

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2022 FEDERAL CONFERENCE BOARDING SCHOOLS/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

A1. Lakes District Branch (WA)

CARRIED

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

Explanation:

Members from WA have continued to be impacted by the reduction of the State-provided Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) and any increases to the AIC in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is being eroded annually by the increased fees charged by boarding facility providers.

An increase in the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance would aid in relieving some of the financial liability geographically isolated families incur when educating their children.

A2. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Social Services and all other relevant government departments 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 facilities.”

Explanation:

The cost of boarding in Western Australia continues, on average, to increase by 3% per annum. With the reduction of the WA State Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) by \$785 per child to the 2010 level, families are continually experiencing increasing financial pressure as the cost of boarding continues to rise. 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.

A3. Nyngan Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Social Services increase the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance to more closely reflect the real costs of educating isolated students.”

Explanation:

Boarding school fees continue to rise at a greater rate than the CPI. The Assistance for Isolated Children Boarding Allowance, an equity allowance, needs to be updated constantly to reflect the increasing financial burden being placed on isolated families by the Government to educate their children. There is an underlying problem of an ongoing erosion of this benefit as an allowance, as boarding and tuition fees increase at a greater rate than the allowance. If our Government is serious about providing the

world-best educational opportunities to equip children with the skills they need, this equity allowance needs to remain equitable, giving rural children an education equivalent to their city counterparts.

A6. Wentworth Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

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

Explanation:

AIC is provided to many students for many valid reasons. The number of families receiving AIC continues to increase, yet our number of geographically isolated families continues to decrease.

Geographically isolated students are the minority, yet we are campaigning to increase the payment for all recipients which requires a significantly larger investment by the Government.

Geographically isolated children are unique in that there is no option to access a mainstream school close by. The cost for these families is different. If we can successfully separate the payments, then requesting an increase to AGIC will take a much smaller Government investment and may be much more achievable.

A7. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) brings to the attention of the Federal Government the impacts the new ‘Direct Measure of Income’ funding model may have on geographically isolated students who attend boarding schools when lobbying for increases to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC).”

Explanation:

In 2022, as part of the Quality Schools reforms, all non-government schools completed the transition from the previous area-based socio-economic status (SES) methodology to the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) to determine the capacity to contribute (CTC) for most non-government schools.

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. Adjusted taxable income (ATI) is used to calculate the median income of the parents and guardians of a school community.

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 to bridge the gap in the reduction of funding from the Government, schools will increase their fees. The cost of boarding is already increasing at an alarming rate and certainly in advance of CPI, without these additional charges.

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.

A8. New South Wales State Council (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates the Federal Government to consider boarding school staff as Essential Supervisory Staff at all times.”

Explanation:

With the current pandemic some health authorities have not declared that all the boarding school staff are considered as essential workers. Boarding schools are very different school settings and need more than teachers to be operational. All teachers are considered essential workers, but not all the other staff such as boarding staff, kitchen staff, cleaning staff. Without all these members of staff, boarding schools are unable to operate.

A9. Broken Hill Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates for rural and remote boarding school students and their immediate families to be classified as ‘Essential Travellers’ in emergency management plans.”

Explanation:

We greatly appreciate that State borders are, for now, open, yet families live with the worry that this could change. Many families who had a child studying interstate during the pandemic faced heartbreaking decisions regarding education and these decisions often resulted in long periods of family separation. We would appreciate ICPA (Aust) continuing to work with the relevant authorities to classify students who attend school or university outside their state of residency, and their families, as Essential Travellers under emergency management plans. This would help ensure that students would be able to access their place of education with relative ease. It would also mean that families could transport students to and from school and be able to see their children, avoiding unnecessary and heartbreaking periods of family separation.

A10. Balranald Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that relevant authorities create a standard essential traveller exemption for rural and remote boarding school students and their parents and tertiary students that live in a different State to their educational institution, should border closures occur in the future.”

Explanation:

During 2020/2021 COVID-19 pandemic, many rural and remote boarding and university students and their families were placed under undue stress when State border closures prevented students returning home or back to school or university, preventing them from being able to access their education, and maintain their emotional well-being. Some students were unable to return to school for months, without structured remote learning as other students at the school had returned to face-to-face learning. Others had to undergo 14 day quarantine alone, many more than once. Then there were the ones who were separated from home for up to six months, just to attend school. We are still seeing the mental and educational cost of these experiences today. Late in 2021, a National Code for Boarding School Students was created by the Federal Government, with all States agreeing to adopt the principles of the Code and implement it in each State. Overwhelmingly, few States implemented the Code in such a way that it benefited students and their families, only adding to the stress and uncertainty of travel and education plans. There appeared to be no federal body able to hold the States to account on this. A clear and transparent plan for boarding students and their families in the event of further border closures will allow for informed decision making and greater assurances into the future.

A11. Balranald Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to request the relevant authorities consider the emotional well-being of boarding students when implementing COVID-19 management plans in boarding houses.”

Explanation:

With school returning in 2022 during the Omicron wave of COVID-19, State Governments again gave differing guidelines to boarding houses and hostels to accommodate and care for students upon return.

Many boarders commenced boarding with a 'drop off' where parents were not allowed on school site and students were unable to leave school premises for any reason, including medical appointments. Many of these boarders share classes with day students who return home daily with freedoms to come and go from school.

In many cases, it would seem boarding students are being isolated on school grounds to avoid isolation in the future. This could become detrimental to the emotional and social wellbeing of students if it is to continue for prolonged periods of time, as well as effecting their ability to perform academically.

The lack of consistency around these requirements has led to confusion and stress for many families and children. Some state health authorities have defined all boarding students within a boarding institution as close contacts of each other, while others have different rules. Some are allowed to have students isolate within the boarding house, while others have been told they cannot do this, and any child who is unwell, deemed a close contact, or positive with COVID-19 must be collected immediately. This obviously presents logistical problems with many families unable to make a return trip from home to school safely without needing to stay overnight along the way due to distance, but unable to do so with a student with COVID-19. These scenarios present constant concern and worry for boarding staff, students and family, causing building stress and worry for all involved, while the wider community returns to a greater sense of normal while living with COVID-19.

The gap is widening for the rural and remote students accessing education through boarding school. With ICPA (Aust) continuing to advocate for these students, their wellbeing can be at the forefront of the relevant authorities.

S1. Bollon Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continue to raise awareness directly with Boarding Schools and the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) about the important role they play in affordability and access to education for geographically isolated (GI) children."

Explanation:

Members are very grateful for the financial support which many Boarding schools and Government provide to GI families. Without this assistance opportunities for our children would be much more limited. Bollon Branch would like to see ICPA (Aust) continue working with ABSA and Boarding Schools directly to highlight the unique challenges faced by our GI families. It is important that schools continue to contribute to keeping education affordable and within reach.