

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2022 FEDERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

Internet Access

A12. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

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

Explanation:

We acknowledge and thank ICPA (Aust) and the Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia for their continuous and effective lobbying of the Federal Government, Telstra, nbn and other providers on internet issues in the bush. In particular, the negotiations with nbn to provide dedicated ports for education is an important breakthrough. The prioritisation of installations required for education is paramount. Many remote families are using the internet provided by the family business or are having to pay for it themselves if educational internet data is not part of their employment package. This includes tertiary and training students, small rural schools and boarding students who've returned home for a period of time.

While expected data speeds, plan sizes and service reliability are continually improving, our members have concerns about the data allocations in plans being heavily loaded towards unreasonable off-peak times. The Mb/\$ continues to fall extremely short of those available to our urban counterparts, thus ensuring maintenance of the internet divide between regional and urban areas.

A13. Lakes District Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate Government and telecommunications providers to ensure all geographically isolated students have appropriate and affordable internet access.”

Explanation:

We acknowledge the work ICPA (Aust) has undertaken in raising concerns regarding communication services across rural, regional and remote Australia for the purpose of educating students.

Members still feel disadvantaged and left behind in the ever-changing world of technology and the services available to them. Data speeds, plan sizes and service reliability are frequently improving, though our members have concerns about the affordability, data allocations in plans, reduced connection and additional expenses incurred when they exceed their plan limits.

With many of our members continuing to have students at home in COVID-19 isolation and those who educate full time from home undertaking their education via remote learning, it remains apparent that the ratio of Mb/\$ between rural and remote areas of Australia and urban areas is significantly higher thus further heightening the internet divide.

A14. Western Australia State Council (WA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) seeks an assurance from nbn that the installation of a Sky Muster service and its hardware will continue at no cost to rural and remote student households, to ensure affordable access to education for geographically isolated students.”

Explanation:

Currently, all equipment and a standard installation are provided free of charge to consumers and is covered by the nbn. Should this situation change in the future, we would like an assurance from nbn that the standard installation remains free of charge for geographically isolated students. As a result of COVID-19 and online learning, a greater number of members have installed a Sky Muster service. There are however members who are yet to install a Sky Muster service due to the lack of requirement for large data allowances. We want to ensure that any future uptake of a Sky Muster service is affordable for parents of rural and remote students.

A15. Mount Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to satellite internet providers to develop an affordable product (hardware and data packages) that can be accessed for the delivery of education by families who live and work in rural and remote areas for the majority of the school year away from a permanent place of residence.”

Explanation:

Following the successful Sky Muster satellite mobility trial conducted by nbn with the help of participating ICPA families in 2021, it has been shown that transportable satellite internet kits can be set up by families and provide a quality connection to help families who work and live in remote camps and areas of Australia and move regularly due to their work. These units help families access schooling and other data needs. In December 2021, Retail Service Providers launched the newly developed transportable satellite internet products to customers. However, the cost of these units is prohibitive for the average rural and remote family with equipment cost in excess of \$25,000 to purchase and the ongoing data costs in ranges of \$500-1000 per month. ICPA (Aust) has been requesting transportable internet systems for families requiring access to online schooling in remote areas for a number of years and this has now been successfully developed. It is essential that these units be offered at a reasonable cost to families who will rely on them for their children’s education. With Distance Education in all States being delivered mainly online, students miss major sections of their study if they do not have internet, and for those families in remote camps, which move regularly from place to place, transportable satellite units are the only means for their children to keep up with their schoolwork. We ask ICPA (Aust) to encourage RSP’s to offer an affordable transportable internet solution for families who live and work remotely and depend on internet for the education of their children.

Example: A family in our branch run a fencing contractor business and they move from one remote area to another as they complete each job and move on to the next - often being in far northwest Queensland or the Northern Territory, many kilometres from any homestead or internet source. In order for their children to have internet to access the online components and work for their Distance Education lessons, the family has recently signed up for a transportable internet system with a purchase cost of over \$30,000 and a monthly data plan of \$600 – just so their children can have access to the same schooling opportunities as other distance education students.

