

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2022 FEDERAL CONFERENCE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PORTFOLIO MOTIONS

Early Learning

A32. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“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:

The AIC Distance Education (DE) Allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the schoolroom. Currently, part-time distance education students are ineligible, therefore families enrolled in pre-compulsory 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 learning resources for these students. If families received this allowance, it would assist with the cost of suitable learning 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. Full-time or part-time, every child needs a schoolroom.

A33. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate the Federal Government for the AIC Distance Education Allowance to be extended to include all geographically isolated pre-school students enrolled in a distance education program.”

Explanation:

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/universal-access-early-childhood-education “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 2022) has 16 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.

A34. Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government for all pre-compulsory students, who are enrolled in a distance education program, to be granted the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance."

Explanation:

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.

Childcare

A35. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to review the In Home Care (IHC) Scheme to provide 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 scope of the guidelines when accessing this scheme needs the flexibility to address the varying situations and differences that are associated with accessing childcare in remote locations.

A36. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) continues to impress upon the Minister for Education and the Minister for Early Childhood Education, the need to prioritise a review of the In Home Care (IHC) program, to improve its ability to suitably deliver a child care program for rural and remote families."

Explanation:

We appreciate that work is 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.

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.

A37. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Education amend the In Home Care (IHC) 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 would solve 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 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.

A38. Westmar-Inglestone Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies relevant authorities to ensure that graduates with a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education, or equivalent, who are less than the age of 18 years are eligible for positions of employment through the In Home Care (IHC) program, regardless of their age, but rather commensurate with their education qualifications.”

Explanation:

Students in rural and remote areas who attain their early childhood qualifications but who do not meet the 18 year old age requirement to work through the In Home Care program are disadvantaged from taking positions. This IHC criteria prevents highly educated and qualified young people from taking positions of employment. This in turn disadvantages families in need of early childhood education and care options, especially in rural and remote areas.

Case Study:

A current Year 10 student commenced a Cert III in early childhood education and care and will be working within a school-based traineeship in a kindergarten setting for the duration of her studies. She was able to commence the Cert III in Year 10 at high school as she had clear career aspirations to work within a rural setting as an in-home educator or carer. This student will not be 18 years old for approximately six months after the completion of Year 12, thus meaning she will be ineligible to obtain an IHC position and be disadvantaged in pursuing her career for this period of time.

A39. Capricornia Branch of the Air (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant government departments to immediately introduce guidelines to regulate the service fees that are charged to families by In Home Care (IHC) Service Providers.”

Explanation:

Currently there are no guidelines in regards to how much fees can be charged to a family by an IHC Service Provider.

It is unconscionable that the In Home Care Service Providers can charge any given amount of fees to a family with no regulation. Potentially, this means that the parent is left with a bigger out of pocket expense each week. Given that there are no guidelines for Service Providers to set their fees by, this can allow services to charge exorbitant fees which can mean families requiring crucial care for their children may not be able to afford to access necessary care.

A40. Queensland State Council (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant government departments to immediately introduce guidelines to regulate the service fees that are deducted from educator's pays/wages by In Home Care support agencies.”

Explanation:

Currently there are no guidelines in regards to the fees that can be deducted from an educator's fortnightly payment. CCS is given to families to help pay for having their child in either a day-care facility or having an educator through In Home Care (IHC). It is unconscionable that the In Home Care support agencies can deduct any given amount of CCS money from the educator's payment. Potentially, this widens the gap payment and means that the parent is left with a bigger out of pocket expense each week. CCS is there to benefit the child not the IHC support agency. Additionally, some IHC agencies have recently chosen to use eHarmony software to keep

track of educator's hours worked and payments. eHarmony also attracts an additional fee for which is, in many cases, being charged to the educators by IHC support agencies. Given this is a business-based choice made by the IHC agency, this fee should be paid for by the IHC agency, not passed onto the educator to be deducted from their payment each fortnight.

A41. Queensland State Council (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the relevant government departments to undertake a review of the current service fees that are being charged to educators by In Home Care (IHC) support agencies.”

Explanation:

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is a payment from the Australian Government that is designed to assist parents with the cost of childcare. In the recent years, fees that are being deducted from educator's fortnightly pays are increasing rapidly. In 2021 alone one particular IHC Service Provider increased their fees three times in a nine month period without any warning to the educator. The fees that are deducted from an educator's pay by the agency eat into the CCS funds that are allocated to the families to subsidise the cost of caring for their children. Making the out-of-pocket costs for families greater through unregulated and unrestricted fees/charges wrought by IHC service providers.

Early Childhood Education and Care – Other

A42. Wentworth Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Early Childhood Education review pay rates and incentives for Early Childhood workers in rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

For many years Education Departments have been aware of the need to provide pay and incentives to attract and keep teaching staff in rural and remote locations. We now need the same attention paid to attracting and retaining staff in the Early Childhood sector.

