

**The Isolated Children's Parents'  
Association of Australia  
ICPA (Aust)**



**2025 Federal Conference**

**Motions  
All-in-one Doc**

**30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025**

**Adelaide, South Australia**



## **BOARDING SCHOOLS/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME**

### **A1. Walgett Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant federal government departments to continue and expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program pilot.”

#### **Explanation:**

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks for the implementation of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program that is a pilot program that commenced this year.

This scholarship has been greatly received by our members and we will be an incredible help to assist the receipts families with boarding fees and all the associated costs.

We would like to advocate for this program to continue and be expanded by increasing the number of scholarships on offer, this will allow many more families the opportunity to stay in their rural or remote communities where local alternatives don't exist and send their children to a school that offers boarding.

We acknowledge that the number of scholarships were small being a pilot program, but there is a real need for such a scholarship, as demonstrated by the number of applicants deemed eligible but were unsuccessful. This need is even more prevalent in the more marginalised and disadvantaged rural and remote areas that have inequitable access to quality education.

### **A2. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant government departments to reestablish the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (CRSP).”

#### **Explanation:**

The Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program was introduced in 2024 as a pilot initiative and was warmly welcomed by ICPA members. It provided successful applicants with the opportunity to attend boarding school at a subsidised financial cost.

For many families living in regional and remote areas of Australia, boarding school is the only viable option for their children to access compulsory secondary education. The CRSP offered substantial financial relief to these families and was a meaningful step toward addressing the significant educational disadvantage faced by geographically isolated students.

Furthermore, the program was viewed as a positive acknowledgement by the Federal Government of the urgent financial pressures faced by rural and remote families in securing equitable educational opportunities for their children. Its reinstatement would continue to support students who, through no fault of their own, are denied local access to quality secondary schooling.

### **A3. Queensland State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government and all relevant departments for the permanent establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF), to support rural and remote families eligible for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance to meet educational costs during times of unforeseen and unprecedented natural disasters.”

#### **Explanation:**



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This year alone, Queensland has experienced devastating and widespread flooding in locations across the state. Whole towns in remote areas have been evacuated and experienced catastrophic outcomes due to unforeseen weather events. Queensland is not the only state affected by these unforeseen events, as South Australia is simultaneously experiencing one of the worst droughts on record, Western Australia has experienced cyclones and bush fires, and other states have experienced weather and industry events outside of their control.

In the wake of catastrophic flooding and other natural disasters, families lose their livelihoods, homes and school rooms where distance education takes place. Geographically isolated families are suddenly faced with the unenviable task of cleaning up and rebuilding in complete isolation while still needing to support their children's education, often with no warning or safety net.

Rural businesses that experience widespread damage to infrastructure, plant and livestock losses stand to be affected long-term which places enormous financial pressure on many families. Employing a governess to relieve the pressure of educating via Schools of Distance Education (SDE's) is often impossible due to financial costs falling back on families as no financial subsidy currently exists to assist with the cost of supplying a distance education home supervisor.

Additionally, in rural and remote locations, gaining an education often requires students to leave their homes and communities to attend boarding school and/or to undertake tertiary or training pathways. These natural disaster events are unexpected and impact on the affordability of boarding school fees or assisting their children into further studies. Without financial assistance, the education of disaster affected students is significantly disrupted.

The development of a permanent RHEF would provide emergency relief to families eligible for the AIC allowance in disaster-stricken regions, ensuring their children have access to schooling, tertiary and trade opportunities and provide relief to parents who are educating their children via SDE when their families are struggling to recover. Unforeseen disasters and industry crises are not something that can be planned for. Overnight, family income and abilities to meet educational payments can be taken away.

It is crucial that a permanent Rural Hardship Education Fund is established to provide financial assistance to rural and remote families, ensuring their children can continue their education during and after periods of natural disasters and to reduce educational disadvantage.

#### **A4. Tambo Branch (QLD)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and relevant ministers to ensure that the Commonwealth's recurrent school funding model includes provisions for boarding schools to receive a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption on accommodation provided to essential boarding staff, where the school accommodates students from remote and very remote areas as defined by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) score."

#### **Explanation:**

In the past year, ICPA Federal Council identified the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) on boarding school staff accommodation as a Federal Focus issue. As part of this advocacy, during face-to-face delegations in Canberra, all relevant Senators and Ministers were extensively briefed on the matter, with comprehensive supporting documentation provided. This issue is therefore not new to the current government.

The nature of boarding schools is that they are primarily located in metropolitan areas. However, these schools enroll students from across Australia—predominantly from geographically isolated, remote, and very remote regions, as defined by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) score.



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For these students, boarding is not a choice but a necessity due to the absence of accessible local schooling options.

Under the current policy, schools that provide on-site residential accommodation to essential supervisory staff are subject to FBT on that housing. This taxation imposes unnecessary and disproportionate financial pressure on schools that are already working to support some of Australia's most educationally disadvantaged students.

These increased operational costs are often passed directly onto families in the form of higher boarding fees, further compounding the financial burden on rural and remote families who already face significant expenses to access education.

ICPA calls for an exemption from FBT on residential accommodation provided to essential boarding staff, specifically for schools that serve students from rural, remote and very remote areas, as determined by ARIA.

Removing this tax would:

- Reduce operational costs for boarding schools;
- Enable schools to pass savings onto families through lower boarding fees;
- Assist in attracting and retaining qualified, committed staff in a demanding residential setting;
- Help ensure equitable access to education for isolated students.

Accommodation provided to essential supervisory staff at boarding schools is not a luxury or optional benefit—it is a core component of student care and safety. Therefore, boarding schools should not be penalised through FBT for providing this essential service.

### **A5. ICPA Federal Council**

“That ICPA(Aust) advocate that the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) continue discussions with the Federal Government to lobby for a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for schools/boarding facilities providing on site living facilities for essential supervising staff who must live on site.”

#### **Explanation:**

It is critical that the Federal Government change the policy on FBT as it currently applies to essential boarding school staff required to “live in” who perform their duty of care for residential students in metropolitan boarding institutions. This tax negatively impacts on the cost of an equitable education for isolated students.

The removal of the FBT on residential accommodation for essential supervisory staff employed by boarding schools will significantly reduce the costs incurred by some boarding schools.

Staff accommodation is a fundamental necessity of a boarding school. Boarding school staff must live on site to supervise the boarders in their care.

During the ICPA(Aust) Federal Conference, held in Sydney in July 2024, a motion was presented and carried therefore providing the policy enabling ICPA (Aust) to pursue this issue at the highest level. (Motion S2. 2024)

In early October 2024, ICPA(Aust) Federal Councillors attended face to face delegations at Parliament House in Canberra where we met with several Senators and Ministers to discuss this particular issue and the best action to take moving forward.



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On the 4th February 2025, a follow-up letter was sent to The Hon Anthony Albanese, Prime Minister of Australia (and included many other members of the Australian Government) to outline our findings on the impost the FBT places on Boarding Facilities and in turn, Families. ICPA(Aust) has been supported with data collection by Members, Australian Boarding Schools & Members of the Australian Government.

ICPA(Aust) believe that ABSA is best placed to continue the advocacy and lobby for a Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) exemption for schools/boarding facilities providing on site living facilities for essential supervising staff who must live on site.

ICPA(Aust) will support ABSA with their ongoing lobby by sharing data and support letters that have been collected to date.

Recommendations:

1. The Federal Government support and advise the Treasury to **change the policy** on Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) to **provide an exemption** for schools with boarding facilities for essential boarding school staff required to live *on site* to perform their duty of care for residential students in metropolitan boarding institutions.
2. The Treasury **enable all Boarding Facilities** who have students enrolled from rural and remote areas (identified through the Assistance for Isolated Children, AIC) **to require** that they are **exempt from FBT** under the existing guidelines: 58ZC Exempt Benefits – Remote Area Housing Benefits (on campus accommodation)

Cost of FBT on Boarding Facilities 2025			
	Per Year	Per Boarder	No. Boarders
	\$95,493.00	\$682.00	140
	\$390,000.00	\$1,234.18	316
	\$103,000.00	\$792.00	130
	\$240,200.00	\$750.63	320
<b>Snapshot of Data from:</b>	\$17,000.00	\$425.00	40
<b>Australian</b>	\$60,000.00	\$650.00	92
<b>Boarding Schools</b>	\$96,500.00	\$740.00	130
	\$175,935.00	\$1,047.23	168
	\$109,786.00	\$1,035.00	106
	\$85,600.00	\$317.00	270
	\$82,852.00	\$1,726.00	48
	\$524,000.00	\$903.00	580
	\$473,680.00	\$3,017.00	157
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>\$2,454,046.00</b>	<b>\$13,319.03</b>	<b>2497</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$188,772.77</b>	<b>\$1,024.54</b>	<b>192</b>

\*\* the data-set in the above table is *subject to change* when a full list outlining the cost of FBT on boarding facilities is collected and compiled.



**A6. Louth Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant ministers to support the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding school.”

**Explanation:**

In many rural and remote locations there is limited or no access to suitable compulsory education facilities and therefore boarding school is the only option. This can often become unaffordable to families, especially when there is more than one child, so families are forced to relocate to employment with closer access to school facilities, resulting in further loss to the already diminished workforce of remote regions. In recognition of conditions, the Australian Tax Office already offers FBT concessions for employer provision of housing where there is a lack of sufficient residential accommodation in remote locations.

Similar concessions should also apply when employers financially assist with the schooling costs of employees’ children where there is a lack of appropriate schooling facilities available in those same remote locations. Currently when employers offer financial assistance towards the cost of schooling, the payment is deemed a Fringe Benefit and taxed at the applicable rate of 47% so any contribution made by the employer is compounded with almost half the amount again in tax.

The cost of accessing compulsory education for geographically isolated children should not be taxed, irrespective of who is bearing the cost. Affordable access to boarding schools for employees who work in remote areas provides their children with equitable access to school facilities as those in non-remote regions. It also serves to keep valuable families in remote Australia, supporting an already challenged workforce.

**A7. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to significantly increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance so that it more accurately reflects the real and rising cost of boarding school education for geographically isolated students.”

**Explanation:**

The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance is a vital support for families who, due to geographic isolation, must send their children away from home to access secondary schooling. However, the current rate of the allowance has not kept pace with the actual cost of boarding, which has consistently increased at a rate far exceeding the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Boarding school fees continue to rise due to increasing operational costs, including staffing, accommodation, transport, and pastoral care. Meanwhile, the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance has seen only minimal adjustments over the years, resulting in a growing gap between the financial support provided and the actual expenses families face. This widening gap places an unsustainable burden on isolated families and erodes their educational choices.

As an equity measure, the AIC must be sufficient to ensure that students living in remote and rural areas can access quality education on a level playing field with their urban peers. Without adequate support, families are forced to make difficult decisions that may compromise their children's educational opportunities, well-being, and stability.

If the Federal Government is serious about delivering equitable access to education for all Australian children, regardless of postcode, it must commit to a meaningful increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance and index it appropriately to reflect ongoing cost increases.



**A8. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to Services Australia and the Federal Government for a review of the eligibility criteria for the Additional Boarding Allowance under the Geographically Isolated (GI) category of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme, so that entitlement is determined solely on the basis of actual boarding costs incurred as a family, without being subject to parental income testing.”

**Explanation:**

The Additional Boarding Allowance, currently capped at \$2,965 per student annually, is designed to support families whose boarding school expenses exceed the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance. However, access to this component is currently means-tested based on parental income, regardless of the actual financial burden incurred.

Boarding school fees for rural and remote students continue to rise significantly and often far exceed what the Basic Boarding Allowance covers. Many families who do not meet the income threshold for the Additional Boarding Allowance still struggle to meet the genuine and increasing cost of boarding. This income test unfairly penalises families who may appear ineligible on paper but are experiencing substantial financial stress due to high boarding costs and additional educational expenses. The purpose of the AIC scheme is to provide equitable access to education for geographically isolated students. To uphold this principle, the Additional Boarding Allowance should be based on demonstrated boarding costs, not on parental income. Removing the means test would better reflect the true cost of accessing education for isolated families and ensure that the support provided meets their actual need.

**A9. Broken Hill Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate for changes within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) criteria to address the inequity of assistance provided to Geographically Isolated students.”

**Explanation:**

The Broken Hill Branch recognises and thanks the government for the support they provide for isolated students accessing education, however the resources of the government are being stretched, as the impact of increasing numbers of students being eligible under the current eligibility criteria for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC).

We believe that families that live in Significantly Geographically Isolated areas and the challenges they face in educating their children are vastly different to families who live closer to educational facilities or transport who may still receive the AIC. Our branch would like the government to recognise the greater challenges and barriers Significantly geographically isolated families face and because of where they live and work, their ability to access equitable education opportunities is greatly affected. We believe that adding an extra eligibility criterion to the AIC Boarding, Second Home and Distance Education Allowances would help identify the families who live in these areas. This may assist in future advocacy efforts with the government recognising the unique and extenuating challenges these families face accessing education for their children.

In its current format, the eligibility criteria for the assistance available to families does not recognise the significant and unique challenges therefore we strongly believe that a more equitable approach would be to have an additional criterion for Significantly Geographically Isolated students within the AIC. An additional significantly geographically Isolated category would only be applicable to those a certain distance from their nearest education facility and where there is NO option for transport to any educational facility.



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We know that all rural and remote families face challenges when educating their children, but the vast distances and additional costs that families in Significantly Geographically Isolated areas face, clearly demonstrates that equal assistance does not ensure equity of access.