A16. Mount Isa Branch of the Air (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Federal Government for a subsidy, or other assistance, to reduce the cost of satellite internet (both hardware and data packages) to make these services more affordable to families who rely on transportable satellite internet solutions for the delivery of their

children's education due to living and working in rural and remote areas for the majority of the school year away from a permanent place of residence."

Explanation:

There are a number of families across Australia who live and work in remote areas out in camps (e.g., stock camps, fencing camps, earthmoving businesses) or other situations away from permanent residences during 'the season'. These families often have their children with them and undertake schooling via Schools of Distance Education or Schools of the Air.

The bulk of distance education schooling is now done online, and it is essential for students studying through distance education to have good internet service. Acquiring internet is extremely difficult for families who move from remote area to other remote areas regularly due to the nature of the work they do.

Transportable satellite internet units have recently been developed and are now offered by a few Retail Service Providers (RSPs); however, the cost of these units is extremely high for the average family trying to connect internet for schooling purposes. We've given the example in another motion, where a member family in our branch has recently set up one of these transportable internet products at a cost of over \$30,000 and a monthly plan of \$600.

There are currently no subsidies, grants or assistance to help with the costs of these transportable units for schooling. For customers who do live in a permanent dwelling, the Sky Muster hardware that satellite internet customers have installed in their homes comes at no cost thanks to assistance from the Government.

We ask that families, who move regularly due to their type of work in geographically isolated areas and who are living in some of the more remote areas of our country during the school year, also be given some form of assistance by the Government to set up transportable internet so that their children can access their education without a huge financial burden being placed on their family.

A17. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the relevant ministers and departments to ensure that internet costs for working, travelling families of geographically isolated children enrolled in distance education have access to subsidised, transportable satellite internet and all associated costs involved with purchasing these kits are also subsidised."

Explanation:

There are currently minimal kits and internet plans available in Australia for families who frequently travel and move due to work commitments. The kits that are available at present, which is only ONE, cost in excess of \$18,000 and internet plans start from \$300 per month.

A18. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate to satellite internet providers to develop an affordable product that travelling families can access for the delivery of education."

Explanation:

Currently for travelling/working families, there is only one satellite internet company that caters for frequently moving working teams and as this is the only option, they can and do charge high amounts of money for their service as there is no other option in Australia at present.

Mobile Coverage/Service

A19. Kindon Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications, Minister for Education and relevant bodies, for rural and remote schools to continue to be a priority in future Mobile Black Spot Program rounds and that mobile coverage solutions, when implemented, work well and extend beyond school grounds.”

Explanation:

This motion was tabled at the 2021 ICPA Federal Conference in Longreach and unfortunately mobile reception in our small school area is even worse than it was last year. The mobile reception cuts from 3G to 4G, the landline has poor connectivity and the satellite phone can only pick up signal outside in the middle of the grassed area which means that the lack of mobile coverage is detrimental to all those on the school grounds.

As mentioned last year, our small school is located along the busy Gore Highway, Queensland in an area with inconsistent to no mobile coverage. The school community, like others in similar situations, has purchased and put in their own booster to enable some mobile coverage at the school to meet the broadband needs of the students and staff. However, there are numerous interruptions to the school day and staff's home life due to people coming onto the school grounds to use the school's mobile signal, which the school is providing themselves.

It is essential that small rural schools are considered priorities for mobile coverage under future Mobile Black Spot Program rounds and that these services once installed work adequately and provide coverage beyond the school premises.

This was the explanation to the motion last year which we have included for more background information:

Rural and remote schools right across Australia are the hub for many communities and often the first port of call in many situations. They are the place that people gather too when an emergency happens in a district. Some schools are so isolated that they are the desired place to house defibrillator machines as they are the 'go-to' point during a crisis. While these schools have the task of overseeing such important life saving devices, many do not have the mobile service to ensure adequate medical advice is received in such an emergency.

