

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2021 FEDERAL CONFERENCE BOARDING SCHOOLS/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

A1. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Education, Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education and the Minister for Families and Social Services for an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance, to help alleviate financial pressures incurred as a result of increased fees by boarding schools and hostels.”

Explanation:

WA members have had a severe reduction in the State allowance Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) and any increases to the AIC in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) is being eroded by the continued increase to boarding fees.

An increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance would relieve some of the financial burden placed on families to pay for their children's education.

WA State Council would like to thank Federal Council for their continued work lobbying the Federal Government for an increase to the Basic Boarding Allowance.

A2. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobby the Federal Government to review the AIC Policy and Guidelines to allow rural and remote students who are accepted into specialised programs not offered at their local school, and who need to board away from home, to be eligible for the AIC.”

Explanation:

There are examples where rural and remote students need to board away from home to access gifted and talented programs or a language other than English (LOTE). These students do not qualify for AIC due to the proximity of a government high school even though it does not offer these specialised programs.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance and advantage of face-to-face teaching across all educational programs.

A3. Wentworth Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Federal Government and relevant Departments to separate Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) into two categories – Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and Assistance for Geographically Isolated Children (AGIC).”

Explanation:

For many years ICPA have been campaigning for an increase to the AIC in line with the astronomical increases associated with the need to send students to boarding school. Unfortunately, a sympathetic ear is offered but not much else.

Part of the uphill battle we face is that whilst we are all acutely aware that rural student numbers continue to fall the number of students accessing AIC continues to increase. So, when we ask for an increase to AIC to match boarding fees it actually means a significantly larger increase in the budget than we would perceive.

We need AGIC to become a completely separate payment so that an increase to this allowance does not represent such a large increase. Those isolated due to medical reason would still be able to access AIC at the standard rate. A separation of these categories would make it easier for government to justify an increase to AGIC at a lower cost.

A4. North West Branch (SA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies relevant Ministers to support the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who assist their employees residing in geographically isolated areas, by providing financial assistance to enable their children to attend boarding school.”

Explanation:

Currently many businesses across remote Australia are faced with the financial challenge of helping to fund the education of employee’s children. Financial assistance is essential to support families employed in remote areas of Australia as they are unable to afford the exorbitant expenses of sending their children to board for secondary schooling. Families who have no choice but to leave their homes and place of employment to continue their child’s education, simply because they cannot afford the costs of boarding, leaves employers with a hard to fill gap in the remote workplace. These remote and rural workplaces struggle to fill vacancies.

Businesses able to provide financial assistance for boarding and secondary school retain their valuable employees. However, it is these businesses able to offer financial aid that are struck with the added costs of paying Fringe Benefits Tax on the assistance provided. For example, a business who offers to cover 50% of a boarding school fee that totals \$50 000, will pay \$22 170 in tax on top of the \$25 000 of assistance. A total cost of \$47 170 to that employer, almost doubling the costs of their financial support. A significant deterrent for any business thinking of offering assistance.

It is most likely that more employers would be able to offer financial assistance to their employees if the FBT was removed. This would help stabilise a rural workforce and keep valuable families in rural and remote Australia.

A5. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continue to lobby the Australian government with its ‘No borders for boarders’ campaign for rural and remote students.”

Explanation

There needs to be a special exemption for all rural and remote students to cross any state border enabling them to travel to and from their homes to their respective boarding schools via their most direct route. This is to ensure students are returned home and back to school safely should there be another occurrence causing state border closures such as the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic.

A6. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers to grant, due to COVID-19, the same level of travel exemption to geographically isolated children who attend interstate educational boarding facilities as those persons considered essential workers, and allow the children permission to quarantine at home.”

Explanation:

Throughout COVID-19 we have witnessed an ad hoc approach to the treatment of children who attend educational boarding facilities interstate. There has been a great deal of anxiety caused to both parents and children with the inconsistent approach as each state has applied its own set of rules.

It is unacceptable that children have been unable to return home for weeks, have had to endure periods of self-isolation away from family and have had their education impacted. By the very nature of their geographical location, many students are already ‘self-isolating’ when they are at their principal place of residence.

A7. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) works with the relevant departments to encourage detailed and cohesive understanding and application of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines to avoid future confusion and misinterpretation which impacts geographically isolated boarding students.”

Explanation:

The AHPPC guidelines introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a great deal of confusion and anxiety to both students and parents in their application. The broad nature of the guidelines has been interpreted and applied differently by boarding school facilities. Some are applied differently even within separate boarding houses on the same school grounds.

Parents are also experiencing the AHPPC guidelines being applied differently to their children simply because they attend separate schools where each schools’ interpretation of the guidelines differed.