### Case Study 1

I live a 250km round trip from my closest primary school, on unsealed roads which are poorly maintained and greatly affected by seasonal conditions. Therefore attending that primary school was not a viable option for my children. For that reason, I have educated my 4 children via distance education, via Broken Hill School of The Air. The school campus is a 570km round trip away (200 km unsealed as above), a 7 hour round trip.

The nearest high school is a 570km round trip away (200 km unsealed as above) in completely the opposite direction of the primary school. There is no bus service that leaves either of the townships that the schools are located in.

The closest boarding facility for high school education is 1440km round trip away, (250km unsealed as above).

My children attend a boarding school that is a 2000km (250km unsealed roads as above) round trip away. We chose that school for many reasons, but most importantly that I have family support in the town where they board.

This is not an uncommon example of members in my branch, 46% of our members are more than 100kms from their closest primary and high school. 50% of our members have over 50kms of unsealed roads.

ALL of our members are at least a 600km round trip to their nearest boarding school.

### Case Study 2

In 2021 I had to make the extremely difficult decision to move myself and our two high school age twins to Broken Hill, 420km from our home, to allow them to finish their secondary education in a face-to-face school. My twins had already completed all their primary education and first 2 years of their secondary education through Distance Education. Our nearest high school is a 150km round trip away on unsealed roads. My eldest daughter did travel, often driving herself, into that school every day to complete Year 12, but I was unwilling to repeat that experience. Especially considering my daughter was the only senior student in her school.

So, as the twins were becoming less engaged, unmotivated and having challenges with unreliable, inadequate technology and lack of practical learning experiences, I decided that we had to move into Broken Hill to offer them more. For me, the most worrying thing was, they were socially isolated, missing out on vital teenager experiences which are fundamental for their development, such as the opportunity for mixing with friends, team sports and other extra-curricular activities, crucial for a teenagers, physical, mental and social well-being. Even though they are twins and had each other, they were extremely lonely.

It was extremely hard to divide the family unit, not only financially, with the burden of setting up and running two households, the additional costs of travelling back and forth to the family home at least every second weekend, with an 840km round trip to and from Broken Hill. But the emotional toll this has taken on my husband, being alone on the station for weeks at a time, has been a big concern for me. If we had better support through the AIC, we would have had other options available to us, which would have allowed me to stay at home and work in the family business and still enabling the twins to receive a quality education.



## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **A10. Kindon Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA Australia advocate to the Federal government and all stakeholders to address the continuing decline of mobile coverage in rural areas which affects small rural schools and rural school bus services.”

#### **Explanation:**

Despite ICPA continually lobbying the federal government to provide adequate mobile voice and data services to rural areas, it has generally been noted around our area that since the 3G system has been turned off, coverage has decreased dramatically and data inaccessible despite extra boosters and aerials being purchased. This has created issues with school buses and children being unable to contact parents or emergency services, students unable to access data to complete assignments and teachers having to rely on an ageing landline for communication. Telstra has significantly reduced coverage and data capabilities whilst at the same time increasing plan costs. This has forced families to pay even more money to purchase Starlink which seems to be the only reliable option.

### **A11. Katherine Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Minister for Communications to ensure all rural and remote students have adequate internet access regarding reliability, speed, quality, and cost of the service.”

#### **Explanation:**

Geographically Isolated families rely on the internet for their educational needs. While expected data speeds, plan sizes and cost are continually improving, service reliability remains an issue. Currently some families are maintaining two different providers of internet, to ensure reliability. For example, NBN and Starlink, so if one drops out the other may still work. This is reflective of the historical unreliability of internet services, poor product and provider choices as well as large wait times for installation of hardware for new services, or repair of equipment. Families should not be having to pay for two internet connections due to the unreliable nature of internet connectivity in the bush. Or suffer long periods of not internet which affects their attendance and engagement at school.

#### **Case Study:**

A family is using NBN and Starlink and rely on generated power (no access to mains power). Generator has tripped or surged, causing the modem to stop working on Starlink. Even when the modem is connected to a surge protector board. This has caused the internet service to not work until a replacement arrived, which has taken 3 weeks. In the interim the family were able to use their back up NBN service. If they hadn't had that back up, the students would have had no access to internet. Similarly, during a previous wet season, the NBN dish was struck by lightning and couldn't be fixed by the service provider for two months. It was this situation that led them to getting the Starlink service as backup.

### **A12. Katherine Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Minister of Communication to ensure Telstra meets their Universal Service Guarantee of providing quality, efficient, and reliable voice services to rural and remote premises to access education including fixed address pastoral leases, remote communities, and remote roadhouses.”



**Explanation:**

Through the Universal Service Guarantee, Telstra are paid by the Australian Government to ensure all Australians have access to a standard telephone. With the announcement that Telstra would be phasing out landline services in the coming years it's important that they are replaced with the same quality and reliability as provided in metropolitan areas. Including no delays and interruptions such as those experienced when using satellite phone systems. It is essential that these services be efficient and reliable during all Australian weather conditions with appropriate backup power supply to ensure students can access education/schooling without interruption. In areas where a mobile network has already been established, it's important that these are upgraded to current standards such as 4G or 5G, and the area covered in maintained or improved.

**CURRICULUM**

**A13. Balranald Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Education to ensure that all State and Territories have equitable dates for when National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing is conducted throughout Australia."

**Explanation:**

There needs to be consistent consideration for the timing of NAPLAN testing that takes into account term 1 commencement dates including, when public and private schools begin operating. In NSW alone, there are 2 different start dates for when school begins, with Far West Schools starting a week later due to what is traditionally known as "Heat Week". This can dramatically impact the valuable classroom time that children in all levels of education are receiving. Term 1 is generally disrupted by certain events across the board such as swimming carnivals, new staff inductions, principal handovers and other school orientated events.

In NSW in the Western area, there are some schools that operate on a 9 day fortnight for schooling due to the geographical isolation of these schools and in Term 1 before NAPLAN testing a school on this time schedule was only able to provide students with 13 days of actual education days, this in turn detrimentally affected the students ability to be able to be prepared for NAPLAN testing which results in inconsistent grading as compared to other students of this age.

The early testing method can not clearly demonstrate a student's progress without taking into account all the time consuming and disrupting factors that have affected their learning progress in Term 1, it is also feasible to consider that a student that starts at least 2 weeks earlier than others in some states have some slight advantage to their counterparts starting at a later date in other areas and states.

**DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**A14. Northern Territory State Council**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to add an additional loading category to the School Resourcing Standard for Geographic Isolated students."

**Explanation:**

Education funding from the Federal Government to the States is calculated by the School Resource Standards (SRS). <https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/schooling-resource-standard>



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At present there are 4 SRS loadings. The SRS loadings provide additional funding for student priority cohorts and disadvantaged schools. A school's SRS can include up to 4 student-based loadings and 2 school-based loadings. Loadings are not affected by capacity to contribute.

The 4 student-based loadings are the:

- student with disability loading
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading
- socio-educational disadvantage loading
- low-English proficiency loading.

A student may attract funding under more than one loading.

The 2 school-based loadings are for:

- School size
- School location.

The Department calculates the loadings for each school each year.

ICPA (Aust) are advocating that there be a 5th student-based loading for Geographically Isolated students. This would then provide additional funding to the states to cover the higher costs of supporting Geographically Isolated students in the Distance Education journey - travel to contact events, appropriate technology, funding towards the compulsory supervisor etc.

If successful, this would mean an increase in funding for NT Distance Education schools.

### **A15. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (AUST) advocate to the Commonwealth Government to formally recognise geographically isolated students as a priority equity cohort by introducing a fifth student-based loading, a Geographically Isolated Student Loading, within the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS).”

#### **Explanation:**

Currently, the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) includes four student-based loadings designed to address educational disadvantage: students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with socio-educational disadvantage, and those with low English proficiency. However, this framework overlooks a significant cohort, students who live in geographically isolated areas.

These students face unique and compounding barriers to accessing equitable education, including lack of face-to-face instruction, unreliable digital connectivity, limited access to qualified supervisors, and the added burden of remote or distance education delivery models.

Introducing a Geographically Isolated Student Loading would formally acknowledge GI students as a priority cohort and direct additional, needs-based Commonwealth funding to support them.

This loading could be calculated based on a student's geographical location and allocated to the school in which the student is enrolled, including Distance Education (DE) schools. DE schools would then have the capacity to use these funds to provide additional resources such as supervised learning support or allowances for home tutors, helping ensure that GI students receive a level of educational opportunity comparable to their urban peers.

By embedding this support in the national funding model, the government would take a significant step toward addressing the structural inequities that currently impact GI students and their families.



**A16. Northern Territory State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) support the formation of a Distance Education Supervision subsidy (name is not important) to assist geographically isolated families whose only choice for their children is Distance Education.”

**Explanation:**

The ICPA has been advocating for many many years for an allowance or subsidy to support Geographically Isolated families with the ongoing costs of Distance Education. This has been occurring at State and Federal levels of ICPA. Unfortunately with little traction and being bounced between state and federal governments.

Distance education enrolment – guidelines and procedures (NT Government Publication)

“ All distance education enrolments require children and young people to:

- meet the requirements for enrolment in an NT Government school as detailed in the Enrolment procedures
- be enrolled for a minimum of one semester for preschool to year 9 enrolment, and by negotiation for years 10 to 12
- have access to a telephone, computer and the internet. Provision of information technology equipment may be facilitated by the department
- be provided with an appropriate learning space and environment. This includes a well-lit, ventilated space, absence of unwanted distractions to learning, and access to learning materials and resources
- be suitably supervised and supported by an adult each school day to complete their learning, including any requirement to attend the distance education centre or another place.

Division 2 of the NT Education Act 2015 states:

Cost of Government school education 75 Government school education to be free

(1) This section applies in relation to a student:

- (a) whose usual place of residence is in the Territory; and
- (b) who is an Australian citizen or permanent resident in Australia or a child of such a citizen or resident; and
- (c) who is enrolled in a Government school.

(2) The cost of providing the following at the Government school to the student must be met by the Territory:

- (a) instruction that forms part of the program that is prescribed by regulation (the standard curriculum program);
- (b) any materials or administrative or other services or facilities provided as part of the standard curriculum program.”

With this legislation and policy in mind, consider the following. Most mothers are able to return to work when their children start school, but it is mostly the mothers of Geographically Isolated Families are either unable to work, or have an increased workload due to the supervision responsibilities required by the enrolment policies for Distance Education which requires that students undertaking Distance Education have adequate supervision in the classroom and an appropriate space or the child to undertake their learning, free of distractions etc. (see above) The choices for these DE families are: One parent (usually the mother) must either forgo an income or time working in the business to supervise the children in the classroom.



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The family or the employers of the family engage a home tutor – firstly recruiting and then providing a salary or day rate for this employee.

Even when the family or business has employed a home tutor, one parent carries an increased workload by taking on the management of the home tutor and classroom activities. Its never a simple drop and go solution like those familiar to non-GI families.

Furthermore, due to the isolation, the family or the remote businesses who employ these families need to house and feed their home tutors. All of which comes at a cost to the private business and not to the government. The costs vary between families but no matter the circumstance, huge cost or sacrifices are made by our GI families in pursuit of a government funded education, which for all Territorians – is supposed to be “FREE”.

Further to these ongoing costs, there is the cost of the initial setup of an appropriate study environment for the students, desks, chairs and the installation of the appropriate internet connection being the very bare minimum. Laptops and ICT equipment are available for hire and purchase from the school, still at a further cost to the family. The back to school voucher scheme does subsidise the cost but at \$200 per year, this amount doesn’t really touch the sides of the initial set up or ongoing replenishment of resources required.

All of these costs do not even take into account the face to face events that are optional but also integral for the children's social and emotional learning, which for those attending Katherine School of the Air comes in at approx. \$2,000 + per term if you factor in the cost of accommodating a family for the time in town, travel, food for the family for the week, the potential loss of income for the week that one caregiver has to be away from the business for. The subsidy for attending an in school event is approx. \$100 per student per event. Although we are thankful for it, this wouldn’t even cover the cost of the fuel to attend these events.

The AIC and NT Student Assistance Scheme does allow some relief but does not even come close to covering the total cost of education for those GI families.

**Case Study:** Costs of setting up and maintaining a home classroom.

Wood Family, Wave Hill Station

Family Outlay	Amount	Assistance Received	Amount
Classroom setup Purchase 2 desks \$100 each, 2 chairs \$100, Rugs for the schoolroom - \$50 each x 3 = \$150, Laptop Initial hire: \$400 upfront and \$100 a year thereafter. (\$500); Headsets \$165 each; School uniforms \$30 per shirt x 3 shirts \$90; Storage Drawers \$100 each x 2. \$200; Shelving \$200	\$1,605	Back to School Voucher	\$200
Home Tutor Salary \$198 per day (10 school weeks per term, 5 days of school x 4 terms	\$40,000	AIC - Distance Ed \$3,741.79 (Preschool not eligible)	0
In School Accommodation and Food P.A	\$8,000	NT - Distance Ed (PreSchool ineligible in	\$0



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		2022 \$2,080 per student per year)	
Internet (Per Annum)	\$2,160	Connellan Airways Grant (in-school)	330
Internet Hardware (Starlink)	\$300	internet subsidy (\$174 per month)	\$2,088
<b>Total Outlay Preschool 2022</b>	<b>\$52,065</b>	<b>Total Subsidies in 2022</b>	<b>\$2,618</b>
Total Cost to Family for our first year of Distance Education <b><u>\$49,447</u></b>			

**Note:** At the time of setting up the student was in preschool, in 2022 and was ineligible for AIC assistance and NT SAS Distance Ed Grant. Since setting up our classroom in 2022, preschool students are now eligible for the NT Student Assistance Scheme, but still ineligible for AIC until they are in transition.