With minimal or no mobile coverage for areas outside of some schools they find themselves often in situations where motorists come in for help asking to use the school phone which pulls teaching staff away from classrooms to identify and record who is on school property or even on-site Principals in adjacent residences woken at all hours with demands for assistance. To entice and maintain valuable school staff to remote small schools is difficult. It is imperative that they are provided with not only a safe and secure workplace but also for privacy in their home.

Some schools are going to the extraordinary length of purchasing their own mobile booster hardware out of their school or P & C funds to ensure that mobile service is available on the school grounds. However, this privately supplied coverage usually does not extend beyond the school fence. Communities and those travelling past these schools with private signal boosters soon learn that they can access some limited service at the school. In attempting to get connection from the mobile boosters at rural schools, people are entering school grounds in order to make calls. Schools usually require records of who is on school grounds, contact details etc and also ensuring the purpose of being on the grounds is known. Handling extra visitors who merely want to use phone service uses up

valuable time for teachers and staff. The interruption to school routine could be minimised if rural schools had more general mobile coverage. The footprint for this coverage needs to extend beyond the school perimeter and sufficient infrastructure needs to be in place to ensure this can happen.

Rural and remote schools need to continue to be considered as priority for mobile coverage under future Mobile Black Spot Program rollouts and ensure that when mobile coverage is installed the coverage reaches outside school grounds.

A20. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Communications and telecommunication providers, to investigate the reliability and capacity of backup power on mobile towers to ensure a consistent and uninterrupted delivery of educational programs to geographically isolated children and rural and remote schools.”

Explanation:

The issue of the reliability of the backup battery on mobile towers during extended power outages is widely known. There needs to be a better system of identifying this failure and replacement of expired batteries. We request that ICPA (Aust) continues to raise this issue when in meetings with telecommunication providers highlighting that without a reliable mobile and communications network, student learning is being impacted.

Telephone

A21. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Communications to ensure the maintenance of landline services in rural and remote areas, until another means of reliable, affordable and appropriate voice service is available.”

Explanation:

The Universal Service Guarantee (USG) should remain on landline telephony services for those living outside of mobile coverage areas and these landline services should be maintained and upgraded, as necessary.

Currently there are ICPA members who rely upon their landline as their only means of reliable and affordable voice service due to poor mobile coverage, so it is imperative that the landlines are retained and maintained.

ICPA (WA) acknowledges the advocacy by ICPA (Aust) for families living in rural and remote parts of Australia who require two forms of communications, due to the nature of where they live, i.e. phone/voice and internet/data/voice - each as a separate service not solely relying on the same mode of delivery and thus ensuring if one service fails the other is still available.

A22. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Minister for Communications to ensure fault restoration and entitlements for geographically isolated students and their families occur within the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) Standards.”

Explanation:

The CSG Standards for repairs in remote service locations is 3 full working days after reporting. It has been acknowledged by Telstra that the existing copper landline service is old technology and sometimes the sourcing of parts can be difficult. ICPA (WA) acknowledges that if eligible, there are

CSG financial entitlements when repairs cannot be completed within the CSG Standards. However, the timely repair of the service is of great importance to members, especially for those without an alternative voice service, and the focus needs to remain on meeting the CSG Standards.

A23. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies Australia Post and relevant government departments to ensure that geographically isolated distance education school materials are classified as essential mail and as such, their delivery is prioritised during mail disruptions, such as a natural disaster.”

Explanation:

In January 2022, flood waters between Glendambo and Coober Pedy SA caused serious damage to both the Stuart Highway and North/South Railway line which made both the road and rail impassable for weeks. During this period of road and rail closures Australia Post proceeded to process 'express post' mail to the Northern Territory but held all other mail packages in Adelaide until the railway was repaired and running again. Many families across the Northern Territory were left without access to their mail for almost three months. Due to it being the start of the school year this also meant home schoolrooms went without vital education resources and supplies. Australia Post's delivery procedures SHOULD BE reviewed to ensure all ESSENTIAL mail is delivered in a timely manner during natural disasters no matter where people reside.