further their studies in the NT.

2023 Motion: From Katherine Branch

That ICPA NT encourage the NT Education Department to add an allowance or incentives for the Home Tutor and the employer of a Home Tutor, to make studying remotely whilst still employed full time more desirable for both parties involved.

We have approx. five home tutors that need to complete a week of work placement to demonstrate their ability to work with children with autism spectrum disorder, a core unit of the certificate. Many have expressed concern with the cost of travel, accommodation, and absence from work to participate in the required work placement. We have also seen a dropout rate of 50% from the program. A study allowance and or incentives would help encourage registration in this skill shortage area.

We have had many meetings across Government to try and secure funding to further support this program. We are currently in discussions with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade to try and source a three-year funding agreement to support home tutors with some of the costs associated with obtaining these formal qualifications.

We have also met with Group Training NT and are working with them to see what industry funding may be available for home tutors and if they qualify under the trainee banner.

Whilst we don't have confirmed funding as yet, are hopeful we will be able to secure something to help assist and encourage home tutors to undertake further training.

Another opportunity we would like to explore is expanding Cert IV in School Based Education Support as a VET program across NT schools.

By doing this we believe it would create opportunities for NT school leavers to consider employment as a home tutor. This would directly assist in attracting and retaining NT home tutors as well as creating employment pathways for NT school-leaver.

Whilst meeting with Government we found there may be funding available for workforce skill-based training such as first aid training in a remote location and travel safely in remote areas. We will continue to work with our branches to see if this training is something that would be of value to parents and home tutors.

There were no Tertiary motions presented.