
Allowances Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I present the Allowances Portfolio report for 2024.

Joining State Council at the 2024 State conference I have enjoyed learning about the allowances and subsidies available to rural and remote families. As a State Council we have raised the relevant issues to this portfolio to the relevant State Ministers, Departments and Organisations.

We are all in this room today because we have some affiliation to rural and remote education and for some of us that can come at a much greater expense than our city friends. Thank you for making the huge effort to attend the 2025 State Conference in Euston and thank you to the Balranald Branch for hosting us. I find that these two days reinvigorate our passion and reinforce the need to continue advocating for our members and their families

We had 8 motions presented at the Dubbo conference in the Allowances Portfolio of which 6 were carried. Following conference, we wrote to appropriate NSW Ministers and Departments, and we have received the following correspondence regarding The Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA). The LAFHA payment rate and income eligibility threshold is reviewed by the department on an annual basis. Therefore, we will continue to advocate for our members surrounding the LAFHA payment rates and eligibility.

In July NSW State Council attended Federal Conference in Sydney. There were 7 motions relevant to Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and there was much debate across the floor particularly around the rising costs of boarding school and AIC payments.

Many children living in rural and remote areas of Australia do not have daily access to a physical secondary school and therefore must attend boarding school to access their senior education. The disparity between the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance and the actual cost of boarding fees across Australia continues to grow and families are struggling to afford their children's compulsory education.

ICPA (Aust), with the endorsement of 20 key rural organisations to date, has called on the Federal Government in an open letter to Minister Rishworth, which is available to view on ICPA website, for an increase to the current AIC to cover 55% of costs not the currently 37% it does.

It was a big win for ICPA when the Australian Government announced that it has removed the requirement for students to commence tertiary studies within 12 months of completing Year 12 to be eligible for the *Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)*.

Now, first-year students who have taken one or more gap years and are aged up to 22 can apply for the \$5000.

More information regarding the requirements can be found here;

<https://icpa.com.au/au/news/tertiary-access-payment-tap-second-instalment-information>

At both State and Federal Conferences, there was much discussion surrounding an allowance such as Distance Education Tutor Allowance (DETA) or alike for families living in geographical regions of Australia doing Distance Education and the extensive extra costs associated with educating children through this mode of delivery. While the AIC Distance Education Allowance assists it by no means covers the additional costs associated with Distance Education such as supervision or lost wages, additional resources and accommodation.

The very nature of Distance Education is be delivered in a home classroom, families are required to provide and fund the cost associated with providing a tutor/supervisor, which often leads to a family member facilitating the classroom. Ultimately, leaving the family at a financial loss due to employing someone or taking the family member (usually the mother) out of the work force. Please see the link to see the fact sheet prepared by ICPA (Aust).

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/5slyvnwpadfcopsuzn8/ICPA-Aust-FACTSHEET.pdf?rlkey=03tblihie6djbcsl5g0tf595t&e=1&dl=0>

At this point I would like to thank our fellow ICPA Federal Councillors, who spend a considerable amount of time lobbying our Federal Allowance issues which affect ICPA-NSW members.

The beginning of 2025 has seen an increase to many, if not all, the allowances and subsidies available to our members, which is positive to see considering the rising cost of living.

In January the Australian Government announced that Early childhood education and care (ECEC) providers can now apply for a living allowance for educators who complete practicums in rural and remote areas.

The practicum exchange living allowance is for educators who:

- use the [practicum exchange network](#)
- arrange a practicum in a rural or remote area other than their home location through the network
- have worked full-time, part-time or casually at a CCS-approved service for more than 40 hours in the last 3 months
- are an Australian citizen, permanent resident or hold a valid work visa.

The allowance will provide up to \$1,543.50 per week, for up to 4 weeks.

Applications are now open. Providers must apply on behalf of eligible staff.

ICPA-NSW provide a list of available State and Federal Allowances, with a summary of eligibility criteria, closing dates and contact details. This spreadsheet can be found in the next issue of Top Wire, or by contacting ICPA-NSW State Council.

I recommend that everyone checks out the allowances and subsidies available, you never know what you may qualify for. And as always get in contact with State Council if you have any questions or need clarification.

When applying for any allowances, we urge families to not self-assess their eligibility but encourage them to provide all the information that is required for each application and allow the assessment processes to occur. You never know, you may be pleasantly surprised.

It is great to see many new Allowance motions have been put forward by ICPA-NSW branches. Each year new issues arise, and we have our members to thank for bringing these to State Council. Rest assured that State Council will take these on board, advocate and update members of any progress made.

Tegan Barton
Allowances Portfolio Leader

Boarding Schools, Agricultural High Schools and Hostels Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, fellow State Councillors, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen it gives me great pleasure to present the Boarding Schools, Agricultural High Schools and Hostels Report for the 2025 conference.

