

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2021 FEDERAL CONFERENCE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

Early Learning

A30. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobby the relevant ministers for funding to start a new early childhood service in rural and remote Australia where there are currently none available for pre-school aged children."

Explanation:

For over 15 years Central Australia has been without a mobile playgroup that services all members of the community in geographically isolated areas. Alice Springs have been advocating now for several years for the expansion of KICKS that the Katherine region has access to or having the opportunity to start up a similar programme.

A31. CONJOINED MOTION presented by:

CARRIED

Katherine Branch (NT), Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA), North East Branch (SA), WA State Council (WA), Qld State Council (Qld).

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government for geographically isolated pre-compulsory school students enrolled in a registered distance education program to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance where they meet other eligibility criteria."

Explanation Katherine Branch (NT):

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program. From the website www.education.gov.au "The Australian Government is providing funding certainty for preschool, having committed \$453.1 million in the 2019-20 Budget to extend the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education until the end of 2020 ... This funding ensures that every child will continue to have access to a quality preschool program for 600 hours (15 hours a week) in the year before school. Universal Access [has] a focus on participation by Indigenous children, vulnerable and disadvantaged children in a range of settings in order to meet the needs of working families, and will be accessible to all Australian children, regardless of their location."

If that was actually what was happening in rural and remote areas, this motion would be unnecessary!

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 2019) has 12 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.

Explanation Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA):

Under the current guidelines, part time distance education students are ineligible for the Distance Education (DE) component of the AIC allowance, which means families enrolled in the 4-year-old programme must bear the costs of maintaining and setting up the classroom in that first year of schooling. Our research has shown that this is a costly impost on families.

The AIC DE allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the schoolroom. The schoolroom must be set up and maintained the day the child begins their education. Full-time or part time, the child needs a schoolroom.

Explanation Western Australia State Council (WA):

The AIC Distance Education (DE) Allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the school room. Currently, pre-compulsory distance education students are ineligible, therefore families enrolled in these programs must bear the costs.

Most early learning programs require significantly more learning materials than that of older students studying at primary levels, with families having to provide these learning resources for students. If families received this allowance, it would help alleviate the cost of the provision of the resources.

The majority of children who are enrolled in a pre-compulsory program are found to have better educational outcomes in later years by forming these important foundations early on. Every child needs and deserves a school room.

Explanation Queensland State Council (Qld):

Most 3-4-year-old children across the country are enrolled in some form of pre-school education, be it Kindergarten, Reception or Prep. For those families who are geographically isolated the costs associated with Distance Education begin in this year of pre-formal education, including resourcing and internet connectivity. Access to the AIC Distance Education allowance should be available to these families from the outset.

Explanation North East Branch (SA):

Currently, 3 and 4-year-old students studying Kindergarten via distance education are ineligible to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance. If families received this allowance, it would alleviate some of the costs of providing an educational experience for their children. The majority of children who are enrolled in a distance education Kindergarten/pre-school program are found to have better educational outcomes in later years, by forming these important foundations early in their educational journey.

Childcare

A32. Kimberley Air Branch (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to review the In Home Care (IHC) Scheme to make better provision for geographically isolated families to access affordable childcare.”

Explanation:

The current In Home Care Scheme does not adequately meet the unique circumstances of geographically isolated families. The criteria in the guidelines for accessing the scheme need to include the specific circumstances that come with accessing childcare in remote locations.

The current membership fees of belonging to an IHC service are prohibitive and do not take into account that families also need to provide board and lodging for the educator who because of the remoteness of the family need to live on location.

A33. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to impress upon the Ministers for the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the need to prioritise a review of the In Home Care program, to improve its ability to suitably deliver a child care program for rural and remote families.”

Explanation:

In Home Care is the only subsidised government child care program available to geographically isolated families who cannot access mainstream child care. As it stands, the design of the program is not a ‘good fit’ for families living and working in remote areas.

We believe a review, with input from key stakeholders including ICPA federal and states, will highlight the improvements necessary to ensure this vital program continues to support rural and remote families in their workforce participation and child care requirements.

Importantly, we are not asking for an increase in funding, rather a review of policies which currently restrict families’ ability to recruit and retain skilled educators in remote areas.

A34. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) request the Minister for Education to 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 children from more than one family in these circumstances 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.

Example 2: A guy 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 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.

Early Childhood Education and Care – Other

A35. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government to implement a nationally recognised and administered Working with Children Card (WWCC)."

Explanation:

WA State Council fully support the implementation of a nationally administered police clearance, specifically for children and thank Federal Council for their continued lobbying on this issue.

Currently a person who wishes to obtain a WWCC for work purposes, has their application checked nationally, then the process is administered at a state level. When employees who already hold a WWCC in one state move interstate, they are expected to reapply for a WWCC in the new state they are applying for employment in. This process causes lengthy delays of up to eight weeks in employing staff, causing disruptions to families and students' education.

A36. Blackall Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the relevant departments within the Federal Government and supports each State ICPA organisation with their lobbying, to implement a nationally recognised and administered Working with Children Check (WWCC), to enhance the safety for students and accessibility to interstate employees, for rural and remote families."

