

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 IMPLORES STATE GOVT FOR MAJOR BOARDING ALLOWANCE INCREASE

For many rural and remote families who have no choice but to send their children away for high school, boarding costs are their biggest expense.

However, despite the climbing price of everyday living and boarding fees, our WA Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) has remained relatively stagnant for a decade.

Across Australia, other States have adjusted their allowances accordingly to better reflect the true cost of boarding school.

Queensland provides a state allowance of **\$10,891** per child each year, with a **\$4000** boost added in 2024 following lobbying by ICPA QLD.

South Australia provides just over **\$5000**.

WA provides **\$1461**.

Over the last 8 years, the WA allowance has **only risen by \$84**.

In letting itself fall out of step with other States, the WA Government is leaving its rural and remote families in a needless struggle to get their kids to high school.

Earlier this month, Nationals WA member for Geraldton Kirrilee Warr used her time in Parliament to beseech the State Education Department to address this inequity.

"It (the BAHA) is currently sitting well below what it costs or even contributes to costs to send a child away to boarding school. I am a boarding mum; I do not deny that. I do it, and it is really, really hard to send your children away at 11 and 12 years of age... We have to distance parent. We have to rely on a completely different village to raise our children... It (the Government) does not even consider boarding an essential need for regional students," she said.

ICPA WA welcomes Ms Warr's comments.

In calling for a significant BAHA increase, ICPA WA is not asking for a handout – Our families are well-versed in the financial and emotional sacrifices that need to be made so their kids can receive a good education.

What we are calling for is an acknowledgment from the State Education Department that they are **well behind** in ensuring rural and remote children have equitable access to secondary education.

We implore the WA Education Department to make a significant increase to the BAHA that accurately reflects the current cost of sending children to boarding school.

ICPA WA requests the State BAHA be increased to **\$5000 per annum**.

Murchison pastoralist Claire Mahoney is one of many parents who have children in boarding school.

She and her family live on Moorarie Station, a property 117 km from their nearest town, Meekatharra.

“Sending our children to boarding school is one of the hardest decisions we’ve had to make. Parenting from the end of a telephone is difficult when you can’t console a homesick child. Now more than ever, with the rising costs and severe ongoing drought conditions, an increase in the BAHA would certainly ease one pressure of educating our children,” Mrs Mahoney said.

Tambellup farmer Jane Cunningham is another boarding parent.

“It is so disappointing to see our regional, rural and remote families struggle to access a high school education, and the lack of value the Government puts on this. If the \$2105 BAHA allowance from 15 years ago had simply been indexed to CPI, it would now be around \$3200. Instead, the current BAHA is less than half that amount – well below even the 2010 rate. This is without the added pressures of fuel and transport costs, and then post-graduate studies,” Mrs Cunningham said.

WAFarmers CEO Trevor Whittington has also called the WA Government to increase the BAHA, saying, “If the Government is serious about equity in outcomes for students living in remote areas far from the education resources of the major centres, it will properly fund living away from home allowances.”

In 2026, the average non-Government boarding school fee is \$31, 297 a year.

All States benefit from the Federal Government's Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance, which can provide a maximum of \$13, 582 per child every year for families, in addition to whatever allowance each State has in place.

This means total Government support for WA families equates to \$15,043.

This leaves families out-of-pocket on an average of \$16,254 per student each year (this does not include the costs of travel to and from boarding, tuition fees, etc.).

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