The family has since incurred more outlay with the inclusion of 3 more early years students, and another home tutor as of 2025.

Stationery such as pencils, whiteboard markers, art supplies, paper for printing, ink have not been included in this estimate, nor have the board and keep or annual leave and superannuation for the home tutor, or the costs of renovating an existing old building to make it fit-for-purpose.

**A17. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to advocate to the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Education to establish a Distance Education Teaching Allowance, in recognition of the essential role that the home tutor plays in educating rural and remote students via distance education.”

**Explanation:**

The introduction of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) would provide critical financial recognition of the essential work performed by home tutors or supervisors who deliver education to students enrolled in Schools of Distance Education across Australia.

For geographically isolated families, Distance Education is often the only available option for primary and secondary schooling. Under current federal requirements, students enrolled in Distance Education must receive appropriate supervision during their learning. In practice, this responsibility commonly falls to a parent—usually the mother—or a paid home tutor. As the Australian Government’s own Distance Education policies note, this supervision may be provided by “an employee or parent,” highlighting that direct teaching support is a mandatory component of distance learning.

In many cases, this requirement results in a parent needing to forgo paid employment on the property, in the community, or at an outstation, in order to educate their children. This significantly impacts household income, placing further financial strain on already isolated families. When families do employ a home tutor, the costs are substantial. Home tutors are commonly paid between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year, depending on experience and location. In addition to wages, families are typically responsible for providing accommodation, meals, internet, and other living expenses, which significantly increases the total outlay.



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This means that families who employ a home tutor are effectively paying award wages to access public education—a cost burden not borne by families whose children attend face-to-face schools. This inequity undermines the principle of universal access to free public education in Australia.

To address this, we recommend the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). This allowance would recognise and help offset the substantial costs associated with employing or providing supervision for distance education students.

We further propose that DETA be incorporated into the existing Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) framework. Since eligibility for AIC already reflects the educational and geographic disadvantage of the family, it is highly likely that those eligible for AIC would also qualify for DETA. Integrating the two would simplify the application process and ensure that support is targeted efficiently to the families who need it most.

### **Case Study 1:**

Our business requires us to travel & work all throughout remote Australia installing water bores for stock & crops. We also have a fodder farm & tourist attraction. With all our businesses it requires us to work 7 days a week. My husband & I run all these businesses & with living so remote we require the services of a governess. We have employed a governess for the past 8 years now with another 7 years to go. In total for the past 8 years, we have paid out \$432,000 in wages plus super, food, accommodation & WiFi. This has a massive impact on our finances and profits but if we didn't have a governess then we wouldn't be able to work and in turn wouldn't be able to afford to even educate or feed our family or live where we do!

### **Case Study 2:**

In the 9-and-a-half years that I have been teaching my children through our distance education school, I have only been able to complete work on the station outside of the classroom in a part-time capacity, heavily reducing the potential income I have been able to earn, and therefore reducing our entire family income. It is a government requirement that students on distance education schools MUST have appropriate supervision while completing their lessons. Using my time to supervise and educate my children means that I'm receiving only half of the income I could be earning if I was able to work fulltime on the station, costing me personally \$24,000 per year. Once again, this cost is for my children to receive a public education, a supposedly free system in Australia.

If I were to stop educating my children and work fulltime on the station, I would be required by the government's distance education rules to employ a Home Tutor to instead supervise my children. Depending on wage agreements, a Home Tutor can be paid anywhere from \$25,000-\$50,000 per year, as well as usually being offered accommodation, meals, and services such as internet and utilities as part of their wage package. This means that while my personal wage would be \$24,000 higher, our costs as a family to employ someone to educate our children would be at least \$25,000 higher, which makes the possibility of employing a Home Tutor completely unviable for us. I would love to see the Australian Government introduce a Distance Education Teaching Allowance to recognise the vital work that Home Tutors/parents of isolated students do, and to help offset the costs of employing a Home Tutor/the costs of lost wages from parents who fulfil this role.

### **A18. Katherine Branch (NT)**

"That ICPA (Aust) continue to advocate to the Federal Government to establish an allowance / subsidy for families in recognition of the cost families bear in providing the compulsory home tutor when educating rural and remote students via distance education."



**Explanation:**

Katherine Branch thanks ICPA (Aust) for your continuing pursuit of this motion. We acknowledge the move away from calling this a DETA. It is the intent of recognition and recompense that is important to our branch not the name. This is a historical issue, which still has not been rectified.

For many students living in remote regions, their only access to schooling is to study by distance education. It is compulsory that distance education children be supervised by an adult - the distance education tutor, who must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program. The cost of providing this supervision is a major burden to the family, whether they are paying someone or by the loss of income incurred when a parent (usually the mother) gives up paid employment to provide this supervision.

**A19. New South Wales State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Social Services to provide funding for a Distance Education Supervisors Subsidy (DESS) to be paid per term to eligible geographically isolated families for safely and actively supervising students in a home classroom.”

**Explanation:**

Currently, children in a distance education home classroom are supervised by a governess (supervisor), parent, or grandparent and there is currently no financial assistance in this supervision. This having many social, emotional and financial impacts on rural and remote families.

Some of these factors include.

- Partners working solo in roles that for safely require two people.
- Takes a secondary income from a family home which is much needed, as remote families face higher cost of living due to location.
- Mothers who have no other option but teach their own children are feeling the emotional and family strain. Teaching your children requires fulltime supervision from 8am-4pm, 5 days a week, often they are required to work for the farm before and after school hours creating 12-14hr days.
- Without financial help, retaining and enticing workforce in remote areas is hard as often families will move jobs and areas once the children are school aged as it is cheaper for their children to attend school in a town.

When children are attending online lessons with a teacher, it is unsatisfactory to think that the teacher on the other end of the computer hundreds of kilometres away is able to supervise children safely and effectively, they still require supervision. How is a teacher on the other end able to deal with the following situations.

- Medical emergencies
- Behavioural issues
- Poor concentration

In Australia all children are said to be able to access a free public education, but for remote students/families studying via public distance education is not true. Having a governess(supervisor) is an expense and to take a family member out of the work force is not free of financial impacts. We implore the Federal and State governments to work towards an outcome suitable for each state.

**A20. Katherine Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and all other relevant government agencies to recognise and implement a wage system for Home Tutors under the Pastoral Award.”



**Explanation:**

The role of the Home Tutor is almost exclusively unique to the pastoral industry, and as it currently stands there is no guidelines or award rates for the Governess / Home Tutor. Many businesses who pay according to the award pay rate system have no clarity as to what award or minimum wage pay rate and conditions a home tutor should receive.

A Home Tutor requires no formal training, and the skill level of the home tutor is dependent on the requirements in the schoolroom. This position plays a crucial role in educating and supporting children in Australia's geographically isolated areas. Recognising the role under the Pastoral Award ensures equity and consistency, especially compared to similar roles in urban areas or public-school environments.

By including the position of 'Home Tutor' under the pastoral award rather than "Miscellaneous" it will allow for businesses to hire a home tutor under the '88 days' rule. It will give clarity to both employers and job seekers regarding the minimum wage rates of pay and hours. Establishing a step in the right direction to firstly gain recognition of the position, then provide a platform for assistance with funding the role via a Distance Education Teaching Subsidy.

Currently, the hours and rates of pay vary greatly between the various businesses.

**Case Study**

One of our Katherine Branch families who are employed by a pastoral company currently employ home tutors as well as all other station staff under an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. This EBA stipulates the conditions of employment such as leave entitlements, levels of pay and various skills for each level. Home Tutor / Governess are covered under a EBA and may be identified as, but not limited to:

**7.3.6 LEVEL 1 – Home Tutor / Governess / Nanny**

The home tutor or governess or nanny provides support, tutoring and supervision of children living on stations.

Education

- Coordinate and supervise the daily school lessons and educational program as per curriculum,
- Plan and maintain a structured schoolroom.
- Organise and provide materials and equipment needed prior to commencing lessons.

In this employment circumstance, home tutors are able to be paid a variety of pay rates according to their experience, work performance and qualifications and both employee and employer have a guideline of the minimum work requirements and employment conditions. By having a definition of the role outlined within the pastoral award along with employment conditions, we are hoping that further to giving important recognition for a crucial role in educating Geographically Isolated children, this will be a strong starting point for a Distance Education Teaching Subsidy.

**A21. Meekatharra Air Branch**

"That ICPA lobby the Federal Government to introduce immediately per child, a minimum home tutor allowance equivalent to the cost for the State Departments of Education to educate a child in the state systems, or preferably a full wage equivalent to the average teacher's remuneration per annum."



**Explanation:**

For at least the past 60 years isolated and remote mothers and families have been educating children at absolutely no cost or recompense to Government. The personal and financial pressure and stress of this responsibility and task is extremely onerous on mothers and families no matter whether the schooling is conducted by SOTA, SIDE, Distance Education, or Registered Home schooling. In some instances, this stress has led to mothers having nervous breakdowns and mental health issues, families breaking up, and families relocating to towns or cities. Why should home tutors or parents who are tasked with remote education, and who have at least an 8 hour daily commitment of teaching their children at home along with all of their other daily chores of managing a household or working on property receive absolutely nothing, no recompense or recognition whatsoever. At the peak of COVID it was acknowledged by the then PM of Australia how onerous the task of home educating is, and that was primarily city based.

This is a matter of absolute social equity, and way overdue to be addressed, compensated and the contributions recognised that mothers / families have made to the education of children at home in remote and isolated environments.

**A22. Katherine Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Social Services for an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children Distance Education Allowance to reflect and assist with the true cost of educating geographically isolated children where distance education is the only choice.”

**Explanation:**

Currently, the AIC provides an allowance for assistance for families with children who live in an isolated area, have a disability or have special health needs. The AIC Distance Education Allowance is currently approximately \$1,300 per child, per term for a child enrolled in compulsory schooling.

As a condition of enrolment to school of the air, it is a requirement for students to have adequate supervision and environment to undertake their studies. Although the AIC does alleviate a small part of the cost, the current allowance per child does not come close to the actual cost borne by the families of Distance Education students, many families employ a Home Tutor, or one parent must take on the responsibility of supervising children in the Distance Education classroom. The means that the family must forgo an income or one parent must take a step back from their role in the family business.

ICPA (Aust) has been advocating for some time for a Distance Education Teaching Subsidy, without success. It is disappointing that the government have not come to the table with assisting our isolated families who have no other choice than to educate their children via distance education and we applaud and commend the ICPA on all levels for all their diligence in pursuing the ongoing issue.

The fact stands, while the AIC Distance Education Allowance does help, it does not even come close to subsidising the cost of isolated families undertaking compulsory government funded education. In the situation where a family or company employs a home tutor, this needs to be a fulltime role. It is not practical for a home tutor to be employed for the 40 weeks of school, due to the isolated location of many of the families it is incredibly expensive and impractical for a home tutor to be ‘sent away’ during school holidays. To attract and retain a home tutor, continuation of employment is required not only for the hours spent supervising in the school room, but also for preparation and set up of the schoolroom, submission of the students work and keeping the area clean and tidy. Further to this the



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Home Tutor must be provided with board and keep, annual leave and superannuation entitlements in line with fair work guidelines. Further to the Home Tutors wage, internet must be installed and maintained, classroom furniture and resources must be provided, which are all out of pocket expenses for the families.

A substantial increase to the AIC needs to be considered and then implemented in order to support these families. Many young families leave remote Australia because they simply cannot afford the huge costs incurred in the pursuit of educating their children via distance education, further to this we run the risk of the businesses potentially overlooking families when considering employment options because it simply costs so much, and there is little relief provided to support these businesses.

### Case Study

Family a) Three children in the classroom and parents employ a full-time Home Tutor. Children are enrolled in Katherine School of the Air. Governess has qualifications in Childcare.

#### Annual Costs for Family (a)

Home Tutors (HT) Annual Salary	\$66,300
HT Superannuation	\$7,624
	<b><u>\$73,924</u></b>

HT Board & Keep (Annually)	cost to the employee	\$8,004
School Fees & Laptop Hire	\$100 p/child	\$300
Resources & Uniforms p/child	\$300 p/child	\$900
Internet plan (annually)		\$1668
Travel & Accommodation 4 Annual Trips (4 x 5 nights)		\$8,500
		<b><u>\$19,372</u></b>

#### Plus, Enrolment and Start-up costs

Enrolment	\$700 p /child
Internet Hardware	\$599
Table & Chairs	\$300 p/child
Schoolrooms Supplies	\$600

### **A23. Monaro Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Education and the Department of Education to further enable Regional University Study Hubs (RUSH's) to provide support services with appropriate safeguards to local secondary students who are learning by distance."

### **Explanation:**

Regional University Study Hubs are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education to provide support to online tertiary students. These hubs have staff, learning spaces, technology and connectivity to wrap around distance learners. and create a community of learning with the students in their localities. These facilities and services can easily be extended by the Hubs and staff to secondary students who are learning by distance, with appropriate safeguards around child protection. The Commonwealth financially supports the infrastructure and staffing in RUSH's for tertiary studies, and extending that support to secondary students will be a low marginal cost with potentially large benefits. This will particularly be the case where there are RUSH facilities in towns



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with no local secondary schooling, such as is the case in places like Bouliia, Bedourie, Birdsville and Jundah. However, it is also the case in larger towns with RUSH's where local secondary schools only go to Year 10 or schools with year 11 and 12 only have narrow curriculums leading to a number of students studying single subject distance education which occurs in so many of our local schools.