After a number of years, I am pleased to report that both the Female Boarding house at Yanco and the new boarding house at Hurlstone Agriculture High Schools have been completed and are now home to new students. Both of these have been ongoing discussions over the past years, and it is fantastic that they finally finished.

At Deputation in 2024 ICPA-NSW raised the following issues with relevant ministers.

- The establishment of a co-educational State Agricultural Secondary boarding College in Dubbo.
- Introduction of a boarding facility at one of the designated NSW Public Sports High Schools to provide rural and remote children an affordable opportunity to explore Olympic Pathways. This will enable equitable access to elite sporting opportunities.

Prior to conference last year State Council were made aware of the proposed closure at the end of Term 1 2024 of Allison House in Broken Hill. Allison House has provided accommodation for students from remote and isolated areas to access secondary education in Broken Hill for 60 years. As a result, ICPA-NSW conducted a survey relating to the

educational needs of students and the requirements of families in Western NSW. This was also extended to include families that reside on the edge of state boarders. The results of this survey highlighted the distances travelled to receive an education and the lack of transportation to existing schools.

It was also imperative to note that the lack of quality education impacts on the workforce in these remote areas. Many families are faced with the decision to leave current employment or may not be willing to relocate for employment opportunities due to difficulties educating their children. We thank those families that participated in the survey and provided vital information.

I was once again fortunate to represent ICPA-NSW on the Boarding Scholarships for Isolated Students Selection Committee (BSIS). These scholarships are provided for students who do not qualify for AIC and are attending one of the State Based Agricultural Boarding Schools in NSW, these being Farrar, Hurlstone and Yanco. I would like to thank the Department of Education and the principals from these schools for providing ICPA-NSW input and a voice on the allocation of these scholarships. I will miss our meetings and would also like to thank Clint Gallagher from Farrar and Marnie Milne from Yanco for answering the numerous questions I have had regarding selection processes.

I was only able to attend the Boarding Schools Expos last year in Dubbo and briefly in Wagga. This provided me with a wonderful opportunity to connect with Heads of Boarding, Boarding Supervisors and Enrolments Managers from over 30 schools. Explaining about the distances travelled to attend school or for sport which maybe hundreds of kilometres away and the lack of education opportunities for many families was an extremely valuable conversation as well as connecting with many families and explaining allowances that may be available to them to assist covering a boarding school education.

I would like to thank Amanda Ferrari and the BSE team for the wonderful resource this provides for rural families, and I hope the virtual summit continues to grow.

Finally, as I finish my final report, I would like to thank Richard Stokes and the team at ABSA. They continue to be a valuable supporter of ICPA and all our families. They have a very full and informative program planned for the year providing training workshops, seminars and education for boarding staff throughout Australia not just NSW. Some of these include Duty of Care workshops, programs and training for Gap students, Youth Mental Health & Wellbeing, Medications Course, Teenage Addiction- taming vaping, drugs, alcohol, gambling and gaming and promoting consent and respectful relationships. These provide a crucial opportunity for Heads of Boarding, Supervisors, and staff to connect with each other, learn what other schools are implementing, what works and what doesn't and new issues that may be arising in the Boarding Environment.

We entrust our children with boarding schools, and it is reassuring to know that they themselves have this support network and education available to them. Richard, I will miss our open and frank discussions.

I am passionate about boarding and the opportunities this provides for rural and remote families, the ups and downs of family dynamics as children and parents adjust. I will miss reading the numerous newsletters from NESAs, ABSAs and the Council of Catholic Schools but I encourage the incoming portfolio holder to embrace the wonderful connections and relationships that the portfolio can offer.

Myfi Kellahan
Boarding Schools, Agricultural High Schools and Hostels Portfolio Leader

Communications Report

Madam President, Invited Guests, Federal Council, Fellow State Councillors and Members, it does give me great pleasure to present the Communications report for the 2024 year.

3 G closure

It would have been great in the Comms world if the 3 G closure had gone to plan and not presented members with so much angst when trying to live their daily lives communicating with those they needed to and transacting essential business and educating students.

Unfortunately, for many of us in rural and remote New South Wales the closure of the 3 G network has been extremely troublesome, with little resolution for some people. The organisation called consistently for a rebate to help members upgrade equipment needed to be able to effectively access the 4 G network. This advocacy did not get traction, but we will still be calling for it. In the last month the Federal Government has put in place a Senate Committee to investigate the shutdown. There are 3 recommendations to be looked at:

- Establishing a program to help customers that have lost mobile phone coverage since the 3 G shutoff, for example, by providing subsidies for boosters, Starlink connections, and replacing equipment that is no longer functional following the shutdown,
- Federal government and the telecommunications accelerate the introduction of mobile services via Starlink,
- Increasing the scope of the National Audit Coverage to include off-road areas, such as private properties.

