



2025 Boarding/Hostels/Second Home February Report

Amber Driver

Update from 2025 February Delegations to Canberra

After the 2024 Federal Conference, 14 Boarding Motions were supported and carried in this Boarding Portfolio.

It is always nice to hear good news and every little bit helps, we'll acknowledge the small wins and continue to work diligently to educate our city cousins, Ministers and Senators, Department Staff and everyone else that will meet with us to hear about the trials and tribulations our rural, remote and geographically isolated children face when accessing education. We (the rural and remote families) are the minority; however, it is our right as Australian citizens to have equity of access to education. And that is the fuel that keeps the volunteer miles & minutes we accumulate burning.

We will celebrate the successes and quietly work harder when we meet opposition. So, let us have a look at some of the Motion updates within the Boarding Portfolio and celebrate one of those wins we have managed to achieve since our last update... The Boarding Portfolio have crossed a motion off our 'to do list.'

Motions - Completed

S1 (2024) "That ICPA (Aust) requests that Services Australia reviews the "No reasonable access to school" conditions to better cater for travelling families whose core business is located in geographically Isolated areas."

Motions - Ongoing

A1, A2, A3 (2024) Access to Compulsory Education needs to be affordable and adequately address the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by rural and remote families to access equitable educational opportunities for their children. The Federal Council have chosen to hone in on this motion as you, our members, have been requesting this change for many, many years.

- Requesting that the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) be restored to cover 55% of the average cost of boarding (as was its intent when implemented in the 1970's) and in the interim, an urgent increase to the AIC Boarding Allowance of at least \$4000 to the BBA occur.
- Requesting alignment of the Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) to the Consumer Price Index: Education sub index to assist geographically isolated students' access to boarding school and truly reflect the costs of accessing education.

Senator the Hon [Matt Canavan](#) supplied ICPA with the policy costings for policy updates to the AIC as requested in 2023 (as published on the Parliamentary Budget Office website at the time) and following our face to face meeting (Feb 2025) has confirmed that a request has been sent asking for updated costings based on an increase of the boarding allowance to \$4000.

Stay tuned.

A4 (2024) Review and Amend Rule 3 in the [application](#) for Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) to remove the continuing requirement once the initial requirement has been met.

In September 2024 I wrote to the Minister for Social Services, Minister for Education and the Assistant Minister for Education to outline the reason we have requested an amendment to [Rule 3](#). Here is an excerpt from the letter.

... "In its current form, the existing criteria for eligibility for funding under Rule 3, no allowance is made for the fluctuating state of rural road conditions or rural access routes. The requirement to reapply during each climatic event causes undue hardship on applicants who need the predictability of funding to make decisions as to schooling. Unpredictable road conditions in rural and remote Australia provide a level of uncertainty and impact ability for families in seeking educational equity for their children"....

In October 2024, I received a letter from Amanda Rishworth MP with an update on this motion:

"Where the student's attendance at school is no longer affected for at least 20 school days in a year, AIC payments under Rule 3 and no longer payable. Where a pattern of disruption is likely to consistently prevent access for at least 20 days, AIC can be paid in recognition of historical disruptions. For example, historical weather reports showing impassable roads for at least 20 school days would satisfy AIC evidence requirements under Rule 3"

Despite our best efforts to articulate the members reasons for supporting this motion, we are falling short on explaining the big picture. Members need to provide individual case studies to underpin 'our ask' and clearly explain the hardship Rule 3 places on families.

If you are compelled to provide impact statements regarding this motion or want to read the letters in full, please contact me.

A7 (2024) Create an option for the [Assistance for Isolated Children](#) (AIC) payments to be made in either 3 or 4 instalments per year as per the individual needs of the Family.

During the February 2025 delegations in Canberra, ICPA Federal Councilors; Anna, Jenn, Melissa and I met with several representatives from ABSTUDY, Assistance for Isolated Children, Services Australia, DSS Student Concessions and Payments, Payments Team AIC and ABSTUDY.

They have been working on this issue since August 2024 and robust investigations have been ongoing to how the system can be upgraded to encompass this change. If you have an example of how this change would benefit you, please contact me.