Further, having secondary students utilise RUSH's will embed these students into a tertiary learning environment in amongst tertiary students, which is a fabulous exercise in widening participation for tertiary pathways and opportunities for these school students.

The Regional Education Commissioner, Hon Fiona Nash stated as an Issue for Consideration in her 2023 Annual Report that action be taken to increase regional students' access to a greater variety of secondary school subjects through in person and distance education measures, such as.....expanding the services of Regional University Study Hubs to include support services for secondary students, including enabling distance learning or opportunities to access specialist subjects. This motion supports that statement of the Regional Education Commissioner.

**A24. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**

"That ICPA (Aust) expand the publicity campaign for RREd Day to include key messaging, increase awareness, and reach a wider audience whilst boosting the visibility of being a home tutor in rural and remote areas."

**Explanation:**

It is becoming increasingly difficult for rural and remote families to fill the roles of home tutors across Australia. This is partially due to there being a disconnect between the role of a home tutor and the agricultural industry, along with the significant costs of employment marketplaces such as SEEK. Many families use free platforms such as Facebook to advertise home tutor roles, however, this leads to a large gap in the recruitment process as many young people do not use this platform. A publicity campaign that educates and inspires people to consider being a home tutor would be a great initiative to attract people to this career.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION and CARE**

**A25. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant Federal Ministers for funding to be sought to address Early Childhood Teacher pay parity to assist with access to early childhood education in rural and remote communities."

**Explanation:**

Pay parity of Early Childhood Teachers is a significant issue. An Early Childhood Teacher completes a 4-year degree course. In a remote early childhood service, an experienced Early Childhood Teacher can expect a salary of around \$106,500. If they maintain NSEA proficient accreditation and elect to work in the Public School System, at a Connected Community School, such as Bourke, in a rural and remote location, the additional benefits they would get compared to working as an Early Childhood Teacher would tally to \$148,671 p.a and includes:

	Childcare	School
Base Salary	94,478.80	157,842



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Directors Allowance	7,745.92	
Educational Leader Allowance	4,253.32	
Recruitment bonus		20,000
Rural & remote relocation support		8,000
Rural Teacher Incentive (Includes value of rental subsidy)		25,000
Stamp Duty relief (not paid if rental subsidy paid)		
Retention benefit		5000
Experienced Teacher Benefit		10,000
Climatic Allowance		3000 (approx.)
Additional Personal leave days		
Additional Annual leave value in \$ terms		26,307
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>106,477.24</b>	<b>255,149</b>

- Significantly shorter contact hours per week
- Professional mentoring by other Teachers
- Structured Professional development programs (\$10,000 pa)
- In addition to the above, there is also the impact on superannuation to be considered.

Early Childhood services are significantly limited in their budgets. It is important to find long term solutions to address pay parity of Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote locations.

**A26. Louth Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant Federal Ministers to amend the lack of salary parity between four year trained early childhood teachers and four year trained primary and high school teachers in rural and remote areas.”

**Explanation:**

Currently, the pay gap is so significant it is impossible to recruit and retain teachers in early childhood centres and new recruits often use early childhood jobs as a stepping stone into the primary school sector.

**A27. Tambo Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to develop and implement targeted incentives to attract and retain early childhood educators in rural and remote areas, to ensure the sustainability and reliability of early childhood and care services in these regions.”

**Explanation:**



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Access to consistent, high-quality early childhood education and care is vital for rural and remote families, both for children's development and to enable workforce participation by parents. However, communities such as Tambo, Queensland, are experiencing significant challenges in attracting and retaining qualified early childhood educators.

The Tambo Childcare Centre currently operates only four days per week and is often forced to reduce hours or close entirely on short notice due to staff shortages. This unpredictability has a cascading impact on working families. In small communities, where every service and business plays a critical role, this affects local economies, limits job creation, and places stress on families who are trying to balance childcare with employment.

To address these challenges, there is an urgent need for federal-level incentives such as:

- Relocation allowances and housing support for early years educators
- Rural placement bonuses
- Student debt forgiveness or subsidised training for those committing to rural service
- Professional development and mentoring tailored to remote contexts

Such incentives would help build a stable workforce and enable isolated daycare centres to deliver consistent, full-time services — supporting not just children and their families, but broader communities.

### **A28. Katherine Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Minister for Social Services to urgently commit to increasing the In-Home Care (IHC) Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Hourly Rate Cap, to ensure that families with no alternative child care options are not forced to shoulder inequitable financial burdens.”

#### **Explanation:**

The current IHC Hourly Rate Cap is not only outdated, it is unjust. It is calculated using a base wage model suitable for standard centre-based care: full-time educators, working 38 hours a week, during standard business hours. This completely ignores the realities of In Home Care delivery, where educators regularly work up to 50 hours per week, across varied days and non standard hours, supporting children with complex needs in often isolated, high risk, or hard to staff environments.

Families who rely on In Home Care do so because there is no other option. These families include shift workers, sole carers, rural and remote households, and parents of children with additional needs. Yet they are being punished for their circumstances, paying up to four times the out of pocket costs of families in urban areas who can access standard childcare.

The IHC Hourly Rate Cap does not account for:

- The award wages required for a diploma qualified educator delivering care in sole charge, often high needs settings.
- Essential on costs such as penalty rates, superannuation, Workcover, payroll tax, and insurances.
- The cost of accommodation and board often required for remote placements.
- Nor the administrative, compliance and governance burden borne by IHC services themselves.



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Worse still, families using IHC must self-fund all materials, excursions, incursions, and learning resources, costs that are included in centre-based care but are entirely out of pocket under the current IHC model.

National reviews, by the ACCC, PwC, the Productivity Commission and most recently ACECQA and Dandolo, have repeatedly acknowledged the structural and financial shortcomings of the IHC funding model. No further reviews are required. What is needed now is urgent action.

Every Australian child has the right to access high quality, affordable early education and care. This right should not be determined by their postcode, their parents' work hours, or the complexity of their needs.

We therefore call upon the Minister for Social Services to immediately commit to increasing the IHC CCS Hourly Rate Cap to a level that reflects the true cost of delivering this essential program, before more families are forced to exit the workforce, educators leave the sector, and children are left behind.

2 Parent Family Earning \$115,000 per annum				
<b>CHILDCARE CENTRE 50 hours a week</b> (Access to a variety of skilled Educators)				
	Full Weekly Cost	Subsidy Paid for Week	Gap Fee Per child	TOTAL GAP
Child1	\$ 750.00	\$ 597.50	\$ 152.50	
Child2	\$ 750.00	\$ 679.00	\$ 71.00	\$ 294.50
Child3	\$ 750.00	\$ 679.00	\$ 71.00	
				\$ 2,250.00
<b>In Home Care 50 hours a week</b> (Basic Educator, minimal skills)				
	Full Weekly Cost	Subsidy Paid for Week	Gap Fee Per child	TOTAL GAP
Child1	\$ 2,370.00	\$ 1,626.00	\$ 744.00	
Child2	\$ 5.00	\$ 4.00	\$ 1.00	\$ 746.00
Child3	\$ 5.00	\$ 4.00	\$ 1.00	
				\$ 2,380.00
<b>In Home Care 50 hours a week</b> (Diploma Educator, higher skills)				
	Full Weekly Cost	Subsidy Paid for Week	Gap Fee Per child	TOTAL GAP
Child1	\$ 2,635.00	\$ 1,626.00	\$ 1,009.00	
Child2	\$ 5.00	\$ 4.00	\$ 1.00	\$ 1,011.00
Child3	\$ 5.00	\$ 4.00	\$ 1.00	
				\$ 2,645.00



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“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to the Minister for Early Childhood Education to act on recommendations from the 2023 In Home Care (IHC) review, The Parenthood’s Choiceless report, and the ACCC 2023 Childcare Inquiry, and develop a tailored In Home Care (IHC) system for geographically isolated families that effectively delivers fit for purpose, financially sustainable, quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to rural and remote families. “

### **Explanation:**

The 2023 IHC review highlights that the current system fails to address the unique needs of geographically isolated families. This cohort, predominantly farmers, faces higher costs and logistical challenges. A more tailored system can lower costs, improve care, and ease the administrative burden for families and providers.

This matter is urgent as the Childcare Inquiry 2023 identified that IHC daily fees increased by twice as much as childcare centres (approximately \$25 per day increase compared to \$13) and out of pockets remain approximately 25% higher for IHC families, not including additional expenses like travel, board, and food, between 2022-2023.

### **Key Challenges:**

- **High Provider Fees:**

Geographically isolated families face out-of-pocket costs that are exacerbated by high provider fees. The Childcare Inquiry 2023 found that IHC fees rose significantly more than those of childcare centres, leaving families with higher out-of-pocket expenses. Despite high fees, the Childcare Inquiry 2023 also found profitability of IHC providers and earnings of educators are low.

*Case Study:* Families are required to use a third-party provider to utilise their Child Care Subsidy (CCS). These providers charge fees to families and these fees are not covered by the CCS. A 2025 quote from a provider included over \$10,000 in annual fees. In this case study, the CCS was 26.66% of eligible costs (excludes the \$10,000 in fees). For a 37.5 hr working week on the lowest pay rate for an educator, the cost would total approximately \$1530 per week. \$408 of this would be covered by the subsidy but an additional \$193 per week in fees would also be charged, negating almost half the subsidy. This fee structure effectively reduces the subsidy, effectively creating a base gap fee of \$5.15/hour.

- **Administrative Burden:**

The IHC system is overly rigid and requires frequent administrative updates, which are inefficient for families with stable, long-term care needs. The 2023 IHC review found that streamlining processes could improve efficiency, reduce family stress, and ensure better oversight. The system is unnecessarily inflexible, with example issues including limitations on family members providing care or caring for children from multiple families at the same time.

- **Labour Shortages:**

The geographically isolated cohort for IHC struggles with recruitment. The typical demographic of educators for these placements are young and inexperienced, and they face complex and unattractive employment conditions. Addressing these challenges is vital to reducing workforce shortages and improving care quality.

*Case Study:* A private recruitment service was utilised by a family to help recruit an educator. The family discussed needs with the recruiter and identified the educator would need to be eligible and employed through an IHC provider so the family could



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claim their CCS. The recruiter expressed reluctance to recruit for IHC positions due to the unfavourable employment structure – noting the typical demographic of educators was a young, female school leaver and the responsibility of setting themselves as a contractor (the model of employment used by many providers) was a large deterrent. A farm business faced a similar issue when a worker with relevant experience, but not qualifications (having cared for children for several years and demonstrating to the farm business a high level of care and shared values with the family), could not be employed through the IHC program. Due to lacking qualifications, the educator would have needed to enrol in a program to obtain an appropriate qualification to meet the eligibility requirements for educators. This was not possible as study VISAs do not allow foreign students to study remotely, which would be inherently required of someone studying and working as an IHC educator for a family accessing the system due to geographic isolation.

- **Income Prediction and Financial Uncertainty:**

For farming families, predicting income for subsidy eligibility is challenging due to fluctuations in farm income. This unpredictability can result in families paying back significant amounts, while still facing high provider fees.

*Case Study:* A farming family weighed the risk of losing subsidy eligibility after a good financial year, having difficulty estimating the next year's income. They decided not to access the CCS. If they chose to go through the IHC system and found by the EOFY they were ineligible, they would have been required to pay back whatever subsidy they had claimed (likely a minimum of \$20,000) and would have also expended \$10,000 of non-recoupable provider fees to have accessed the IHC system. The family instead elected to pay the educator at their own expense (approximately \$60,000 per year). At the EOFY, tax planning allowed the family to average their income over 5 years and used other strategies designed to accommodate for the variable income agricultural businesses are known for. This meant they would have been eligible for highest level of the CCS, rather than the lowest or being completely ineligible as they had considered possible when they chose not to use the system.

### **Proposed Solutions:**

A tailored IHC system for geographically isolated families can directly address the challenges of cost, administration, workforce suitability, and financial predictability by aligning program design with the realities of rural and remote life. Such a system would enable:

- **Cost Reduction by Recognising Family and Business Capabilities:**

Many farming families operate sophisticated businesses and are well-equipped to manage the employment of educators. A tailored system could enable these families to take on employer responsibilities—such as recruitment, risk management, and onboarding—eliminating the need for costly provider-managed employment services. This would significantly reduce fees while possibly retaining provider involvement in areas such as quality assurance and regulatory oversight, where they can offer the greatest value.

- **Streamline Administration for Long-Term, Stable Users:**

Customised administrative processes would reflect the stable and ongoing care arrangements typical in remote settings. Reducing the frequency and complexity of reviews, allowing shared educator models, and offering more flexible care options (e.g., support for part-family care or multi-family arrangements) would make the system more accessible and sustainable.



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- **Address Workforce Suitability and Retention:**

A tailored approach would recognise that the IHC workforce in remote areas is often young, annual (gap-year), or from overseas. The system could support these workers through simplified employment pathways (e.g. employer-based roles rather than contractor models), flexible qualification options, and coordination with immigration and training departments to better align regulation with workforce realities.

- **Improve Financial Certainty Through Income Flexibility:**

By basing subsidy eligibility on prior-year income, a tailored system could protect families from subsidy clawbacks due to income volatility—an inherent part of farming life. This would provide greater financial security and make IHC a more viable long-term option.

