



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia

Advocating for equitable access to education for students in rural and remote Australia

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AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS WHO VALUE RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

Dear Sir/Madam

For many years ICPA (Aust) has been advocating to the Federal Government for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to recognise geographically isolated distance education home tutors (usually mothers) who take themselves out of the workforce, their businesses and their normal daily lives to administer daily education to their children in the home schoolroom, an education which is compulsory and supposedly free.

Unfortunately, this advocacy continues to fall on deaf ears at State, Territory and Federal levels and ICPA (Aust) has today written once again to the Minister for Regional Education seeking support for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance and included the information herein.

Whilst we acknowledge that the teaching and associated costs of educational programs is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments and while all States provide state-based distance education schools, programs and teaching staff to deliver these programs, ICPA (Aust) believes the unique issue of supervision and delivery of these programs within individual family's schoolrooms across rural and remote Australia goes beyond standard educational delivery and requires a distinctive multi-faceted approach.

ICPA (Aust) believes a collaborative and consistent solution involving both State and National tiers of government is required to address this situation which is so important to rural and remote Australia. This issue goes to the heart of equitable access to education, which is every child's right, and speaks to the value and support for women's equality in the remotest parts of Australia along with the sustainability of rural and remote communities and the vital industries they facilitate and support. In 85% of instances, the mother is the home tutor in the geographically isolated distance education classroom. She is therefore taken out of the workforce, foregoes an income and relevant financial benefits and performs a role out of necessity for many years of her life so her children can access compulsory education.

A distance education home tutor teaching one child through primary school (including preschool) will spend between 10,800 to 14,400 hours in the schoolroom over the course of approximately 9 years to deliver an education to their children without any financial remuneration, despite extensive work performed. The calculations below exemplify the implications of not earning an income while undertaking the distance education tutor role.

Family member as geographically isolated distance education tutor	
Average hours per day	6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year
Average years spent as DE tutor for one child	8 years (kindy/preschool plus primary school)
Average total hours spent tutoring one child	9600 –12,800 hours
Minimum Wage	\$20.33 per hour
Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	\$195,168 - \$260,244
Superannuation @ 9.5% foregone	\$18,540 - \$24,721

The above identifies the time taken to act as the distance education tutor for one child from a formal distance education preschool/kindy program through to the conclusion of their primary schooling, highlighting the financial losses and implications for the person undertaking this role, which in 85% of the time, is the child's mother. The number of years a

geographically isolated distance education tutor continues in this role grows exponentially with each additional child in a family, with many distance education tutors needing to continue on the role for much longer than 8 years. This data does not come close to reflecting the immeasurable commitment and sacrifices mothers and families make to educate their children in a geographically isolated distance education context.

The need to fill the role of the distance education tutor in geographically isolated locations not only impacts remote women's employment opportunities and financial status but can significantly impact the viability of family businesses when the mother is taken out of crucial roles in the office, paddock and much more to take up the responsibility of full-time tutor. We also know anecdotally that the challenges of the home tutor role, when carried out over a long period of time with little acknowledgement or support, financially or otherwise, can adversely affect the mental health and wellbeing of the person undertaking the role.

In some circumstances it is not possible for a mother to take on the home tutor role therefore geographically isolated families endure the excessive costs and challenges of providing a governess to fulfil the position.

Other families make the difficult decision to send their very young children to boarding school for their primary school education or relocate to a second home for their children to access mainstream schooling, when it is unmanageable for the mother to sacrifice her position in the workforce or the prospect of employing a distance education tutor is not possible. The latter option removes the family from their primary home, property and local community for the majority of the year.

Having a second home can be the source of enormous mental strain on the family unit, being physically separated from loved ones and their physical and emotional support day to day. Often it is the father who is left at home in an isolated situation away from the support network of his family. In 2021 the National Rural Health Alliance reported that farmers are overrepresented in national suicide rates, 60% higher than non-farmers (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2021-12-07/farmers-still-face-higher-rates-of-suicide/100679652>, 7/7/2021).

The fact that this situation goes largely unacknowledged and therefore unsupported by all levels of government is extremely disappointing. Our members call for all Australian, State and Territory Government Education Ministers to have a collaborative discussion, in a forum that has the collective power to bilaterally appreciate and agree that distance education tutors in geographically isolated schoolrooms are critical to the delivery of public education in rural and remote Australia, and indeed the cost of delivering this public service should be carried, or at least shared with government, rather than solely by the family.

ICPA (Aust) is advocating for a \$6000 per family/annum payment to remunerate geographically isolated families for the extensive contribution they make to their children's compulsory education by providing a full-time tutor to facilitate the education of students in remote home schoolrooms. ICPA (Aust) believes \$6000 is reasonable, although by no means fully representational of the actual costs incurred.

A DETA would provide some financial assistance to give geographically isolated families more opportunity to make choices that enable them to keep their family together and stay at their primary residence while educating their children.

ICPA (Aust) seeks your support in imploring that the Federal Government address this issue.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration of this matter and look forward to future discussions on this topic.

Yours faithfully



Alana Moller
Federal President

Attachments: ICPA (Aust) DETA Fact Sheet and Infographic

ICPA (Aust) calls for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)



- 1 In 85% of instances the mother is the home tutor in the geographically isolated home schoolroom.
- 2 The mother is therefore taken out of the workforce, foregoes an income to provide her child/ren with a compulsory, free education.
- 3 Alternatively the family must pay a governess to perform the home tutor role.
- 4 A distance education home tutor teaching one child through primary school will spend an average of 12000 hours in the schoolroom - approximately 9 years.
- 5 ICPA (Aust) asks for \$6000 per family/annum to remunerate families for their extensive contribution they make to their children's compulsory education by providing a full-time home tutor

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What is the cost of a compulsory, free education ?



85%

1

The percentage of mothers who are the home tutor in the geographically isolated schoolroom

2

12,000 hours



The average hours spent tutoring one child through their primary schooling

3

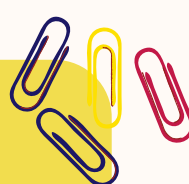
\$230,000



The average wages foregone in unpaid work over the course of primary schooling

4

\$21,000



The average superannuation foregone due to unpaid work over the course of primary schooling

Financial Remuneration

NONE

These figures are based on the average figure of a distance education tutor supervising one child from pre-school through primary school and increase exponentially with each extra child in the schoolroom.