A9, A10, A11 (2024) Continue and expand the 'Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program' (CRSP) pilot.

A two-page letter was sent to the Prime Minister of Australia on 23 September 2024 outlining a broad range of feedback from Members concerning the CRSP pilot.

I drew attention to the [intended outcomes](#) of the program (as outlined on the Department of Education website) and also outlined 2 Key recommendations:

- 1) *That the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program continues beyond the Pilot.*
- 2) *That the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program Pilot be expanded to include all eligible candidates who apply"*

Currently, the CRSP pilot is being reviewed. A team of Federal Councilors met with the Department of Education during our week in Canberra and were advised that this program was not offered in 2025. Once the review is complete, a decision will be made if and how the CRSP will be delivered in the future and if any changes will be made to the funding, number of scholarships and criteria.

S2 (2024) Exemption of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) on accommodation provided by Boarding Schools who wish to assist essential “live in” boarding school staff.

Together with the help of ABSA and ICPA Members, I have been able to compile a comprehensive data set and support for this motion. Thank you to the many boarding facilities and boarding families across Australia have shared data regarding the effects and the FBT placed on accommodation provided by boarding schools and the actual costs of boarding families are faced with.

I have been able to send a robust and comprehensive letter to Prime Minister Albanese and many other Senators and Ministers to outline why it is so important to have this issue solved.

Two key recommendations have been outlined and submitted:

- 1) *The Federal Government support and advise the Treasury to **change the policy** on Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) to provide an exemption for schools with boarding facilities for essential boarding school staff required to live on site to perform their duty of care for residential students in metropolitan boardings institutions.*
- 2) *The Treasury **enable all Boarding Facilities** who have students enrolled from rural and remote areas (identified through the Assistance for Isolated Children, AIC) to **require** that they are **exempt from FBT** under the existing guidelines: [58ZC Exempt Benefits - Remote Area Housing Benefits](#) (on-campus accommodation)”*

We have the attention of the Government, the support of Boarding Schools, ABSA and ICPA members, Federal Council are exploring options on how to progress this topic to deliver a favourable outcome for all.

We were heavily supported by over a dozen Senators and Ministers during our February 2025 Delegations. Following our face-to-face meeting, Senator [Gerard Rennick](#) mentioned the FBT issues during in the Senate on 6th Feb.

S3, S4 (2024) Additional financial support be allocated to boarding schools, for students with a disability from rural and remote areas. The inclusion of an amendment into the 2025 review of the ‘Disability Standards for Education 2005’ to encompass the needs of Geographically Isolated students with a disability residing in a boarding facility for secondary education.

On the 22nd October 2024, correspondence was received from The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for Government Services and the NDIS. While he did not directly address the issues we outlined in our letter regarding Motions S3 and S4, we did gather information on how future requests and motions could be written. Here is part of the response received:

... “In addition to reforming the program to improve the NDIS the NDIA ([National Disability Insurance Agency](#)) has a National Remote Services Branch which is responsible for providing essential services to support people with disability who live in geographically isolated locations in Australia. This includes children and their families. The Branch works with a range of partners and other government agencies - State and Commonwealth - to develop relationships and connections that the agency needs to support the delivery of the NDIS.... I appreciate that this strategy is not exclusive to rural and remote Australia or to the children and families that you represent, but it is

an important initiative in driving real change in delivering better outcomes in these communities where we know First Nations people face unique challenges in getting the support they need, in the form they want it.”

Support ICPA. Even though many of the issues we discuss during delegation seem to have ‘easy fixes’ and sensible solutions available, the reality is, that lasting and meaningful change can take time. The gears turn at an impossibly slow rate compared to the hustle and bustle of the streets that wrap around Canberra, our Capital city. Your continuing support of the motions you present at Federal Conferences by sharing recent data and case studies, helps us increase the awareness of the life we live, who we are advocating for and what specifically we are asking for. Your personal experiences help us broaden our understanding of the access challenges we face trying to educate our children. The ICPA Federal Councilors bring your stories and voice to Canberra.

If you would like to see the full responses received in relation to any of the motions in the Boarding Portfolio, please reach out to me. My advocacy on your behalf is only as good as the information I receive.