
Allowances Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the Allowances Portfolio Report.

2020 has certainly been different for many across Australia and our rural and remote students have not been immune. The Allowances portfolio continued their advocacy for these students with renewed vigour as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded and issues were brought to our attention.

I want to thank you all for attending conference and your presence reinforces the need for us to continue all the hard work that we do as members and State Councillors.

ICPA members are the policy makers of the Association. This means that branches bring their issues to our Annual State Conference for other guests to hear the passionate debates. These issues are then taken further, usually to politicians and department advisors to be acted on. ICPA advocates to ensure that ALL students throughout rural and remote areas have equity of access to an education appropriate to their needs - whatever the educational/learning institute.

Rural and remote students continue to be under-represented and this disparity adversely impacts these individuals and their communities. The myriad of issues resulting in this disparity include financial, cultural, personal, educational and social support factors and the Australian education system must strive to deliver excellence and equal opportunity for all Australian students. The rural and remote cohort is more likely to be willing to return to their rural and remote communities ensuring viability, economic development and resilience of these communities. Despite the restrictions and uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, there have been some positive happenings for rural and remote tertiary students in the last 12 months.

COVID-19

While not only benefiting rural and remote tertiary students, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was pleasing to note that tertiary students and apprentices in receipt of a student payment through Centrelink may have been eligible for extra payments: Economic Support Payment and Coronavirus Supplement. During the pandemic, if students remained enrolled and plan to return to study even if self-isolating at home or their education provider temporarily closed or reduces their study load they still receive their payments. As is the case at any time, students were reminded to call the Students Line (132490) if any of their circumstances change. For prospective students who are planning to apply for a Centrelink payment during the COVID-19 pandemic, provisions have been made to facilitate the application process. An applicant can use their myGov account to confirm their identity, receive a Centrelink Reference Number (CRN), create a Centrelink online account, link their Centrelink online account to myGov and make their claim online.

Additionally, the personal assets test was removed for Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY and Austudy and the liquid assets test waiting period was removed for Youth Allowance and Austudy.

Students working to qualify for Youth Allowance as an independent under the workforce participation criteria, was a concern that as a result of COVID-19, job losses and decreased employment opportunities particularly in hospitality, these students may be impacted in their

capacity to earn the required 75% of the National Training Wage in their nominated 14- month period. Please get in touch with State Council if you or someone you know is having trouble

with this so that we have examples to take to the relevant stakeholders.

NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION STRATEGY

Out of the 7 recommendations those of particular note:

Tertiary Education Access Payment of \$5000 for all school leavers who relocate for full-time higher-level tertiary education of at least one-year duration from an outer regional or remote area.

Independent Youth Allowance - allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. This recommendation enables rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub, to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY.

Independent Youth Allowance Concessional Workforce test - recommends reducing the earnings requirements and a review of the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs.

Fares Allowance - recommends expansion of the Fares Allowance to enable students who have relocated to return home during their first year of study

TERTIARY ACCESS ALLOWANCE

The introduction of a TAA remains a high priority. The Tertiary Access Allowance amounts are aligned with the Relocation Scholarship payments, and we continue to advocate for the Tertiary Access Allowance for rural and remote students irrespective of eligibility for Youth Allowance.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE

Liquid Assets Waiting Period – The Department of Families and Social Services reinforced that the Liquid Assets Waiting Period is applied if liquid assets are over \$5,500 for a single student and is tapered up to \$11,500 meaning there is a maximum 13-week waiting period

Youth Allowance Overview 2020 - The Youth Allowance Overview document, created as a guide to YA eligibility and application, has been updated in consultation with Services Australia and is available in the January 2020 Pedals and on the ICPA (Aust) website. This document aims to summarise the lengthy YA website information for rural and remote students planning to study full-time and intend to apply for Youth Allowance. It is a guide only. For more information, advice, clarification and further assistance, please phone 132490 (dedicated Youth Allowance phone number) or visit www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/Centrelink/youth-allowance.

Wait time on 132490 phone line - the Minister reinforced that the Department is aiming to streamline services to provide services that allow better access to face-to-face, telephone and online service and reduce the need for customers to call.

Centrelink staff and misinformation - ICPA (Aust) has been assured once again that Centrelink staff manning the 132490 phone line have extensive training, have the resources to answer all queries efficiently and where a Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY or Austudy enquiry is complex, staff have access to specialist staff. While we cannot contact Centrelink on behalf of a member because of Privacy Laws, we can contact them with the issue generally.

Call Back Service - The Department has trialled and implemented a call back service for other services, but this is not in their plans to implement for youth and student services including AIC and YA. The service overall is continuously under review with respect to efficiency and customer service.

Proof of Identity - ICPA (Aust) has been told the reason a student is required to present to a Centrelink office, access point or agent to prove their identity is to protect individuals from identity theft and other forms of identity fraud.

Relocation Scholarship - ICPA (Aust) is continues to push for the Relocation Scholarship to extend to independent Youth Allowance recipients to address the continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with relocation costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to dependent Youth Allowance assistance. Aligning the TAA with the Relocation Scholarship amounts will benefit the youth allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students' ineligible for Youth Allowance.

RURAL AND REGIONAL ENTERPRISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (RRESP)

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP) has supported students in rural, regional and remote areas with the costs of studying at university or a vocational education and training institution.

Allowances are not designed to cover all the costs associated with educating our children, but they can and do provide an opportunity of support to families that may never have been able to access these educational opportunities. The difference in educational outcomes between rural and remote students compared to those students in metropolitan areas is well documented. The Allowances that ICPA NSW advocates hard for, go a long way to bridging the educational gap in providing greater equity and access to educational institutions for rural and remote children. However, we always need to do more, especially when we still have so many rural and remote students unable to access any financial support.

Sometimes we present motions for a long time before finally seeing progress. Sometimes we need to review what we are asking for and see how we can word it differently to change the way a situation is viewed by those with the power to approve or make changes. Personal stories make great case studies to present on deputation and help to give real life experiences to our motions.

Each year both state and federal ICPA councils bring your issues to respective state and federal governments for increased financial support through various allowances to assist with educating rural and remote children.

On behalf of all ICPA-NSW members, I would like to thank our Federal Council colleagues and NSW State and Federal governments in working together to increase the financial support offered to our rural and remote families. ICPA families are truly grateful.

When applying for any allowances, families are encouraged not to self-assess their eligibility, but are encouraged to provide all the information that is required and allow the assessment processes to occur. ICPA-NSW continually updates and provides an annual allowance spreadsheet as a summary of what allowances are available, eligibility criteria, closing dates and contact details. It is available in editions of Top Wire, on the website, Facebook posts or by contacting the

allowances convenor.

In closing I would like to thank my fellow State Councillors for all their assistance since my taking on the role of Allowances Convenor and for all the time you give voluntarily to provide assistance to our members.

Tanya Mitchell
Allowances Portfolio

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