There are many members who are being directed to Starlink services as their only option to effective communications. This is unacceptable and considerably costly, especially since it is not covered by the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

Following the closure and the extent of the problems being experienced by our members, ICPA-NSW and CWA of NSW put out a joint media release to ensure all levels of Government and Departments and other stakeholders were aware of the issues members were experiencing. In this media release we were calling for the Minister for Communications to expedite the next plan. We are unfortunately still waiting for this to be actioned.

Just prior to Christmas, ICPA-NSW sent a survey out to members to gauge the full extent of the issues surrounding the closure of 3 G. Primarily this information was to assist Federal Council with their advocacy, but the data collected will be very useful as we continue to highlight the communication problems since the closure. A summary of this data was published in the last Top Wire magazine.

Interesting statistics have been gathered from the survey, in that 88% of the respondents acknowledged a decline in their mobile service at their house. 59% of the respondents don't have a landline anymore, which is concerning because they effectively have no voice calling ability. Members reported that there has been a marked reliance on the low earth orbit (LEO) connections and UHF radios. The ability to perform timely emergency services in rural and remote areas since the closure have been noticed, along with members reporting that education and transacting daily business has been challenging.

The many motions in the agenda at this conference will also be very useful in our advocacy going forward. Members can be assured the organisation will be prioritising this issue in our advocacy in 2025.

Please keep ICPA-NSW informed of any issues regarding your connections. There are also five options available to members who have unresolved problems. It is extremely important that you report your issues, otherwise our advocacy is not being backed up. The report rate to Telstra regarding the 3 G problems is very low. Hopefully the options below will assist you to get a message to Telstra about your 3 G connectivity problems.

- Put in a complaint to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) by this link <https://www.tio.com.au/complaints>
- Call the Telstra helpline by dialling 1800 990 853 between 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday AEDT.
- Email – telstracomplaints@team.telstra.com
- Use an online form with Telstra <https://www.telstra.com.au/contact-us/feedback-complaints/make-a-complaint>
- 24 hour chat option with Telstra in their app.

Inquiry into the Universal Service Obligation (USO)

ICPA (Aust) put a submission into the review of the USO. States were invited to provide comment to the submission, which I did. It is important to remember that the USO only refers to landlines and not mobiles as they are not stationary. An important change to the USO will be the removal of the Copper Continuity Obligation so that Telstra can invest to bring new technologies to regional and rural customers.

Telstra Regional Advisory Committee (RAC)

Telstra has reviewed the structure of these committees. All ICPA representatives have been removed from the Committee, as Telstra believes our partnership is a strong enough connection.

School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI)

The free internet available to families who have school-aged students and do not have access to the internet has been extended until June 2028. The government has announced an additional \$4.9 million in funding to extend the School Student Broadband Initiative. With this extension, up to 30,000 families will be able to access the program, ensuring that more children have the same educational opportunities as their peers. Please seek out the program and apply if you fit the criteria.

I have received a comment that the SSBI is working extremely well. It is easy to navigate, a great service when you order, and the internet is working perfectly.

NBN Sky Muster Plus Premium Plans

Are you a member who is dealing with limited data plans on Sky Muster? If so, it is really time to look at a Sky Muster Plus plan. These plans have been around since 2023 and may be very helpful to your connection world. There are three plans available and only 30% of people have taken the next step to a Plus plan which will give you access to unlimited data:

- Sky Muster Plus Premium – high tier option
- Sky Muster Plus Premium – mid tier option
- Sky Muster Plus Premium – entry tier option

NBN Fixed Wireless Speed Boost

There has been an announcement of a \$750 million investment made up of \$480 million from the Commonwealth Government and an additional \$270 million from NBN Co to upgrade the NBN Fixed Wireless network.

NBN Co continues to transform the way regional Australians can access and use high speed broadband. These speeds are to be available during busy periods as regional Australians use more data than ever before. The aim is to support the rise of remote healthcare, working and learning from home and connecting rural entrepreneurs to the world and allow people to stay connected to family, friends and their community.

NBN Co has upgraded its existing Fixed Wireless towers with the installation of new technology along with software enhancements to help deliver overall enhanced nbn network speeds and coverage to regional Australia.

NBN Co has just completed the Fixed wireless upgrade with the key benefits for those in regional and remote Australia being:

Faster speeds: Around 800,000 homes and businesses, with more than 210,000 in NSW, can now enjoy faster speeds, including during busy periods.

New high-speed plans: Two new high-speed tier plans are now available via participating retail service providers, offering peak wholesale nbn network download speeds of up to five times faster than what was previously available.

Expanded access: More than 120,000 homes and businesses previously within the nbn Sky Muster satellite service footprint now have access to nbn Fixed Wireless for the first time.

Enhanced performance: Improved network performance for uncapped data plans under nbn Sky Muster Plus.