S1. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) investigates the impact the Federal governments new ‘Direct Measure of Income’ funding model has on geographically isolated students who attend boarding schools.”

Explanation:

From 2020, the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) of capacity to contribute (CTC) replaced the previous area-based socio-economic status (SES) score measure to determine the capacity to contribute (CTC) for most non-government schools. The new direct measure will apply to all schools by 2022.

A CTC score is a measure of a non-government school community’s capacity to contribute to the ongoing costs of running the school. A school’s CTC percentage affects the amount of base recurrent funding the school attracts from the Commonwealth Government under the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act).

For most non-government schools, their government funding primarily depends on how much their per-student base funding is discounted.

The discount is determined by the school’s SES score. Schools with well-off parents have higher SES scores and received lower base funding per student; schools with less-well-off parents have lower SES scores and receive more. The average SES score is 100, and 97% of scores fall between 85 and 125.

SES scores were calculated every five years using census data about the average income, education and occupation level in the area where each family lives.

The DMI is based on the median income of parents or guardians at the school (that is, the family income that sits in the middle of the range of incomes at a school). The median family income is translated into a DMI score by comparing the median family income of a school against the median family income of other non-government schools. The data are standardised to a mean of 103 and a standard deviation of 13, weighted by enrolments.

The DMI uses parent and guardian names and addresses linked to data within the Multi Agency Data Integration Project (MADIP). There is an 18-month delay in the availability of income data through MADIP. Parent and guardian names and addresses provided in 2018 were linked to 2015-16 MADIP data. Parent and guardian names and addresses provided in 2019 were linked to 2016-17 MADIP data.

Adjusted taxable income (ATI) is used to calculate the median income of the parents and guardians of a school community. The use of ATI is supported by stakeholders and is consistent with other government policy for payments such as Family Tax Benefits and the Child Care Subsidy.

Additional data (such as concessional Australian Government financial benefits, Pay As You Go (PAYG) and spouse reported income data) are used to improve the accuracy of the measure by improving the coverage of data and capturing low income earners and others not included in taxation records.

As a result of using the Direct Measure of Income parameters many schools throughout the whole of Australia will receive a cut to their funding, this is a major concern for boarding families. Many schools will see their funding reduced anywhere from \$1,000,000 to \$4,000,000 per annum, equating to \$3,000 plus per student. Members are concerned that a greater increase to school fees will be levied upon families to bridge the gap as a result of the reduction in funding from the Government. The cost of boarding is already increasing at an alarming rate and certainly in advance of CPI, without further additional charges being incurred.

Unlike our city counterparts geographically isolated students who need to board away from home have fewer choices with regards to the school they attend; they are limited to those schools that have boarding facilities. Some States have Government Residential Colleges however, due to the tyranny of distance and logistics it is often impractical to attend these facilities.

For example: Families in the WA Pilbara region, the closest Residential College is in Geraldton some 1254km away. To fly there requires a flight south to Perth and then another back north to Geraldton. There is no Residential College in Perth, so the only option is private boarding.

The proportion of boarding families in schools is often such a minority so will have little impact on the DMI, but families could be forced to pay more in order to access an equitable education.

S2. Southern Downs Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) sincerely thanks the former Federal Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education the Honourable Andrew Gee, and the current Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communication and Regional Education the Hon Bridget McKenzie for their help in advocating on behalf of all geographically isolated students during the COVID-19 lockdowns and their engagement during the “no borders for boarders” campaign.”

Explanation:

Our branch is located on the QLD/NSW border, and we saw first-hand the enormous impact that many of the decisions regarding border closures and travel restrictions were having on our boarding and University students. It was an incredibly stressful time for many students and families. We understand Minister Gee worked hard in seeking exemptions for these students and would like to extend a vote of thanks to him.

F1: New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) work with the Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communication and Regional Education, to request the respective State Governments implement in an expeditious manner, a clear and consistent pathway for the Right of Appeals process under the current National Code for Boarding School Students.”

Explanation:

The National Code for Boarding School Students that was endorsed by National Cabinet on 17 September 2021, was warmly welcomed by ICPA-NSW. We thank Federal Council and all State Councils for the work that was done in this space to achieve national recognition.

Despite the National Code being agreed to by all State Governments, the issue of different rules between the States, followed closely by, no right of appeal and no specific contact person within the health departments, remains a serious issue for members. The Code clearly states a right of appeal process must be in place, however, on countless occasions ICPA-NSW have not been able to ascertain a direct contact in QLD, SA, VIC or ACT.

Whilst some states have implemented a recognition of boarding students, it appears to be a ‘tick box’ recognition that lacks consistency. A designated contact and appeals process as directed in the National Code, needs to be provided as a priority by relevant State Health Authorities.