### Costs and Benefits:

- **Government:** While there will be costs to restructuring the system, the government will save by reducing the cost of IHC services, which are currently the most expensive childcare option. This can also reduce the need for proposals such as higher IHC hourly rate caps.
- **Providers:** Providers may see a reduction in business for the geographically isolated cohort, but they could focus more on quality assurance and other large cohorts, potentially improving profitability.
- **Families:** Tailored systems would reduce administrative burdens and provider fees, saving families time and money.
- **Educators:** More attractive employment options, including better support for meeting eligibility requirements, would help retain staff and address workforce shortages.
- **Children:** Tailored systems have the greatest potential to deliver what matters most: safe, nurturing, and consistent early education and care for children—no matter where they live. By designing a system that responds to the realities of rural family life, we can remove the barriers that currently limit access and quality. This means children in remote communities will not only have equal opportunity to learn and thrive, but will benefit from care environments that are stable, community-connected, and developmentally enriching. At its core, a tailored IHC system is not just a policy reform—it is a commitment to equity, wellbeing, and the future of Australia's youngest rural citizens.

### A30. Katherine Branch (NT)

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Education amend the In-Home Care rules for families in remote areas to allow:

1. An educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time.
2. An educator to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family(ies) under In Home Care."

### Explanation:

The reason for this is that there are often multiple families employed by and living in the same location in remote areas (for example pastoral stations, tourism and conservation operations). Due to the remote location all staff and the educator live at the same location. Allowing an educator to care for



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children from more than one family in these circumstances is solves the practical problem of limited accommodation - accommodating more than one educator is likely to be difficult.

It also provides the opportunity for a greater range of people to be employed in these areas (including single parents) who would otherwise be unable to take these jobs as they wouldn't have access to childcare. By potentially increasing the number of children living at a location, all children will benefit from the social interaction.

Allowing an educator to care for their own children would also increase the range of people available as In-Home Carers in remote areas. It is extremely difficult to find appropriately skilled people willing to live in remote areas. Allowing someone with their own child to be care for other children at the same remote location would be of great benefit.

Example 1: A single mother applies for a station hand position. She is highly qualified and prior to becoming a mother had extensive experience working on remote cattle stations. The owner of the station she has applied to also has a small child and already employs an educator through IHC. There is suitable accommodation for the mother and child but not enough for another educator. By allowing that educator to also care for the station hand's child, the station hand gets a job for which she is qualified for (it is also difficult to find good station hands so expanding the pool of people who could take these jobs is important) and both children have access to good quality childcare and a playmate bringing valuable social interaction.

Example 2: A man applies for a station hand position on a remote cattle station. He and his partner have a toddler. There are no childcare facilities within 200km. The managers of the station also have a toddler. By allowing the employees partner to become the In-Home Carer (dependent on obtaining the relevant qualifications etc) the manager's child has access to high quality care, the manager(s) can concentrate on their jobs, the station hand is not separated from his partner and his partner has a fulfilling job.

The rules around Family Day Care provide a starting point for a structure to determine the appropriate number/age of children and how the CCS would work in this situation. Further consultation with families living in remote areas with young children would be required to refine these structures to ensure they are practical and suitable for their situation.

### **A31. Marree Air Branch (SA)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Early Childhood and the relevant departments for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, to consider the unique needs of rural and remote families when it comes to the eligibility criteria for funding and benefits such as the Child Care Subsidy (CCS)."

#### **Explanation:**

In South Australia, the Remote and Isolated Children's Exercise (RICE) provides an Outback Childcare program that enables families to receive short-term childcare in the family home when they are in need of childcare during busy times or if they need respite or emergency care. Currently, this program does not attract any government support or funding, resulting in RICE having to rely on community donations or asking families to pay an unsubsidised full-rate hourly fee for the service. The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) can only be received when a child is enrolled through a centre-based childcare facility or through the In Home Care (IHC) scheme. However, these schemes do not meet the needs of all remote families, as many are unable to support full-time in-home care. The temporary nature of the RICE Outback Childcare program is appealing to many families, as it allows



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them to plan care during the times of the year they need it most, without the burden of housing a full-time carer.

The cost of accessing childcare without the CCS is an unaffordable option, leaving families to try to find other ways to manage childcare needs. Families living in rural and remote areas have no real option of childcare like community creches, nearby centres, or extended informal support networks. Living on a remote cattle station 1,000 km from Adelaide makes relying on informal support networks for childcare impractical and often impossible.

A recent report indicated that the Federal Electorate of Grey (which encompasses 90% of South Australia, including all of its rural and remote areas) has the worst access to childcare in the country. The Outback Childcare service needs to be made affordable for families, as well as viable for RICE to manage and administer.

If the eligibility criteria for the CCS were to consider the needs of rural and remote families, allowing them to access childcare through the Outback Childcare program or similar

### **A32. Balranald Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Early Childhood Education and Minister for Education for continued funding and ongoing commitment into the early childhood sector in rural and remote Australia.”

#### **Explanation:**

All children should have access to universal early childhood education, we ask that children in rural and remote areas be included and that geographical location be included as a disadvantage to the access to education. It is vital that in the first 5 years of a child’s life that access to early education provides the best possible opportunity for a child to thrive later in their primary education access. This access should not be hindered by where they live or access to services that can provide this service but can’t access the reasonable funding needed to provide service in these areas, also known as “childcare deserts.”

- That there is support paid for further education of staff in facilities as an incentive to continue teaching/carer qualifications to ensure places at centres are supported and best fulfilled
- Some centres can’t cater for the enrolled children because of the minimum requirements of qualifications for staff, leaving centres that can cater for up to 60 children only being able to care for 24
- Utilising already established centres/ mobile care units and allowing them to access better/ more funding to enable them to employ more staff which in turn provides more care facilitation and places they can provide this care to
- Funding streams such as the child care subsidy scheme be made available to services that provide rural and remote early childhood education to allow them to meet operational costs

### **A33. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to relevant Ministers for sufficient funding from streams such as the Community Childcare Fund (CCCF) Sustainability stream (or any other funding streams that may be similar), be made available for services in remote and very remote locations to meet their operational costs which are unable to be met through the Childcare Subsidy (CCS)/Parent Fee model.”

#### **Explanation:**



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Services providing Childcare Subsidy Model childcare are currently capped at the maximum amount of CCCF Sustainability funding they are able to apply for (\$200,000 pa) despite the operational gap they are able to demonstrate, which is often significantly larger. The same cap applies to services in regional areas as in remote and very remote locations, and the only longer-term funding is in the CCCF-Restricted pool, which services may not be eligible for. Remote & very remote services have to meet significantly higher staffing & operational costs – such as providing housing for teachers and meeting the pay parity gap for teachers to attract and retain adequately qualified teachers. Early Childhood Services in remote and very remote locations should be able to provide a service with teachers and staff at the same level as their city cousins - our children are worth no less, and often have significantly more vulnerabilities according to the AECD (Australian Early Childhood Development) Census Data.

### A34. New South Wales State Council

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate for legislative change to section 5(1) of the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law to enable the provision of Early Childhood Preschool Programs on rural and remote school sites, available to both three- and four-year-olds, not governed by the school itself.”

#### Explanation:

The b4-Kindy program operates exempt from the definition of an education and care service under section 5(1) of the Children (Education and Care Services) National Law. As per the Law, an education and care service is any service providing or intending to provide education and care on a regular basis to children under 13 years of age other than **a school providing full-time education to children, including children attending in the year before kindergarten but not including a preschool program delivered in a school or a preschool that is registered as a school.** The b4-Kindy program:

- Is **provided by a school.**
- The school provides **full-time education** to children, including children in the year before kindergarten.
- The **children attending are in the year before kindergarten**, but not two years before kindergarten or earlier.
- The program is an integrated early learning program delivered by a School Learning Support Officer (SLSO) under the direction of a teacher. It is **not a preschool program**. The National Law defines a preschool program as an early childhood educational program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher to children in the year that is two years before kindergarten.

Operating with the above the limitations, three-year-olds are not able to access early childhood education in their rural and remote communities, making it more challenging to reach the recommended 600 hours of early childhood education prior to commencing school.

In addition to this, the b4-Kindy program must also ensure compliance under the Crown Employees (School Administrative and Support Staff) Award. SLSOs employed to deliver the program must work under the direction and supervision of a teacher to support the achievement of educational outcomes. SLSOs are not to supervise students on their own. Regardless of the activity, a teacher must be in sight and/or hearing distance at all times. ICPA NSW is advocating for state Legislative change to allow SLSO's the responsibility of sole supervision, allowing for those three and four-year-olds the opportunity to be located in a purpose specific room separate from primary students.

### A35. Cunnamulla Branch (QLD)



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“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Early Childhood Education and relevant early childhood organisations to deliver regular and reliable appropriate early childhood programs for highly vulnerable and remote locations across Australia.”

### **Explanation:**

Cunnamulla is a remote and rural community in southwest Queensland. This community has continued to struggle to achieve high quality early childhood programs for many years despite the efforts from supportive groups and organisations.

The community has seen small and short investments into the early childhood space that has provided no reliable or regular programs.

In Queensland, the RAFS (Remote Area Families Service) have visited the area in late 2024, hosting 2-3 property-based playgroups. However, this has not continued, Cunnamulla ICPA has reached our multiple times to RAFS and have had no response.

The KEYS (Keeping Early Years in the Spotlight), an initiative by the Schools Plus Program was unable to continue its goals with the loss of key personal and the dramatic impacts of COVID. The KEYS group felt unsupported by the local early childhood and education and care office, with promises of support and no follow up. The current remainder of funding is being used for a playgroup that is operating once a week for families however there is significant uncertainty as to what happens when the pool of funding for this group is complete. Estimated to be some time in Semester 2, 2025.

The Queensland's first five forever program that was run at the Cunnamulla Library for families is no longer running and has been missed by many in town and remote families.

The Gidgee Kids Daycare centre in Cunnamulla has noted some improvements in staffing and the organisation of children's rooms, however, continues to fight for appropriately trained staff, as current operations limit the spaces available to families. This impacting not just children's early childhood experiences but the ability for families to enter the local workforce. This in turn creates a decline in the community's population, with families leaving town to access care for their children. The centre has had incredible difficulties in the establishment of a consistent kindergarten program having severe impacts on children's preparation for transition to school.

Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporation for Health provides ongoing health services weekly to families with the support of Bush Kids, however parents and families are not receiving regular communications and feel their health concerns are not being recognised or addressed until their child is reaching school.

Conversations around Kath Dickson toy library have begun but Cunnamulla ICPA local members and other key community stakeholders have not been included in these conversations and are unsure what this means for Cunnamulla and surrounding families.

In previous years we have seen the closure of mobile playgroups that have supported isolated families on properties. Again, a small investment saw a mobile playgroup return in 2019, with only a commitment of funding for 12 months, this included an injection of educational resources that were later inaccessible when the project came to its conclusion.

The AEDC 2024 data continues to be unavailable for community to use in conversations for strategic planning for early childhood programs that influence successful transitions to school. Our community in 2021 had the highest birth rate per capita in the country yet we have no consistent or sustainable early childhood programs.

Our community needs regular and reliable programs where early childhood and families are at the forefront of their organisations mission.

### **A36. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**



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“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant Minister to establish funding to deliver mobile early learning programs to geographically isolated children, aged 0-5 year, who are currently without access to any such service because of where they live.”

### **Explanation:**

The Australian Government’s Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) highlights the importance of early childhood education in shaping lifelong learning outcomes. It aims to “extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school,” ensuring that “all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life” (Department of Education, 2023).

Despite this national commitment, many geographically isolated children aged 0–5 years in Central Australia continue to miss out on access to any early childhood learning opportunities due to where they live. While the Katherine Isolated Children’s Service (KICS) provides federally funded mobile playgroups to children in the Top End of the Northern Territory—including communities like Mataranka, Timber Creek, and Elliott—these services do not extend to Central Australia.

According to the 2021 Census, there are approximately 16,224 children aged 0–4 in the Northern Territory. While population density is significantly lower in Central Australia, many children are spread across vast remote areas without access to preschools, early learning centres, or supported playgroups. This creates a substantial equity gap in early childhood education.

Early education is not solely about preparing for school. It plays a critical role in a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development. It helps children build confidence, learn to interact with others, and develop foundational skills that support future learning and wellbeing.

Additionally, mobile playgroups offer crucial opportunities for parental engagement, particularly for caregivers in isolated areas who may experience limited social contact. These services help parents connect, share experiences, and access guidance, which strengthens parenting capacity and community wellbeing.

This long-standing service gap represents not just an educational issue but a broader health and equity concern. By investing in mobile remote playgroups for Central Australian families, the federal government would be fulfilling its obligation under the EYLF to ensure all children—regardless of geographic location—can access meaningful early learning experiences.

For these reasons, we propose that ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant Minister to establish targeted funding for mobile remote playgroups for children aged 0–5 in Central Australia who are currently without access to such services.

Geographically isolated families that reside outside of the "remote community footprint" have been without access to any early learning childhood services prior to preschool for more than a decade as has many remote communities in our region. Early education is a vital tool in all children’s development, along with being a foundation for learning, it’s how they build confidence, interact with others, and learn important social and emotional skills. It’s also an opportunity for parents to come together, share stories and support one another.

### **Case study 1:**



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As a mum of two geographically isolated children Kiya knows firsthand the importance of having these services available to all families, no matter where they choose to live. In Kiya's circumstance her sense of what was 'normal' became misguided as they weren't exposed to other children regularly. It wasn't until their daughter was 6 months old that they noticed she had some challenges with her feet. Had they been able to interact with other children of a similar age they may have become aware she was behind in her development sooner and accessed early intervention treatment earlier.

