

Established in 1971, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) is a national organisation representing regional students and their families at all stages of education and has a large network of branches throughout Australia.

MEDIA RELEASE

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ICPA WA CONFERENCE A SHOWCASE OF RURAL SOLIDARITY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Following the conclusion of another successful Conference, the Isolated Children and Parents Association of Western Australia (ICPA WA) has set its agenda for the year and will continue its advocacy for equitable education for rural and remote children.

ICPA WA held its 54th annual State Conference on the 27th of March, at Aloft, Perth.

This year's Conference theme was 'Opportunity Knows No Postcode.'

Despite high fuel prices, which have dealt a blow to many rural businesses and families, and the looming presence of Cyclone Narrelle, the Conference once again attracted parents and stakeholders from across the State to come together and participate in a dialogue aimed at improving rural children's access to quality education.

The volunteer organisation's Conference is an important opportunity for members to submit and debate motions on issues affecting them, and provides a chance for families to share their lived experience. The motions presented will shape ICPA WA's advocacy direction for the year.

Education Minister Sabine Winton opened the Conference and presented. Other speakers included the Department of Education Director General Jay Peckitt. The Conference's keynote speaker was Rachel Russell, a coach, educator and author specialising in neurodivergent wellbeing.

ICPA WA members from the Gascoyne, Meekatharra, Mid-West, Lakes District, Eastern Districts, Yalgoo, and Goldfields regions made the trek from their rural homes to attend.

We farewelled Jane Cunningham, a Tambellup farmer who has served as our dedicated President for three years.

We welcomed a new Vice President, Jasmyn Allen, who lives on a farm with her family near Yuna and is now Acting Chair for ICPA WA.

Jasmyn said she was "incredibly proud" of the strong turnout for the Conference.

"It was an important opportunity for members from across regional and remote Western Australia to come together, share their experiences, and focus on practical solutions to the challenges facing rural and distance education," she said.

"What stands out most is the resilience and commitment of our families and educators. The collective voice of ICPA WA remains a powerful advocate for change, and we will continue working constructively with government and stakeholders to ensure that regional students are not disadvantaged by geography.

"This year, we also offered a specialised boarding session with staff from boarding and residential schools across WA in attendance, to incorporate our joint unity in providing a quality boarding experience for all of our rural and remote kids who need to board to access high school.

"The session focused on inclusive education in boarding, with a focus on children with ADHD and other neurodivergent diagnoses. It was a great opportunity for our educators in boarding."

Among our new committee members is 21-year-old Madi Hall. Madi grew up and lives on Bulloo Downs Station, a cattle property south of Newman. She worked as a governess for three years across Australia before returning home. Madi completed her primary schooling through Meekatharra School of the Air and attended boarding school.

ICPA WA is very excited to see more young faces come in.

"ICPA was a vital part of my time as a SOTA and boarding student, as it provided me the chance for socialisation at camps and advocacy for issues that directly affected my family and me, such as increasingly low BAHA (Boarding Away from Home Allowance) payments," Madi said.

Issues addressed at the Conference include, but are not limited to:

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TEACHERS IN RURAL AREAS

Council carried several motions calling for urgent, practical action to address the chronic teacher shortage crisis in rural and remote Western Australia, which is severely disrupting student learning.

STATE BOARDING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE (BAHA)

Council carried several motions calling for a **substantial** increase in BAHA to account for the **significant rise** in boarding fees impacting families who have no choice but to send their children to boarding school.

CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION CHILDREN

Council carried the motion for ICPA WA to advocate for a conveyancing allowance for parents of distance education students who need to drive their children to attend in-school learning programs. Geographically isolated students in WA's Schools of the Airs rely on 'in-school' face-to-face sessions to access core curriculum and develop essential social skills—opportunities they cannot get online. Families must travel hundreds of kilometres at their own expense.

BOARDING ACCOMMODATION

Several motions carried highlighted a critical gap in support for rural students living in residential accommodation—particularly those with disabilities, neurodiverse needs, and complex health challenges. The motions call for **additional, targeted funding** for residential facilities to reflect the true level of care required, alongside increased staffing, improved staff-to-student ratios, and access to specialised supports.

SCHOOL BUS SERVICES

Council passed several motions that collectively highlight shortcomings in the delivery, accessibility, and administration of school bus services for regional and rural families across WA. Current policies create uncertainty and exclude some children from consistent bus access, especially in low-density areas or on smaller routes. Equally pressing are **failures in communication and consultation**. Motions indicate that School Bus Services (SBS) are not consistently following their own policy guidelines, often informing families of bus changes prematurely or with insufficient notice, causing confusion, stress, and last-minute disruptions.

For further comments, images and case studies, please contact:

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