Explanation:

The Working with Children Check or WWCC was proposed in 2000, with each state and territory's scheme operating independently of each other. Its purpose is conducting background checks for people seeking to engage in child-related work. These checks aim to prevent people from working or volunteering with children if records indicate that they may pose an unacceptable level of risk to children. While the check is currently conducted on a state level, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2015 has called for the transition to a nationwide check.

There is a real impediment to rural and remote families endeavouring to engage employees, working with their children from interstate, as the checks do not always pick up crimes committed in other

states. In addition, the hold up when a prospective employee, from interstate, does not have that relative WWCC and the new ruling that no one may commence work until their state relative paperwork is sighted, can mean a lengthy delay to the commencement of employment.

Some criticism of the WWCC system followed a report that a man being investigated by counter-terrorism authorities, who had previously been involved in a standoff with police at gunpoint in which he threatened them with a sword, continued to be authorised to work with children. Nesha Oneil Hutchinson, President of Australian Childcare Alliance NSW stated that the Working With Children Check system contained serious flaws where unless an individual was convicted of a crime against a child, they may still pass the check. This would allow individuals convicted of crimes against adults to be allowed to work with children. Furthermore, the state-based system would possibly allow someone committed of a crime against a child in another state to receive the check as well.

Given this and the recommendations by the Royal Commission we feel that the nationwide system should be expedited.

S5. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for assistance for Approved Providers to offer incentives to recruit and retain qualified Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote areas.”

Explanation:

50% of Educators working at any one time in Early Childhood Education and Care services are required to hold a Diploma qualification (or be actively working towards a Diploma qualification). Services are also required to engage at least one Early Childhood Teacher who holds a tertiary level Early Childhood Teaching bachelor's degree.

The recruitment of qualified staff is a constant barrier in regional and remote areas to the delivery of professional and meaningful Early Childhood Education. The lack of availability of qualified people is a major contributing factor. Incentive programs are becoming not only popular but necessary to engage qualified Educators from larger towns and cities. For many not-for-profit services, resources are extremely limited and the ability to offer competitive incentives is non-existent.

If not meeting the qualified Educator ratio, services are not able to operate. Services are in breach of legislation and the Approved Provider is liable for a \$50000 fine. In which case, service delivery is affected due to service closures. Children are not able to attend, and they miss the opportunity to participate in vital preschool programs.

Increased financial assistance coupled with incentive programs for skilled employees for rural and remote services would allow Approved Providers to attract and retain qualified Early Childhood Educators and Teachers. Services will then have the capacity to support children to meet necessary Early Childhood outcomes. The risk for rural and remote services if this is not achieved is that children will be at a disadvantage to other children through compromised delivery of Early Childhood Education and Care.

S6. Hay Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant ministers for funding amounts for Mobile Preschools to be reflective of individual service delivery models in rural and remote areas.”

Explanation:

Current funding for Mobile Preschools is grossly inadequate. There are no reviews within the 3-year funding period so when a service increases delivery (extra days at existing venues or extra venues) within that funding period, the Approved Provider must fund the additional services with existing funding or cash reserves. This affects the long-term sustainability of services. For example: At the start of 2021 HCS increased 3 of their venues from fortnightly to weekly. HCS is also soon to add Ivanhoe (which is located 210km North of Hay) as a venue. HCS receives no extra funding to deliver these additional services and must find ways to fund them with existing funds.

New Mobile funding model is expected to roll out in July 2021 and although there has been sector consultation, there has been no confirmation of funding models. This leaves services in doubt about service delivery capacity and unable to plan for delivery of services.

DET is pushing for 15hrs of preschool per week per child. For many Mobile Preschools this is not possible. For example: Currently children who attend HCS Mobile can access 6 hrs per week. HCS currently service 6 (soon to be 7) different communities per week and without additional secure funding, don't have the resources to increase those venues to a second day per week.

S7. Cunnamulla Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobby the relevant Federal Ministers and departments to immediately prioritise re-establishing early childhood educational programs in recognised highly vulnerable rural and remote locations."

Explanation:

There are 14 families including 22 children wanting to attend educational services – 1 day-care centre and playgroup 1 day per week that started in May

- 57% of children start school in the Cunnamulla district developmentally vulnerable
- The Early childhood education and Care department have been active in Cunnamulla since July last year and no significant action or change has occurred
- Results from the Australian Early Developmental Census have deteriorated since 2009 and Cunnamulla is one of 5 locations which are going backwards
- Paroo Shire has been nominated as a QLD state early childhood priority
- The Paroo Contact Children's Mobile is currently unfunded but has to immediately recruit staff, a vehicle and trailer currently based in Cunnamulla, and extensive early childhood resources/equipment to offer regular scheduled supported playgroups (Eulo, Cunnamulla, Noorara, Quilpie and Bulloo shires).

S8. Cunnamulla Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That the ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the relevant Federal Ministers and Departments to increase training opportunities and employment incentives in order to enable local childcare providers in rural and remote regions to attract and retain staff members to subsequently increase capacity for children to attend."

Explanation:

Currently in the shire there are more than 100 children under the age of 8

- The only childcare facility has a waiting list of more than 30
- Many of these children on the waiting list are children of professionals who are unable to perform their work in essential service due to the lack of available childcare - the childcare centre is unable to take more children on due to their lack of staff.