The Commonwealth-funded Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is currently under review. Initially, FaFT was delivered in Central Australia as a mobile service, supporting all children under the age of five and providing remote families—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—with the opportunity to participate. This flexible, inclusive model was designed to meet the diverse needs of families living in geographically isolated areas, covering over 30 sites across the region. The program employed five educators and numerous local stakeholders, allowing for a collaborative approach to supporting families as their needs arose.

In several instances, these services began to make a tangible impact, improving outcomes for children and families. However, as these programs gained momentum and built strong community engagement, funding was withdrawn, resulting in the discontinuation of key services. This stop-start approach has proved discouraging for families, disrupting progress and undermining trust in the stability of essential early childhood services.

As a result of funding cuts, FaFT now relies heavily on government schools to deliver the program, with a particular focus on Indigenous communities and families. While this school-based model continues to provide valuable support, it has significantly limited access for families in remote areas who are either not within proximity to these sites or do not meet the program's eligibility criteria. Currently, Central Australia offers eight FaFT programs, with three located in Alice Springs:

- Larrapinta – Alice Springs
- Sadadeen – Alice Springs
- Gillen – Alice Springs
- Ntaria (Hermannsburg)
- Papunya (240 km northwest)
- Yuendumu (293 km northwest)
- Harts Range (220 km northeast)
- Kintore (530 km west)

While FaFT offers many benefits, it is not reaching its full potential for geographically isolated children aged 0–5 due to the limitations of the current delivery model.

### **A37. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to relevant Ministers for funding to support the infrastructure needs of Community Based early childhood education providers to deliver Childcare and Preschool services in remote towns."

#### **Explanation:**

There are currently limited opportunities for Community Based Early Childhood Services to gain the required capital funding for significant infrastructure needs to meet demand in remote communities. This affects rural, remote and geographically isolated children, because they end up in "childcare deserts" where early childhood services are not provided.

The cost of infrastructure in remote locations is significantly higher than regional and metro settings yet there is no appropriate funding mechanism.

### **A38. Bourke Branch (NSW)**



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"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant Ministers for universal access to early childhood education and care in Rural and Remote Australia."

### **Explanation:**

Evidence shows that the first 5 years in a child's life are the most important for creating opportunities to thrive and be successful in later life. It is the most important educational opportunity we can give our children. All children, regardless of where they live, should be able to access high quality early childhood education and care.

### **A39. North West Branch (SA)**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for the extension of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to include geographically isolated children enrolled in eligible pre-compulsory early childhood programs."

### **Explanation:**

Extending the AIC to cover pre-compulsory early childhood education would assist families in geographically isolated areas to create rich, engaging, and well-resourced home learning environments for their young children, helping reduce the early learning gap between remote and urban peers.

This support is especially critical with the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten in South Australia. Without adequate financial backing, this initiative risks unintentionally widening the educational divide for the most remote children.

ICPA (Aust)'s ongoing advocacy in this space has gained traction, with interest shown by federal election candidates in the seat of Grey. Our branch fully endorses Federal Council's continued lobbying for this much-needed and equitable reform.

### **A40. Katherine Branch (NT)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to be extended to include all Geographically isolated pre-school students enrolled in a distance education programme."

### **Explanation:**

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has universal access to a quality early childhood education program. The desired outcome is to increase enrolment and improved attendance.

From [https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3\\_05\\_part\\_2\\_education.pdf](https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3_05_part_2_education.pdf) website

[https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3\\_05\\_part\\_2\\_education.pdf](https://budget.gov.au/content/bp3/download/bp3_05_part_2_education.pdf)

"The Australian Government is providing funding to support continued universal access to 600 hours per year of preschool for children in the year before they start school. The Preschool Reform Agreement (2022–2025) aims to improve preschool participation and outcomes, including improved enrolment and attendance. Preschool funding is an ongoing commitment, with funding amounts from 2026 to be published once future funding arrangements are agreed."

The Services Australia website regarding the AIC allowance states that the minimum age is 3 years and 6 months old.

"Your child needs to be at least the minimum primary school entry age for your state or territory. They must also be under 19 on 1 January of the year of study.

Or they need to be any of the following:



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- at least 3 years and 6 months old and living away from home due to a health condition or disability
- under 20 on 1 January in the study year, with a disruption to their education, such as illness
- under 21 and studying at primary or ungraded level and getting [Disability Support Pension](#), or [Parenting Payment](#) single
- doing tertiary study and under their state or territory minimum education or training requirements age.”

When claiming the AIC allowance, the applicant is notified that a Northern Territory resident must be turning 6 years old between 1<sup>st</sup> of January to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June to be eligible for the AIC Allowance. Some students are already in Year 1 by this age and have been attending a school-based learning program, for two full years.

Setting up the classroom for distance education delivery for Pre-schoolers costs the same, if not more, as for the first year of compulsory schooling. The number of children accessing this pre-compulsory year by distance education is not huge. For example: Katherine School of the Air (KSA) has had a structured Pre-School Program in place for over 20 years and currently (Sem 1 2025) has 24 enrolments. On average KSA enrolments have been around 20-25 each year. The NT Government already recognises this cohort of students by making available half of the “NT Correspondence Site Allowance – Preschool” to assist all four-year-old children that are enrolled in pre-school with the Alice Springs and Katherine Schools of the Air.

Extending the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) distance education allowance to include these students will ensure greater and more equitable participation in Early Childhood Education by rural and remote students. Distance education students could benefit enormously from a minute portion of the billions of dollars allocated to early childhood education and care, including the funding intended to ensure the system is more accessible, affordable, and fairer for families.

### Case Study

I have three children enrolled in Katherine School of the Air. All three children were not eligible to receive the AIC until they were in Year 1. Meaning the costs of setting up the schoolroom, accommodation and travel to contact events and early intervention appointments have been met with no assistance from federal government. The early years learning program facilitated by Katherine School of the Air has played a pivotal part in my children’s ability to learn, socialise and their general wellbeing. If I had waited until the age of 6 years to enrol them into a Distance Education facility, their ability to participate and interact with their peers would have been greatly affected. There is no other option other than Distance Education for where we live. Our access to playgroups, library programs and other learning platforms are extremely minimal. It is nationally recognised that children need educational learning programs from the age of three and 6 months. Geographically Isolated children enrolled in Preschool and Transition are at a pivotal time in their learning pathway for teachers to assist with learning difficulties and to offer early intervention as early as possible. If my children had waited to start from the age of 6 and go straight into Year 1 without teachers having prior knowledge of their learning capabilities, they would have fallen further behind and not be at the level they are today.

## **RURAL & REMOTE SCHOOLS**



**A41. Marla Oodnadatta Branch (SA)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant ministers to permit the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for students travel to Canberra to be calculated from their geographical place of learning for rural and remote Students.”

**Explanation:**

The Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) is an Australian Government initiative designed to subsidise travel costs for students in Years 4–12 visiting Canberra for civics and citizenship education. Eligibility requires schools to be located at least 150 kilometres from Canberra, with rebates increasing based on distance. For instance, in 2024, rebates ranged from \$30 per student for distances of 150–499 km, up to \$510 for distances over 4,000 km.

The School of the Air (SOTA) in South Australia, administered through Open Access College, serves geographically remote students across the state. Its school location is in Port Augusta. In 2021, the government allowed SOTA's PACER rebate calculations to be based on Port Augusta rather than Adelaide, acknowledging the school's actual location.

However, this approach does not fully address the realities faced by SOTA families. Many students reside in areas significantly farther from Port Augusta, some over 700 km away. Consequently, the travel expenses from these remote locations to Canberra are substantially higher, and the current rebate structure does not adequately offset these costs. Our travel time can be in excess of 10 hours to get to the airport in Adelaide for our children to go to Canberra, yet schools in Tasmania are automatically classed as Zone 5 because of their air/travel expenses yet this is likely to be less costly.

The current PACER rebate method does not consider the additional distances and associated costs incurred by students traveling from their actual residences to the school's administrative base before proceeding to Canberra.

To address this discrepancy, a more pragmatic approach would involve calculating PACER rebates based on the actual distances students travel from their homes to Canberra. This would provide a fairer subsidy, reflecting the unique circumstances of distance education students and place them in a different zone.

**A42. Marla Oodnadatta Branch (SA)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant ministers for the additional loadings for the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) rates for students traveling to Canberra to be permanently implemented.”

**Explanation:**

The Australian Government should consider making the additional loadings to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) permanent to address the ongoing financial challenges faced by rural and remote families. While temporary increases have been implemented to alleviate cost-of-living pressures, such as boosting the rebate for students from very remote, disadvantaged schools in the Northern Territory from \$510 to \$2,040, these measures should be made permanently from their current Pilot Program. Families in remote areas often incur significantly higher travel and accommodation expenses when organizing educational trips to Canberra, and these costs are not fully offset by the standard PACER rebates. By permanently incorporating additional loadings based on remoteness and socioeconomic disadvantage, the government would ensure equitable access to vital civics education experiences for all students, regardless of their geographic location. This approach would acknowledge the unique challenges faced by rural and remote communities and support their inclusion in national educational initiatives.



## **SCHOOL TRAVEL**

### **A43. Northern Territory State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to work with all Australian airlines to offer capped or discount fares to families of Geographically Isolated students for travel to/from boarding school.”

#### **Explanation:**

The Northern Territory has a large number of Geographically Isolated students living remotely with their families who need to attend educational institutions interstate to complete their education. The Northern Territory has a very limited number of boarding school places available for students, therefore, a large number of families have no choice but to send their children to boarding schools interstate. Choices for Tertiary and Trade training are equally limited. NT residents can access the Qantas Resident Fares but only for flights from Alice Springs to Darwin (return) or Alice Springs to Adelaide (return). These are useful and much appreciated but more options are needed.

There are a large number of families not even living close to Darwin (up to approx 1,000km away) that have children studying interstate in locations such as Townsville, Charters Towers, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne who need to drive huge distances to either Darwin or Alice Springs to be able to fly to the school location. There are two/three airlines operating the NT and during the hugely popular ‘dry season’, parents are competing with tourists for flights that can range from \$300 - \$3,000 one way to get children to and from boarding school. There is no consistency for reasonable fares for parents, particularly during the peak dry season.

The high cost of airline travel also inhibits families from travelling during school term to visit their children further isolating the families from each other and can mean that families often miss key events in the children’s school life.

### **A44. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant bodies to provide a subsidy for rural and remote boarding and tertiary students accessing flights in areas of Australia where no student fare is available.”

#### **Explanation:**

Attending boarding school or tertiary education away from home presents many challenges for families. Getting students home during term breaks, exeats, or university holidays has become increasingly more difficult and expensive.

Many boarding and tertiary students are faced with the situation where they must travel large distances by long bus journeys or in private vehicles, significantly reducing their time at home. There are locations throughout the state where flights could shorten travel distances considerably; however, the high cost of airfares often prevents families from being able to use them.

Time at home is vital for the well-being of both boarding and tertiary students, especially given the limited opportunities they have to be in their home environment. Reducing travel time through more affordable flight options would ease the stress on families and improve the mental health and well-being of these students.

### **A45. South Australia State Council**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to work with regional airlines, including Regional Express (REX), to establish a national fixed-fare scheme for students required to travel to and



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from rural and remote areas for education purposes, similar to Queensland's 'Bush to Boarding' initiative."

### **Explanation:**

Rural and remote students across Australia, including those in South Australia, deserve equitable access to education, which includes affordable and reliable travel to and from boarding schools. Many families have no option but to send their children away from home for secondary schooling, incurring high and often unpredictable travel costs.

In South Australia, ICPA families rely on Regional Express (REX) flights from towns such as Coober Pedy, Mount Gambier, Port Lincoln, Ceduna, and Broken Hill to Adelaide. A capped, concessional airfare scheme (similar to Queensland's 'Bush to Boarding' program), providing flexible, discounted fares for students, would offer significant financial relief and improve access to education for isolated families. While REX is currently in voluntary administration, it is anticipated that the situation may stabilise by June 30, 2025, potentially enabling implementation of such an initiative. Federal leadership and coordination would be key in ensuring a nationally consistent, accessible solution in collaboration with relevant airlines and states.

### **A46. Port Augusta Branch (SA)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to and work collaboratively with airlines servicing remote and regional areas to develop and implement a dedicated student airfare to support equitable access to education for geographically isolated students."

### **Explanation:**

Families living in remote areas often face high travel costs when students must fly between home and boarding schools or tertiary institutions. A consistent and affordable student fare would help ease the financial burden on families and support equal access to education, regardless of location. This initiative would align with ICPA's commitment to improving education access and affordability for rural and remote families.

### **A47. Broken Hill Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate for QANTAS, REX and other regional airlines to offer reduced, capped priced fares on available seats to rural and remote secondary, tertiary and TAFE students travelling between their place of education or training and their home at any time on any flight."

### **Explanation:**

In NSW there are currently no fare discounts available to anyone, and the cost of air fares are extremely prohibitive for students.

For many secondary, tertiary and TAFE students living in rural and remote communities, air travel is often the most time efficient and safest form of travel. Our branch members have students travelling vast distances to attend their educational and training facilities. This can result in a whole day or two days' travel by rail or road, when there are time constraints this is not possible, especially if students are driving with a restricted provisional license. Having reduced, capped prices would enable students to travel between home and the location of their education with greater ease and safety. This would encompass students travelling for leave, practical and theory components of their course requirements and also allow the security of travel to and from their educational institution and their home via the most direct route available when unplanned situations arise.