NBN Co announces upgrades for remaining homes and businesses on Fibre to the Node

- * NBN Co will provide new upgrade paths for the remaining homes and businesses across Australia on the Fibre to the Node network, enabled through an investment with the Australian Government.

- * The investment is expected to benefit around 622,000 homes and businesses, with more than half located in regional Australia with the Far West being an area to benefit from the upgrade. More than 95 per cent of premises will have the option to upgrade to nbn full fibre via nbn Fibre to the Premises. The remaining five per cent require further design work to confirm the appropriate upgrade path.

- * nbn full fibre is faster and more reliable than Fibre to the Node and enables access to nbn's fastest upload and download speeds.

NBN Co will upgrade the remaining Fibre to the Node network across Australia, backed by an equity investment of up to \$3 billion from the Australian Government, in addition to more than \$800 million from NBN Co.

Work on the upgrades will start immediately and be completed progressively. The upgrades are expected to be completed by the end of 2030.

NBN full fibre is faster and more reliable than Fibre to the Node, which uses ageing copper to deliver broadband services, this means for homes and businesses, that they will have faster broadband speeds enabling more people and devices to be online at the same time with minimal disruptions. This means smoother streaming, faster downloads and uploads, and stronger connections - even with multiple devices online at the same time.

A decade ago, the average Australian home had seven internet-connected devices and consumed around 40 gigabytes per month. Today, the average household consumes more than ten times that amount across 22 internet-connected devices. Within the decade, the average monthly download usage is forecast to reach more than 1,100 gigabytes across around 40 internet-connected devices.

Digital Divide

In December 2024 'The Digital Equity and Education report' was released. The digital divide is something this organisation has been highlighting for your years. This report talks about access to devices, internet connectivity and digital literacy. Students in regional NSW are at a distinct disadvantage in their experience of digital inclusion compared to their counterparts. During covid the Government made a commendable effort in providing some support, but unfortunately these supports have been reversed, and the gap is widening.

The effects of digital inequity are not limited to the classroom and education, they actually reverberate across our communities, impacting future employment, social inclusion, and wellbeing.

The report flags 5 top priorities to address digital inequity in education.

1. Do not assume students are digitally included
2. Meet the digital needs of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and asylum seeker/refugee students
3. Implement comprehensive and targeted digital literacy programs in schools
4. Invest in digital infrastructure in regional NSW where higher levels of digital exclusion are recorded
5. Strengthen digital equity data collection and research.

Regional Telecommunications Review

In December 2024 submissions into the latest Regional Telecommunications review closed. ICPA (Aust) provided a submission to the review that ICPA-NSW had input into. Branch motions were used in the submission.

Regional Tech Hub

The Regional Tech Hub is a great free resource for any telephone or internet technical problems you may be experiencing. The phone number for the Hub is 1300 081 029. The Hub is only open for limited hours, but you can always leave a message for a return phone call.

The hours of operation are:

Mon: 12pm – 5pm
Tues: 12pm - 5pm
Wed: 9am – 2pm
Thur: 9am – 2pm
Fri: 9am – 2pm

Road Trips

Both Telstra and NBN are keen to travel to branch areas and participate in information days, field days or whatever is on. Please be in touch for their details and you can contact them to make the arrangements.

Deputation

Thank you to our communication stakeholders who are always happy to meet with us on deputation. It is always worthwhile to discuss the policies of the organisation relating to communication.

Thank you to my fellow State Councillors who work tirelessly on a volunteer basis for you, our members.

Please remember to reach out if you have communication issues and hopefully, we will get some resolution to the current issues.

Libby McPhee
Communications Portfolio Leader

Distance Education Report

Madam President, distinguished Guests, fellow State Councillors, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present the Distance Education Report for ICPA-NSW for the 2024 year.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Balranald branch for hosting the 2025 conference in Euston.

We have had a big year within the Distance Education portfolio, starting with the NSW Department of Education (DoE) announcing a review into Distance Education. This was exciting news, as at the 2022 conference in Bourke one of the motions was for a review into Distance Education. ICPA-NSW has been working with the Department of Education and presented the recommendations from our members. One of our focuses with this review is to enlighten and explain to the Department of Education the unique circumstances that geographically isolated children are facing, which is very different to any other category of Distance Education across NSW.

Since the review was announced, the Department of Education has visited all Distance Education sites across NSW and engaged with key stakeholders including ICPA-NSW. ICPA-NSW will continue to work with the Department of Education and make sure our members are aware of the review findings once announced later this year.

We also met with the Hybrid Education team from the Department of Education. This has given us an opportunity to and shared our members experiences and concerns, we hope that our contribution will help shape the future direction of this style of education.

Upgrades to School of the Air Broken Hill studios commenced last year, which has also included some additional studio to help the school with the increase in satellite lessons students are receiving daily.