We are losing university trained early childhood educators to the school system where the pay and conditions far outweigh that of long day care centres, yet we know how important those early years are. These educators are with our children during their years of greatest development, yet we are not prepared to pay or reward them accordingly.

In very remote areas, access to housing or subsidised housing can mean the difference between having an operational centre or not. Rural and remote areas need assistance to attract educators because our children deserve a ‘good start’ too.

A43. Bourke Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the relevant Federal Ministers for funding to be sought to address Early Childhood Teacher pay parity between teachers working at an Early Childhood Education and Care centre and a teacher working in early childhood education in a school.”

Explanation:

Pay parity of Early Childhood Teachers is a significant issue. An Early Childhood Teacher completes a four year degree course. If they elect to work in the public school system in a rural and remote location, the additional benefits they would get compared to working as an Early Childhood Teacher would include:

- Additional 7 weeks of annual leave (approx. \$10,000pa)
- Significantly shorter contact hours per week
- Approx. \$20,000-\$30,000 additional salary

- Professional mentoring by other teachers
- Structured Professional Development programs (\$10,000 pa)
- Access to teacher housing (at a 70% discount on market rates in Bourke) (\$10,000 pa).

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.

A44. Cunnamulla Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Early Childhood Education and the Minister for Education to immediately prioritise re-establishing early childhood educational programs in recognised highly vulnerable rural and remote locations.”

Explanation:

We would first like to acknowledge the work that Bush Kids have done in providing necessary health services and support in our kindy and wider community.

However, it is an ongoing issue that playgroups and other early childhood programs are not being provided and sustained in our communities.

- 2021 AEDC data indicates that 47% of children in Cunnamulla & surrounds start school developmentally vulnerable.
- Cunnamulla is still one of 5 locations going backwards and is recognised as a QLD state early childhood priority with ECEC launching the Connect 4 Children strategy in Cunnamulla in 2021. Through the Connect 4 Children strategy, communities in Queensland are developing unique plans to help improve the wellbeing of children prior to school (from birth to 5 years old). Each Birth to five plan is created locally by the people who are invested in, and care deeply about, the future of that community and its children.
- There has been zero contact from ECEC in community in the last 8 months. Previous contact came to 1 meeting in Dec 2021.
- Keeping Early Years in the Spotlight was developed through the Cunnamulla P-12 State School, with the support of all other education providers in the Paroo Shire, to support early childhood programs through the employment of an early childhood teacher 2 days per week. However, this position has remained unfilled since July 2021, only recently being filled at the end of July 2022.
- The Paroo Contact Children’s Mobile, including a fully equipped Toyota Landcruiser utility and trailer, remain idle in Cunnamulla unfunded.
- PCCM needs sustainable support and funding to immediately recruit staff to supply regular mobile playgroups to Eulo, Cunnamulla, Wyandra, Quilpie and Thargomindah.

Noorama is a small community 100kms outside of Cunnamulla who are currently running their own playgroups with volunteers and have been actively searching for funding to provide a qualified educator. With a total membership of 10 core families and 20 children.

The main issues this playgroup hopes to address include:

- Access to quality educators that can help parents learn how to interact with their children at home and identify developmental needs. If required, they could assist with pathways to support services.
- Ensure funding and services are reaching remote children
- Provide socialisation, education, and support for both parents and children.
- Prepare families and facilities/services for Distance Education, which will be required in the near future.

A45. South Australia State Council (SA)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates the Minister for Early Childhood Education 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) provide 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 Childcare Subsidy Scheme (CCS) can only be received when a child is enrolled through a centre-based childcare facility or through the In Home Care (IHC) scheme which is currently unavailable for RICE member families due to provider limitations within South Australia.

The cost to access childcare without the CCS is an unaffordable option, leaving families to try 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 family or friends who could step in. Living on a remote cattle station 1000km from Adelaide makes asking your mum, sister or best friend to step in and help for the day unpractical and often impossible.

With the recent report that indicated 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, just finding a facility, let alone accessing it, is a difficult undertaking in itself. The Outback Childcare service needs to be made affordable for families as well as being viable for RICE to manage and administer.

If the criteria for eligibility for the CCS was to consider the needs of rural and remote families, therefore allowing them to access childcare through the IHC program, then the RICE based Outback Childcare and similar services would become more affordable and accessible for families in times of need.

A46. Western Australia Council State (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 supports the implementation of a nationally administered police clearance, specifically for children. Employees who move across State borders are required to reapply for a WWCC when applying for employment in a new State. This process can result in lengthy delays when employing staff of up to eight weeks, causing disruptions to students and families. Currently, a person who wishes to obtain a WWCC for work purposes is checked nationally, which is then administered at a State level.