

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

**Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
Inquiry into Australia's preparedness, response and recovery
workforce models, as well as alternative models to
disaster recovery**

from the

**Federal Council
of the
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience *Inquiry into Australia's preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, as well as alternative models to disaster recovery.*

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, grassroots, not-for-profit, apolitical, national parent organisation, which advocates on behalf of members for equity of access to an appropriate education for all geographically isolated children and students, from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia. They often live great distances from their nearest education institution and from services required to support the education of their children. ICPA (Aust) extends its reach to local branch, state and national levels, all representing and supporting members in rural and remote locations of Australia.

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the terms of reference relevant to our organisation and members :

(c) Consideration of the practical, legislative, and administrative arrangements that would be required to support improving Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters:

ICPA (Aust) believes that consideration of educational access for rural and remote Australians in times of natural disasters should be included as an important aspect of legislative and administrative arrangements related to disaster management, recovery and resilience.

When experiencing a natural disaster in a rural and remote locations, immense pressure is placed on families as their ability to earn an income can be severely impacted by such a disaster. This not only impacts their ability to pay for day to day expenses, but in many circumstances it poses significant financial and practical difficulties for families who, due to their geographical location, face additional obstacles to access schooling for their children.

Many of our member families reside in locations where there are limited or no secondary schooling options available for their children, which means that boarding school is often the only reasonable option. This comes at a significant cost and ICPA (Aust) has advocated for many years for adequate financial assistance to help subsidise these costs.

Furthermore, when Distance Education is the only education option for families living remotely and a personal crisis directly affects the parent (who is frequently the Distance Education Tutor), the dependent school aged children stand to be disadvantaged due to the parent's incapacity to fulfil their normal duties within the schoolroom, resulting in the student/s falling behind in all areas of curriculum.

In summary, when a natural disaster is experienced for rural and remote families, educational access and delivery across all levels of education is hindered. This ranges from children attending Early Learning/Long Day Care Services, accessing In Home Care in the home, attending a rural school, distance education, boarding school or tertiary education.

ICPA (Aust) believes programs and measures should be implemented to assist with the significant barriers to educational access due to where these families live. Ideally this could be realised with the introduction of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) to assist with the cost of education during drought, flood, fire or other rural hardship. Geographically isolated children should not be disadvantaged or unable to attend their studies due to ongoing long term droughts or other natural

disasters. Educational expenses are an investment for the future prosperity and resilience of all our rural and remote communities.

ICPA (Aust) believes a Rural Hardship Education Fund should include:

1. A supplementary payment made to the Assistance for Isolated Children allowance (AIC) for families identified as being in rural hardship, example: living in drought affected areas/states.
2. Funding for rural schools, Early Learning/Long Day Care Centres in affected areas.
3. The resourcing and availability of itinerant and specialist teachers to enable more support for distance education students and rural schools, including home visits in remote classrooms and other localised support resources.
4. An adjusted rate/additional subsidy to assist affected families to access In Home Care for young children.
5. A tertiary access allowance for rural and remote students enrolled in university, training courses, or an apprenticeship to assist where parents experiencing rural hardship are contributing to the financial support of these students.

ICPA (Aust) has published a Rural Hardship Education Fund Briefing Paper which details further the background and recommendations for the establishment of such a fund, which can be found [HERE](#)

The establishment of a permanent/long term Rural Hardship Education Fund is urgently needed and should be included in Future Drought Fund programs and plans for establishing disaster resilience and recovery to address the unique educational needs and additional costs associated with educating children in rural and remote communities for families affected by drought conditions to contribute to the future resilience of the communities they reside in.