Before Distance Education rolled onto the NBN Sky Muster network, students were unable to attend Aurora College. In 2023, the first School of the Air student was accepted and commenced at Aurora in 2024, and another student is attending in 2025. Aurora College is an amazing resource for students to expand their knowledge and excel in the areas of Maths and Science for Year 5 & 6.

During our Deputation in Sydney, we continued to advocate for Geographically Isolated Distance Education students. We look forward to hearing the results from the review and direction that Distance Education will move towards in the future.

We would like to encourage members to please contact us with case studies, so we can continue to give these examples to the Department, government and stakeholders. Case Studies give our motions bigger voices and make it real.

Laura Stalley and Tegan Barton
Distance Education Portfolio Leaders

Early Childhood Portfolio Report

Dear Madam President, Distinguished Guests, Fellow State Councillors, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for allowing me to present the Early Childhood Report for ICPA-NSW at the 2025 Conference.

The past twelve months has seen ICPA-NSW continue to bring focus to key issues in the Early childhood Portfolio. Central to our issues is a lack of practical access to preschool for families in rural and remote NSW. As many of you will be aware, there has been a necessity for continuous advocacy for access to education for four-year-old preschoolers in identified remote locations where the only preschool four-year-olds could access is Distance Education.

During the past few years, we have had some success with the pop-up pop down model initiated by the NSW Department of Education, utilising existing schools and Distance Education Preschools. These small communities were not beneficiaries within the 100 Preschools announcement, throughout 2024 we continued to ask for this program to be extended to offer two days of preschool for both three- and four-year-olds. We felt we had practical solutions, with available staff at some sites, and a desperate need for this service to allow our youngest learners the opportunity for a strong start to education. We have met with Department representatives on a case by case need to resolve issues and find solutions, however at every turn there have been new challenges.

At the end of 2024, we became aware that where services had been operating successfully, they are now deemed “non-compliant”. Legislative differences between NSW Department of

Education and the Early Childhood Regulatory Authority are proving to be significant hurdles. The Local Reform Commission is working to implement the B4Kindy program in these small schools, and although in the early stages of implementation, appear to be the current option for the ongoing lack of preschool access in rural and remote communities. We will continue to work with key stakeholders to influence the model, and advocate for legislative change to find a better solution. We believe each community will be unique and our collective input will better equip those with influence to ensure a better outcome for each community.

ICPA-NSW recognises the significance of school sites to our smaller communities and has actively been advocating for recessed sites to be available for rent to Early Childhood Services offering Mobile Services. Once again, the Education Departments aversion to risk is preventing these assets from being utilized for their original purpose, Education. At a time when we have recognised that rural NSW makes up a significant proportion of our Childcare Desert, it seems both practical and financially viable to utilise facilities already established within communities to accommodate Early Childhood Services. These small communities were not beneficiaries within the 100 Preschools announcement, and most likely won't be in the future.

Can our government feel at ease with simply allowing other organisations, such as community halls and preschools, to carry the risk, or should they consider the greater risk of continued educational disadvantage to our youngest and most vulnerable learners at the most critical stage of development?

Whilst it feels as though we take one step forward and several back in improving access to Early Childhood Services in Rural and Remote NSW, I remain hopeful that the government is now recognising the misalignment between legislation and practical solutions, and we can make real changes that will benefit our rural communities. Early Childhood has a small window, so we need change now to benefit our children while it matters most. The Federal Government has made recent announcements about subsidised care and early childhood education, we all know and understand how vital it is to the future of each child and our society as a whole, but for so many families, there is no service to access. This needs to change, each child matters.

Please feel free to share your concerns, ideas and even successes with me so we can work together to influence change.

Thank you for your attention.

Kirsty Wilson
Early Childhood Portfolio Leader

Health and Wellbeing Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, fellow state councillors, members, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present my final Health and Well-Being Report for ICPA-NSW at the 2025 State Conference.

ICPA has raised with the Minister of Health and Minister for Regional Health the following issues:

- The availability of on the ground youth and adolescent Mental Health services in rural schools and communities, furthermore, provide incentives for these specialists to remain in our communities”.
- Enable access for parents/carers of remote students, vital allied health support through funding and/or subsidies.”
- Extension of the “Brighter Beginnings” program to include developmental screeners, closely reflective of the Royal Far West Healthy Kids Bus Stop, for three-year-olds in rural and remote areas.”
- A more accessible school-based platform for assessment and diagnosis of any learning and well-being support requirements of children living in rural and remote NSW. This enables early identification and timely interventions without the need to access consultation outside the school.”

ICPA-NSW were also invited to present ongoing evidence at the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Implementation of Portfolio Committee No2 - Recommendations relating to the delivery of specific health services and specialist care in remote, rural and regional NSW.