For this reason, a use of a discount code as put forward by Julia Creek Branch, Motions S9, S10 at the 2024 Federal Conference would be enable students to use air travel to complete their education and training needs to and from their home in a safe and time affective way. Air travel from rural and



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remote communities for students allows flexibility and greater options when completing their studies which will in turn ensure that students have a greater chance of completing their secondary and further education without having the burden of traveling vast distances with exorbitant costs. These student capped fares would also encourage city students to consider taking on a rural and remote placement through their training as travel and distance would not be a barrier. This incentive will help promote and rural and remote locations as an accessible option for various compulsory practical course requirements which in turn may lead to graduates choosing rural and remote locations being where they start their career.

### **A48. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant bodies for a 'Capped Student Fare' for rural and remote students attending educational institutions within Australia who need to travel between their home residence and the educational establishment they attend."

#### **Explanation:**

Students who fall into this category should be able to book tickets—by air or road—at any time of the year without being subject to fare increases caused by peak tourist seasons, holidays, limited availability, or other factors that cause ticket prices to fluctuate.

Currently, some geographically isolated families, whose children attend schools interstate or intrastate, have their travel costs covered or coordinated. This includes travel from home to the nearest airport and onward to the school. There are existing policy mechanisms—such as ABSTUDY—that demonstrate how such systems can function. However, ABSTUDY does not cover airfares for all eligible students, and its support varies by case.

In Western Australia, capped student airfares are available through a government-supported booking agency. Additionally, the Department of Education provides assistance to Indigenous students with flight and travel arrangements.

We propose that this existing framework—used by agencies like ABSTUDY to book and secure student travel—be expanded to cover all geographically isolated families. At the very least, this should include access to capped student travel fares between a student's home and the educational institution they attend.

#### **Case Study:**

A family has a child at a boarding school in their nearest capital city, over 1000km from their home. Return flights back to this family's nearest town at the end of Term 1 2025 for the school holidays cost the family \$725. This same flight is costing the family \$1,096 for the end of Term 2 2025 for the school holidays, with the flight cost increasing by over \$370 due to Term 2 holidays falling within their region's tourist season.

### **A49. North West Branch (SA)**

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to work with commercial airlines servicing regional and remote areas across Australia to introduce equitable, capped student fares or establish discount codes for rural and remote school-aged children and tertiary students required to travel for educational purposes."

#### **Explanation:**

For geographically isolated families, air travel is essential, not optional, for accessing education. Many students must travel long distances to attend boarding school or other educational services,



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and without affordable flights, families are often forced to choose between lengthy and exhausting road travel or incurring prohibitive costs.

We acknowledge Qantas' existing Resident Fare Program and appreciate the support this offers in select regions. However, this program is currently limited to parts of Northern Queensland, the Northern Territory and North-Western Australia, and only applies to a restricted number of seats per flight. Students from other regions such as South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania are unable to access these discounts and continue to face excessive travel costs.

We request that ICPA (Aust) advocate for a more inclusive solution by working with the commercial airlines to develop their own dedicated national student discount code. These could be structured as capped student fares or flexible, concession-based booking options, aimed specifically at school-aged children and tertiary students travelling between home and place of study.

The Queensland 'Bush to Boarding' initiative through REX Airlines demonstrates that such a program is both possible and effective. This model offers capped fares for students travelling from regional centres to major cities and could serve as a blueprint for broader national implementation. While REX is currently in voluntary administration, we note that this is expected to have concluded by 30 June 2025, potentially allowing for renewed partnerships in the near future.

Case Study:

**One North West member, who lives 800km one way from Adelaide, tried booking her boarding student on a flight from Adelaide to Coober Pedy 4 weeks before the planned trip. The flights were coming up as completely booked out for the entire month, even that far in advance. Closer to the date, the flights became available but at an inflated cost of \$590 one way, with no return flights. The increase in flight costs when booking a week out compared to 3 weeks is horrendous and often very limited seating.**

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS**

### **A50. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to allow National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants from rural and remote areas, who are required to attend boarding schools for their secondary education, to utilise their NDIS funding for the employment of individual support workers within boarding facilities."

#### **Explanation:**

Students with disabilities living in rural and remote areas often have no choice but to attend boarding schools to access secondary education. These students require support similar to what they would receive at home; however, current NDIS restrictions often do not allow funding to be used for support within boarding environments.

Without access to appropriate support workers funded through NDIS plans, some schools are left with no option but to employ additional boarding staff to assist these students. The cost of this staffing is then distributed across all boarding families, significantly increasing already substantial boarding fees and creating an inequitable burden.

Allowing NDIS recipients to direct their individual funding towards necessary support within boarding houses would provide equitable access to care and reduce the financial strain on schools and other families.

### **A51. South Australia State Council**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government, through the Ministers for Education and Health, to make targeted funding available for the provision of speech pathologists in rural and remote schools, particularly where students are enrolled through distance education."



**Explanation:**

There is a widespread shortage of speech pathologists servicing rural and remote areas across Australia, in both the education and health sectors. Early intervention and access to ongoing therapies are critical to ensuring students do not fall behind in their educational development.

It is well established that remoteness amplifies the challenges faced by students with speech and language needs, particularly those studying via distance education. Targeted federal funding to improve access to speech pathology services in these areas would help close this gap and support better educational outcomes for rural and remote students nationwide.

**A52. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers and agencies to ensure that federally funded health clinics and health physicians across Australia are easily accessible to all Australians, so all geographically isolated children can receive a diagnosis and ongoing treatment of medical issues that impede their ability to learn and thrive.”

**Explanation:**

We appreciate that there is ongoing work in progress for this motion. We thank ICPA Federal Council for your efforts thus far and wish to advise that the issue is still relevant and ongoing. Northern Territory ICPA members and families are unable to access public service providers without frequently being turned away from their local public, albeit remote, health clinics because they ‘do not meet the criteria’ (to access the public health clinic). Remote families have no other ‘local’ health clinic alternative, but if they ‘don’t meet the criteria’ and are refused treatment, they necessarily must travel vast distances including interstate to access treatment for what could have otherwise been dealt with closer to where they live, at their closest remote health clinic, serviced by rostered doctors, specialists and allied health providers. Some families are facing months, even years to try and access services in remote Australia being put on a waiting list that never actually runs in order either. It is not acceptable that publicly funded health facilities discriminate on race, demographic, or on any other basis, let alone in a situation where there are no other local alternatives for rural and remote families to ‘conveniently’ access.

**Case Study 1:**

Mum of seven year old child that has finally been diagnosed with ADHD through their SOA in the public system after years of waiting for said child to be assessed has now been told that they have been placed on a 12-18 month wait list to be seen by paediatrician doctors and allied health providers in the public system but if they were to pay or travel interstate they may be seen within a year. Said child has just turned 9 and still hasn't been seen by a paediatric doctor nor an OT or allied health provider. This child is still struggling on a daily basis to complete basic school activities, basic daily tasks, form friendships and socially interact on a 9-year-old level. This child is now mentally suffering and receiving private counselling and psychology with the parent out of pocket hundreds of dollars a month. A paediatric doctor and Occupational Therapist visit this families local clinic only an hour away on a monthly to 6 weekly basis and this family has been told that because they do not fit the criteria they cannot be seen by these specialists!

**Case Study 2:**

Mum of four-year-old enrolled through SOA with a stutter and some speech problems, went to local remote clinic wanting to book an appointment with a speech therapist that travels to the local clinic on occasion, during the year. Mum was told, “I’m sorry, you do not fit the criteria, you will have to make an appointment in Darwin”. Mum gets hold of the same speech therapist that travels to the



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local clinic, still told “No, I can’t see you in XXXX (971km from Darwin), but I can see you in Darwin anytime”. The speech therapist tells Mum that the first thing she must do is get a hearing test for her child, “Most local clinics are able to do a simple hearing test”. Back to XXXX clinic and told yet again, sorry, you don’t fit the criteria. Mum has had to travel 971km to Darwin for hearing tests and an initial consultation with a therapist; the rest of the appointments were done over Zoom. Mum reports “Zoom is ok, but certainly made it harder with the delay to be able to fully show the mouth positioning and sounds. It would be helpful to see the therapist at our local clinic once in a while, to make sure we are doing the right thing.”

### **A53. Hughenden Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) work with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA), to help develop an information pack, which will build a knowledge base to assist parents of a child with specific education needs with the decision making process during the transition to boarding school.”

#### **Explanation:**

Parents of students with specific needs often struggle to find clear guidance on navigating the enrolment process and what’s required to transition their children successfully into a boarding school environment.

A dedicated resource outlining essential steps and support options would provide families with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions throughout the application process, including the accommodations that can be put in place during the transition process and throughout their high school boarding experience.

There is a lack of awareness around the resources available to all families of students with specific needs through state and independent stakeholders. We thank the current organisations for their support in helping transition boarding students with specific needs, and believe that with a dedicated resource that creates greater awareness of these resources it would ensure a smoother transition for families and students.

At the recent state conference in St George, delegates were provided with a ‘Let’s talk about boarding – for parents thinking about sending their children to boarding school’ pamphlet published by the Australian Boarding School Association (ABSA). This resource already provides excellent guidance for parents considering boarding school. It would be a meaningful step towards inclusivity if we could expand this resource and other like materials & support practices, to include specific guidance for students with additional needs.

#### **CASE STUDY**

Navigating the boarding school selection process for our neurodiverse son, was an isolating and overwhelming experience. Despite his enthusiasm for boarding life, we faced multiple roadblocks—schools hesitant to provide adequate support, rejections due to initial adjustment difficulties, and even the inability to secure an interview at some institutions. As parents, we were left feeling lost, unsure of the next steps, and without a clear path forward. Distance Education, while an option, did not provide the social and cognitive stimulation he needed, reinforcing our commitment to finding a suitable school. However, we lacked the necessary guidance—there was no central resource to explain available supports, recommended preparations, or reasonable accommodations schools could make to aid in the transition. This caused severe stress and anxiety for our child and also ourselves. Had there been awareness of the current resources available and there been a dedicated resource outlining the steps for transitioning a neurodiverse student to boarding school, including available supports, necessary adjustments, and key professionals to engage, our experience would have been far less traumatizing. Parents of neurodiverse children should not have to navigate this



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journey alone, uncertain of what accommodations they can request or how best to advocate for their child's success.

### **A54. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) work with the various bodies to improve isolated children's access to specialist Paediatrician services, including the Royal Australian College of Physicians to look at the barriers to accessibility of these specialists."

#### **Explanation:**

Across Australia children and families are struggling to access appointments with Paediatricians within reasonable timeframes. The public waitlist for children seeking a Paediatrician appointment for Behavioural concerns is now at 7 years. In terms of a child's ability to socialise with their peers, learn effectively within educational settings and be engaged with their family this wait time is unacceptable, and often leads to children in our remote communities having earlier interactions with the youth justice system. The subsequent negative impact for remote communities and isolated families is devastating, and can feed into cycles of violence, crime and entrenched disadvantage.

Changes to the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention program mean that children now require a formal paediatrician assessment and diagnosis prior to their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday if they require ongoing assistance under the NDIS.

### **A55. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the relevant Ministers for improved access and utilisation of Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) funding, currently managed through the NDIS scheme."

#### **Explanation:**

Many remote & geographically isolated children are missing out on essential allied health supports due to the ability to access or utilise funding administered through NDIS for Early Childhood Early Intervention. In Bourke the NDIS Early Childhood Partner was McKillop, and they had around 7 staff supporting Western NSW. McKillop Family Services has withdrawn, and the workload has been transferred to NDIA staff. Remote areas also have a significant underutilisation of ECEI funding, as when children's needs are identified, there are often no allied health services available to support them. Evidence shows that accessing Early Intervention supports improved educational outcomes.

## **TERTIARY EDUCATION**

### **A56. Tambo Branch (QLD)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Social Services to remedy the Youth Allowance application process as the current one-time pass code is not user friendly, especially in poor internet areas."

#### **Explanation:**

Whilst we understand that security is paramount when filling in forms online that contain personal information, we still believe that there must be a more efficient way to complete a Youth Allowance application. Reliability of internet connection continues to be an ongoing issue for Rural and remote families and dropouts are common. The One Time Passcode (OTP), means exactly as it says and if there is a failure of the website or the internet connection during the application process, it requires a full restart of the application process, which is lengthy and can take up to 50 minutes to complete.



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The manual application process still requires uploading to the website and is fraught with perils as well. As per the below case study the application process ultimately took several weeks to complete and an extraordinary amount of frustration in the meantime.

### Case Study

Step 1 – My child fills in the YA application form online which takes about 50 minutes. Sends me the OTP to complete my bit

Step 2 – Halfway through me providing the information required to advise of Parental income the website crashes and I can no longer use the OTP

Step 3 – Ring Centrelink to find out what to do next – 50 minutes

Step 4 – Complete the MOD JY form manually and upload the document along with the Assessments of Income

Step 5 – This information has not linked with Student's Application

Step 6 – Ring Centrelink – on hold for 1 hour. Centrelink advises me to get student to upload the correct parental documents in her profile – this is not acceptable

WE GIVE UP AND START AGAIN

Step 7 – Student deletes that application, and we start again – 50 minutes again – provides me with a new OTP

Step 8 – Student accidentally requests for parent/guardian to access/upload documents on her behalf – this requires more documents to be filled

Step 9 – Student decides that she wanted to change this answer, however, this required her to redo the entire youth allowance again

Step 10 – I attempt to go through the process and it says the OTP just provided is INVALID!!

Step 11 – We redo the form – AGAIN – and Isobel attempts to upload the documents on my behalf and finally we are successful

### **A57. Louth Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate for the Minister for Social Services to increase Centrelink rent assistance payments to assist with’ or ‘to reflect the rising costs of rent for geographically isolated students who have to live away from home to access a tertiary education.”