I would like to thank Tanya Mitchell and Britt Anderson for attending this review on behalf of the Portfolio. Speaking at the review, albeit a nervous experience they were able to raise the above-mentioned issues and the significant impact that these have on families. These have now been tabled in Parliament so hopefully some resolution may not be too far away.

The NSW Ministry of Health is continuing the Rural Health Workforce Incentive Scheme aimed at stabilising the supply of health workers in rural and remote locations. The incentive scheme allows for financial and non-financial incentives to be offered to health workers such as nurses and allied health professionals who have recently taken up an identified vacancy.

These incentives can include a payment up to \$10,000, additional personal leave, additional base salary, subsidised accommodation and relocation benefits. Each individual health district can identify positions and roles that meet the eligibility criteria and apply to have the incentive scheme applied to the position.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time on State Council, and I encourage people to consider joining a wonderful group of people who continue to strive to implement change.

Myfi Kellahan
Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Leader

Rural Schools and Curriculum Report

Madam President, Fellow State Councillors, Federal Vice President and Councillor, Members and Guests,

I would like to thank Central West Plains for hosting last year's 52nd Annual Conference in Dubbo. It was a remarkably successful conference.

After the conference in Dubbo a letter was forwarded to the Deputy Premier of New South Wales with Distance Education, Rural Schools, Early Childhood, Health and Well Being along with Allowances, with all the motions from conference.

Our meetings have continued with RRREI (Regional, Rural and Remote Education Implementation) which afford the opportunity for ICPA-NSW to talk to the most appropriate person when dealing with our motions.

At the conference in Dubbo, there was an announcement that single-person accommodation would be erected at Louth Public School. This has been a motion for many years and a great outcome for ICPA-NSW and Louth Public School. We would like to thank the relevant departments for making this happen.

ICPA-NSW was contacted by one of our members regarding the 482 Visa asking that the \$6,000 per annum visa holders pay for their children to attend a public school in rural and remote NSW be abolished. A letter was sent to the Deputy Premier of New South Wales and Minister for Education and Early Learning, Prue Car, from ICPA-NSW asking that the \$6,000 that employees pay to the public school be brought into line with other States.

In Queensland and Victoria there are no fees charged and in South Australia no fees are charged if you attend a rural and remote school. It is an advantage to have more students attending our rural and remote schools and they do not need any deterrents for people to relocate to our rural and remote areas.

We would like to thank the Deputy Premier for her response, and this has now been changed so that 482 Visa holders in NSW rural and remote schools no longer pay the \$6,000 per annum in school fees. This is a great outcome for all concerned.

State Councillors attended the annual deputation to Sydney in May. This is a busy time for Councillors but generally positive. This is when we have our face-to-face meetings with politicians and other relevant people who relate to our portfolios.

The motions you as members bring to conference are on the agenda when we attend these meetings. Deputation is a constructive way to receive positive feedback for the motions that we discuss.

The ICPA-NSW hosted the Federal Conference in July 2024, I was fortunate to be on the convening committee. I would really like to thank Laura and Karen, as our convenors along

with Cath as treasurer and Bree as registrations. We all came to Sydney early to help but I must say the professionalism of work that had been done prior to Sydney made the last-minute necessities such a pleasure, it was such a great committee to be involved with. The whole conference, including venues etc., was a great success.

The motion regarding secondary schooling as a pop up, pop down model, in our rural and remote TP1 and TP2 schools, for students who do not have a suitable home environment for their schooling and for various reasons cannot go away to boarding school, suggests an innovative solution which has worked in other states.

In NSW, the above-described remote students attempting their preschool or secondary education via distance education, in reality have no practical access to public education.

The way forward for this motion is that legislation must change to allow these students to attend their local TP1 or TP2 schools. Currently, in TP1 and TP2 schools, whether it be secondary or preschool, the teaching principal believes or feels they need to be in the 'line of sight' of these students.

Legislation must be implemented to relieve principals in TP1 and TP2 schools, to allow pop up and pop down models in public schools.

Potentially this is a win/ win for the small rural and remote schools, as currently in the far west of NSW, the population is declining due to assorted reasons. If these small schools became educational hubs for preschool to year 12, this could keep very remote and remote small schools operational. Comprehensive education services are an incentive for new people to come to our villages as schooling is often a priority.

In a flow on effect liveability attracts and helps retain service people and staff so the shire and wider area also benefits.

There have been instances where the Teacher Housing houses in rural and remote and very remote areas were left in bad repair. ICPA-NSW would like to ask the Minister for Housing to ensure that contractors who oversee teacher housing visit at least every three months. This should guarantee that these public houses are maintained to an appropriate standard without the need for major work to be done after the tenant has gone. A leaving principal should vacate early in the new year, this would allow for an inspection and any work needing to be completed for the new principal to move in prior to the first term.

This would permit the new principal to settle in the house before having to be in the classroom for Term 1. In small TP1 schools in very isolated areas it is sometimes confronting enough without the added pressure of unsatisfactory housing.

ICPA-NSW Rural Schools and Curriculum Portfolio would like to see some of our older motions made into policy, these have all come from our rural and remote TP1 and TP2 schools and would benefit the community, students and teachers. One is the handover, as it would be as beneficial to students as well as the incoming principal. It must include at least a five-week program, to relieve the pressure for the principal allowing them time to understand

the best strategies to use in a multistage classroom and the resources they have at their disposal in their new position.

I would like to thank all our Councillors who do such a fantastic job volunteering their time to achieve some great outcomes for our rural and remote children. Thank you to our members for coming to conference, it is a wonderful opportunity to hear about other issues rural and remote children face but also it gives you a chance to voice your issues.

Annabel Strachan
Rural Schools and Curriculum Portfolio Leader

Specific Student Needs Portfolio Report **Formally Special Education Portfolio**

Distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the Specific Student Needs Portfolio Report.

Welcome to Euston for our 2025 conference hosted by Balranald branch. A huge thank you to the awesome convening committee for their organisation of our conference for this year. I hope you all have a rewarding few days and enjoy yourselves.

Formally the Special Education Portfolio, is now named Specific Student Needs, Portfolio. This name change has recently happened to better reflect the actual space that it encompasses more accurately. Going forward ICPA-NSW State Council agreed that this portfolio will cover Health & Wellbeing along with Special Education needs of those that either are Gifted and talented or those requiring extra help because of learning difficulties.

ICPA-NSW continues to raise the need for a compulsory autism spectrum disorder (ASD) specialised training module for university student teachers as part of their training. Such a module would greatly assist teachers to recognise the early signs of a child with special needs, who may be experiencing problems in the classroom and therefore able to provide help for that child.

Now that distance education is on the NBN Sky Muster students are now able to apply to attend Aurora College. 2023 saw the first child accepted into Year 5 and start in 2024 with another child starting in 2025. This opportunity allows students to expand and extend their knowledge in Maths and Science and we have been told that the students thoroughly enjoy the lessons.

Another year volunteering for ICPA-NSW as part of the amazing team that makes up your current State Council. I feel very fortunate to be surrounded by passionate, supportive, like-minded councillors that are the true definition of a team. Thank you for all that you continue to do, it is truly appreciated.

I cannot end my report without acknowledging our vacating Immediate Past President Claire Butler. Thank you for being such a source of support and for imparting your amazing knowledge and talents with us all. Thank you for your friendship of which I truly appreciate.

I'll finish my report with the following quote:

“The purpose of Education is to turn mirrors into windows”. (Sydney J Harris)

May our children have all the opportunities that each of those windows provide as we all continue to work together for “Equity of Access to Education” for our rural, remote & very remote families.

Thank you.

Gabie Le Lievre

Specific Student Needs Portfolio Leader

TERTIARY REPORT

Distinguished Guests, Fellow Members of ICPA, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is with much pleasure that I present the 2025 Tertiary Report.

The disparity in tertiary participation, retention, attainment and opportunities for rural and remote students continues to be evident in the under-representation of this cohort in tertiary education compared to their metropolitan counterparts. The priority for the tertiary portfolio is to address the barriers to ensure equity for these rural and remote students. Tertiary students and their families from geographically isolated locations face unique disadvantages and challenges to accessing a tertiary education. Factors such as a lack of social support, distance from tertiary education institutions, the high costs of relocation, tuition and ongoing living expenses all contribute to lower choice and opportunity for these students. These barriers increase the more remote a student resides from their chosen university.

Members continue to voice the greatest impediment to accessing a tertiary education is the high cost for students to relocate, often hundreds of kilometres away, to access their chosen pathway, along with living away from home. Adequate financial assistance is imperative to increase the engagement of rural and remote students at this level. ICPA-NSW seeks to ensure that students from rural and remote areas who have the ability, ambition, motivation and desire have access to tertiary education options which will enable them to pursue the career path of their choice.

During our 2024 Annual State Conference held in Dubbo there were 4 tertiary motions presented. These involved issues around the way advanced standings and credits could be transferred from one academic transcript to another when a student has cause to change universities, collaboration between Country Universities Centre and TAFE Connected Learning Centres to create Regional University Study Hubs within the Connected Learning

Centres, increase to the allowance rates for Vocational Training Assistance Scheme (VTAS) to reflect the actual costs for apprentices and trainees and support for tertiary students and apprentices who have to undertake placements to complete their qualification.

The Tertiary Portfolio has addressed the motions through correspondence to and in collaboration with Federal Council to Ministers and Government departments, including the Minister for Education, Minister for Regional NSW, Minister for Agriculture, as well as Shadow Ministers, the University Admissions Centre and Council of Deans of Education.