#### **Explanation:**

Obviously regional, remote, and very remote children need to factor in rent to their study plans. Rent is the biggest component of a student's costs and is often prohibitive therefore to study for example in a larger city or may mean that a student has to work so much that their course suffers.

### **A58. Rankins Springs Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Education and the Federal Treasurer to change the timing of debt indexation for study and training support loans.”

#### **Explanation:**

The indexation of Higher Education Loans Program (HELP, or also known as HECS) and other study and training support loan debts has long been an issue for graduates. Although these loans have been promoted in the past as ‘interest free’, the loan has always had indexation applied at the rate of the current CPI (Consumer Price Index) or WPI (Wages Price Index) (whichever is lower) at the time of indexation, 1 June. A recommendation from the Australian Universities Accord (2024) is to change the timing of indexation. Once a graduate earns above the compulsory repayment threshold (currently \$54,435 in 2024-25), repayments are deducted from wages through the tax system and held by the government until the graduate lodges their tax return when the funds are then applied to reduce the



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debt. The total amount deducted from wages over the financial year is not applied to the loan until after the graduate lodges their tax return. The unjust issue is that indexation is applied to the debt on 1 June, which is before the repayments have been applied to the loan, disregarding the fact that the graduate has had repayments deducted from their wages over the previous 11 months. Not like a bank loan which applies the repayments immediately.

We understand that this is a complex system for the tax office to administer, but we feel that the timing of the indexation of the debt is unfair. Applying indexation after the lump sum repayment has been applied to the debt would be far more equitable.

This could be remedied by indexation being applied 1 November each year after the Individual Tax Return due date of 31 October. If this indexation date was adopted, any repayments deducted from wages during the previous tax year would be included in the balance of the student support loan debt before indexation is calculated and applied.

We are aware that the recently elected Labor Government is proposing a 20% reduction to all study and training support loans that exist on 1 June 2025, before indexation is applied. This will be retrospectively calculated and applied after the proposed legislation passes Parliament in July. The Government has also proposed raising the minimum repayment threshold to \$67,000 in 2025-26, with compulsory repayments only being calculated on the income above the new \$67,000 threshold instead of the total annual income. While these modifications are welcome, they do not change the fact that the timing of indexation is inherently unfair. We would argue that the cost of some of these measures would have been better spent by changing the indexation date.

### **A59. Balranald Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to Services Australia to streamline the application process for geographically isolated Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) applicants by having dedicated call centre staff similar to that of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC). “

#### **Explanation:**

Two of the most remote members of Balranald Branch have recently been “rejected” for Tertiary Access Payment via the Services Australia Online Application system. This has now required them to give further information when they are already in the “system” due to having been AIC recipients the year prior to applying for TAP.

It appears that the online TAP application asks many questions and then, after being looked at by a person, puts the application “on hold” and asks further questions relating to proof of the new address. Despite providing those new address details (after very vague questioning online) the system then rejects the application!

This is a serious flaw, when in contrast, the AIC is so simplified to apply for and has a direct line to talk to an officer who understands the needs of remote students.

How many rural and remote students apply for TAP and after such a rejection don't pursue their legitimate right to this allowance?

### **A60. Julia Creek Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate the relevant government departments, ministers, and the tertiary sector to extend the Commonwealth Prac payments to include those studying medicine, veterinary and allied health degrees who undertake mandatory practicum placements in/from rural and remote areas.”

#### **Explanation:**

Julia Creek ICPA would like to thank the Minister for Education the Hon. Jason Clare and the Federal Government for acknowledging the need for Paid Practicum Placements in the areas of



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Teaching, Nursing and Social Work. We ask ICPA Federal Council to lobby the Federal Government to extend eligibility to include other areas of study, to acknowledge the huge cost that undertaking these mandatory practicums holds, especially in rural and remote locations.

Many tertiary degrees in fields such as teaching, nursing, medicine, veterinary science, and allied health have substantial practicum or placement requirements. For instance:

- The Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery at James Cook University (JCU) requires over 4,000 hours of practicum over six years, with a strong emphasis on rural and remote placements.
- Veterinary Science at JCU requires approximately 40 weeks of practicum over five years, and longer depending on which University attended .
- Nursing and Midwifery students complete 46 weeks of practicum over four years.

### **A61. Kinson Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby residential colleges to prioritise rural and remote tertiary students who seek on campus accommodation to pursue their tertiary education.”

#### **Explanation:**

Rural and remote tertiary students often lack the luxury of choice when it comes to accommodation after relocating to metropolitan areas to pursue their studies. While some universities offer guaranteed accommodation for first-year students—providing much-needed security—not all institutions extend this support. In many cases, residential college places are occupied by city-based students who choose to move out of home, making these colleges a convenient option. Unfortunately, this limits availability for rural and remote students, who are then left to navigate the challenging and often costly process of securing off-campus housing.

Case studies:

UQ/QUT College Applications – College beds going to City kids as an easy and safe way to move them out of home thus depriving country kids of accommodation for their first year out of senior schooling.

Our experience with getting our son into a college at UQ for the 2024 cohort was a frustrating experience.

He applied promptly to the college applications once their opening dates came around and in particular, to two of the main colleges in the hope of joining either of his cousins in their chosen Colleges. His great-Grandfather was one of the first students at one of these colleges. He did everything asked to gain an interview which he eventually gained and thought went well. Both Colleges advised us they were full in in September 2023 and that he had not gained a position.

We do understand thatATAR results are a big factor as well in gaining access to a college however, our son gained a very good result, both predicted and the final figure.

We were then left with trying to find somewhere for our son to live, for the first time independently of a structured environment. Although at boarding for the whole of his senior years, they are not use/unaware to the everyday needs to live in a rental accommodation i.e. food, power, rent etc and we struggled to find somewhere suitable for a first year as a UQ student. We were very lucky that a friend of a friend was looking for someone to live with their daughter in a house late December and offered us the position and it has worked out very well.

Upon talking to a few friends who live in Brisbane, they mentioned that they had heard from friends that some had sons/daughters that were moving out of home and into college accommodation as it was a safe and easy transition to moving them out of home and to teach them independence.



**A62. Blackall Branch (QLD)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Department of Education (FDoE), Department Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and other relevant Departments to recognise that the experience gained by a Home Tutor who delivers the curriculum (which is an essential requirement for the Department) as Recognition of prior learning (RPL) evidence and goes toward the Home Tutor's qualifications and skill to be a qualified teacher's aide/teacher."

**Explanation:**

Home Tutors provide an essential role in the delivering of school-based education. The Department requires a home tutor to deliver this. A home tutor should get credits for recognition of prior learning/experience. This would encourage Home Tutors to continue in the Education Industry either as a Teacher Aide or to pursue Teaching as a career with less time to complete a university degree. It is in the FDoE interest to attract and incentivise more people to become Teacher's and Teacher's Aides. We have a wealth of knowledge available that should be recognised.

**A63. Port Augusta Branch (SA)**

"The ICPA (Aust) advocate for an Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) allowance to support rural and remote university students studying from home in establishing a dedicated study space equipped with the necessary classroom-style resources."

**Explanation:**

"Rural and remote students starting university from home require a dedicated study space, just as school students do, equipped with up-to-date technology to support effective learning. The costs of essential items such as laptops, printers, and reliable internet access quickly add up, making it challenging for families to create a positive and productive home learning environment. An AIC allowance would help ease this financial burden and ensure these students are set up for success from the start of their tertiary studies."

**A64. Port Augusta Branch (SA)**

"ICPA (Aust) advocate for the Federal Government to establish a rural and remote rent assistance program for university students that is independent of parental income and supports them while they study full-time."

**Explanation:**

Currently, university students in Australia can access rent assistance through Centrelink, but eligibility often depends on age and parental income. Students under 22 are typically considered dependent and must meet specific criteria to qualify for rent assistance. For instance, to be deemed independent, a student must be 22 years or older, or under 22 and meet certain conditions such as living away from home due to study requirements or extreme circumstances .

The maximum fortnightly Youth Allowance for a single student living away from home is \$663.30, with an additional \$149.00 per fortnight available through Rent Assistance, provided the student pays more than the minimum rent threshold . However, these amounts often fall short of covering the full cost of living away from home, especially moving from rural and remote areas where housing costs can be higher.

Many students, particularly those from rural and remote areas, face challenges in establishing independent living arrangements due to financial constraints. The current system's reliance on parental income for students under 22 can be a barrier, as it may not accurately reflect the student's financial independence or the cost of living in their specific circumstances.



Given these challenges, there is a strong case for the establishment of a dedicated rent assistance program for rural and remote university students. Such a program would provide financial support independent of parental income, helping students establish themselves independently and pursue their studies without the added stress of financial insecurity.

**A65. Port Augusta Branch (SA)**

"ICPA (Aust) advocate for the Federal Government to provide a placement and travel allowance to support rural and remote students attending mandatory university placements."

**Explanation:**

We ask for the establishment of a dedicated placement and travel allowance to support rural and remote university students undertaking mandatory placements. While some financial assistance exists, current provisions are limited and often insufficient to cover the full costs associated with these placements.

We ask that financial support to all rural and remote university students, irrespective of their field of study or institution, to ensure equitable access to mandatory placements. A dedicated placement and travel allowance would alleviate the financial burden on these students and enable them to gain essential practical experience without the added stress of financial constraints.

By establishing a comprehensive placement and travel allowance, the government can support rural and remote university students in accessing and completing mandatory placements, thereby promoting equity and enhancing the quality of education in our communities.

**A66. Winton Branch (QLD)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Department of Education (DoE) to ensure time spent working under the Permission to Teach program or equivalent programs, counts towards the time required to access the Higher Education Loan Program, (HELP) in very remote areas."

**Explanation:**

In Queensland, a range of rural teacher incentives currently exist to attract teachers to rural placements and are made available to Permission To Teach staff. One key incentive for teachers to go rural is to access the HELP after completing four years of rural employment. At present, the time spent working under the Permission To Teach program does not count towards this four-year period meaning that those teaching staff would have to complete five years or more in a rural setting before being able to access the HELP.

**A67. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Government to change the eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance, so that those rural and remote students who choose to save or invest their earnings during the working period prior to attending University are not disadvantaged by the Liquid Assets criteria."

**Explanation:**

Students who choose to save their earnings during their gap year should not be disadvantaged due to the Liquid Asset Waiting Period. Many students work hard to save their earnings but instead must use their savings to support themselves and pay rent while attending university until the Liquid Asset Waiting period is fulfilled.

The Liquid Asset Waiting Period applies if the applicant has more than \$5500 in liquid assets prior to application for Youth Allowance and means waiting a number of weeks based on the amount of liquid



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assets. It tapers from \$5500 to \$11,500 meaning there may be a maximum 13 week waiting period before Youth Allowance payments begin.

Fellow students who earn the amount required to be considered eligible for Independent Youth Allowance but spend everything they earn, are eligible for the allowance straight away but those who have saved and have money in the bank are not eligible for the allowance until after the required waiting period, and therefore not eligible for Rent Assistance either until payments begin.

### **A68. Bourke Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) seek financial support for regional and rural tertiary students and apprentices who have to undertake placements to complete their qualification.”

#### **Explanation:**

A final year Radiography student has to undertake a 12-month full time **unpaid** placement to complete her degree. This student has to relocate to where she has been sent for the placement, to work full time without payment, find and pay for accommodation, transport and support herself for the year with a second job, after being a student for three years.

## **TRAINING**

### **A69. Richmond Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) be thanked for its long time advocacy for an increase to the commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA), which has been announced recently by the Prime Minister.”

### **A70. Balranald Branch (NSW)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Minister for Education to extend the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to include rural and remote students who must live away from home to complete a Trade Apprenticeship.”

#### **Explanation:**

The current eligibility for the TAP is restricted to those who are studying Certificate IV or above and therefore excludes Certificate III Trade Apprentices.

Rural and Remote students who do not live near towns or centres must relocate to complete their Apprenticeships, with some also needing to purchase expensive tools.

With a current oversupply of Tertiary Qualifications and a critical undersupply of Trade Qualifications, it is obvious that more support is needed for Apprentices.

The relocation costs to complete an apprenticeship are the same as a Tertiary student and the TAP would be an incentive to encourage rural and remote students to consider an apprenticeship or traineeship as a career path.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

### **A71. Tambo Branch (QLD)**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal Minister for Health and relevant government bodies to review and amend the current restriction of a maximum of two duplicate Medicare cards per family, to better accommodate families with multiple children living away from home for the purposes of education.”

#### **Explanation:**



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Currently, Medicare allows for only two duplicate Medicare cards to be issued per family. This restriction poses significant challenges for rural and remote families with multiple children (especially those under the age of fourteen who are unable to apply for their own personal Medicare card) who must live away from home to attend school, such as in boarding school arrangements.

For example, a family residing in Town A may have two parents and two or more children attending different boarding schools in Town B. Each child requires their own Medicare card to independently access medical services. However, due to the current limit of only two duplicate cards, families in this situation are unable to provide each child with an individual card, potentially delaying healthcare access or complicating medical appointments—particularly in emergency or unaccompanied situations.

This issue disproportionately affects families in rural and remote areas, where boarding school is often the only viable educational pathway from a young age. Amending the policy to increase the allowable number of duplicate Medicare cards in these circumstances would help ensure equitable access to healthcare and reduce unnecessary stress and logistical burden on families and health providers alike.

## **AGM / FEDERAL CONFERENCE MOTIONS**

### **A72. Tasmania Branch**

“That the Tasmania Branch of The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association host the 2027 Federal Conference in Tasmania.”