We have also recently been made aware that the NSW Government AgSkilled program is telling our members that they are ‘managing their budget’ and are therefore not offering access to training currently. This program was to enhance vocational education and training for the agriculture and livestock sectors ensuring workers are prepared for industry changes driven by innovation, research and technology. The program was aimed at primary producers, farm employees, industry professionals, or those seeking employment in agriculture, including job seekers and school leavers, working in the agricultural plant-growing and livestock sectors. We continue to seek clarification and advocate for continued support for this program that upskills those working in our agricultural industry.

Pleasingly, State Council can report that there have been some welcome outcomes from our advocacy and that of Federal Council which will positively impact rural and remote tertiary students.

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is available for eligible school leavers from inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas who relocate more than 90 minutes by public transport from their family home to undertake a full-time, eligible higher level tertiary education course (Certificate IV or above). We can now confirm that the payment may be available to first year tertiary students who finished Year 12 or equivalent before 2024.

Paid Placements

Those studying to be a teacher, a nurse, a midwife or social worker will be eligible for the Commonwealth Prac Payment to support them undertaking mandatory workplace placement required for university and vocational education and training qualifications. This new payment will provide around 68,000 eligible higher education students and over 5,000 VET students each year with \$319.50 per week during their clinical and professional placement periods.

Benchmarked to the single Austudy per week rate, this payment will provide cost-of-living relief for many students. It will be means-tested and available from 1 July 2025 and will be in

addition to any income support a student may also receive. We are now advocating for other professions being studied to be included in the eligibility.

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is a network of learning hubs dedicated to making higher education more accessible to regional students. With community-owned centres across NSW, QLD, and Victoria, CUC provides local students with modern study spaces, technology, and access to academic resources and support services. CUCs continue to expand across NSW, Queensland and Victoria which makes accessing a tertiary education for thousands of rural and remote students a viable option.

ICPA-NSW is very appreciative of the State and Federal Government's continued commitment and prioritisation of tertiary education for rural and remote students. The recent positive and significant measures have addressed many current and past motions. We will continue to progress and raise the profile of current, previous and ongoing issues rural and remote students face when accessing a tertiary education through all avenues available to us at every opportunity, to ensure they have the opportunity to access, participate and complete a tertiary education of their choice commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

In closing, I would like to thank all of those who seek to support our rural and remote students to access, participate and complete their tertiary education, to forge relationships and partnerships in order to provide an educational pathway to support local industry and communities.

**Tanya Mitchell on behalf of Robin Beckwith
Tertiary Portfolio**

Travel Report

Madam President, distinguished guests, members of ICPA, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I present the Travel Portfolio Report for 2025.

Last year regarding travel and we had meetings with Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, Shadow Minister Regional Transport and Roads, Transport for NSW, Bus NSW, Minister for Agriculture, Regional and Western NSW, Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, Shadow Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education and the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport.

It was 2016 when we first requested the Minister for Transport to give University students travel assistance, like the School Drive Subsidy (SDS) to get to their place of study. You might remember we got the Regional Apprentice and University Student travel fuel card trial introduced in February 2023 but was cancelled in May that year by the Minns Government.

We are told that (apparently) Tertiary students continue to receive generous concession travel arrangements, these include concession fares on all public transport in NSW including all

NSW TrainLink services. After meeting with Steve Whan, Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education during our deputation in Sydney in September last year we received a copy of the letter from him that he had written to Jenny Aitchison, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads in support of a subsidy for Tertiary students to travel to Uni.

We have been working with TfNSW so Lord Howe Island parents can book a second flight from Sydney to Narrandera for students going to Yanco Agricultural High School and claim part of the cost back. Previously the flight subsidy was only to the mainland and parents had to pay the additional cost. I am pleased to say that in early March this year part of the criteria was changed to “enrolled as a full-time student in a secondary school within NSW from year 7 to year 12”.

Yanco Agricultural High School was notified in September by NSW Trainlink that only students that reside in NSW are eligible to travel on Desi/Holiday buses.

Unfortunately, this means Victorian & Queensland students need to arrange their own transport to and from home to school for Desi and Holidays. We have sent letters to the NSW and QLD Cross Border Commissioners and are waiting for their reply.

The Preschool Drive Subsidy trial commenced in 2022 and was extended for another year and finished in 2023. The last update we have received about whether it will be implemented, is that Transport for NSW continues to work with the Department of Education to finalise the review of the Preschool Drive Subsidy. Outcomes from the review will be provided to the Government for their consideration to inform any further program development and funding decisions. It is anticipated that a summary of review findings will be shared following Government’s consideration of the outcomes.

For further information on Travel Subsidies go to:
transportnsw.info/tickets-opal-eligibility-concessions/school-student-travel

David Butler
Travel Portfolio Leader
