



Submission

to the

**Wage Justice for Early Childhood Education and Care Workers
(Special Account) Bill 2024**

**from the
Federal Council**

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

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ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have access to the services required for an equitable, affordable high-quality education, from early childhood through to tertiary and training. The member families of the Association reside and work in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of achieving access to an equitable education for their children, despite their geographic location. They often live great distances from services required to support the education of their children and therefore need specifically designed rural and remote programs that allow these children to learn, develop and thrive.

ICPA (Aust) has long advocated for employment incentives and pay parity to ensure the recruitment and retention of qualified Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote areas. We value this interim measure as an attempt to ensure Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals are fairly remunerated to help attract and retain ECEC professionals, and to ensure that ECEC remains accessible and affordable to families, however it does not address the real and dire lack of ECEC professionals in rural and remote Australia longer term.

ICPA (Aust) believes that this proposed grant program does not provide the security and recognition of ECEC professionals that is required. Grant programs are short term, administratively arduous and restrict growth and development with unrealistic and inappropriate guidelines for the rural and remote settings. The Wage Justice for Early Childhood Education and Care Workers (Special Account) Bill 2024 does not value the ECEC sector for the work of guiding children's development and embedding the foundations of their educational and life journey. This short-term grant based interim measure does not instill confidence in the sector that there is a solid and valued future in this industry. This Act ceases to have effect at the end of June 2028 and as such, this interim measure is expecting ECEC businesses to agree to the wage increase with the real prospect that at the conclusion of the grant program they will be left with no further support to continue to pay their staff the increased wage.

The long-running lack of vision to deliver specific rural and remote ECEC services to rural and remote families has significantly hindered the opportunities for educational development available to children living in these areas, and also stifles the growth and sustainability of communities and industries to which these families belong. With limited to no access to suitable ECEC services in many rural and remote communities, parents and women especially are unable to participate in the workforce, inhibiting their capacity for growth, independence and the ability to gain their living by work. A strategy for and delivery of quality ECEC, specifically for rural and remote areas should be the backbone of equitable educational outcomes for rural and remote children and would strengthen the economic and social vitality of families and communities across rural and remote Australia. It is only through long-term fixed funding programs that all children and families in Australia will have access to secure ECEC services with long term educators and sound frameworks presiding over their care and growth – regardless of where they live.

Pay parity for Early Childhood teachers across all settings is essential in addressing the difficulties that rural and remote communities face in employing qualified professionals in long day care centres. Every state has different employment conditions but in New South Wales, if ECEC teachers elect to work in the public school system in some rural and remote locations, the

additional benefits they receive compared to working as an Early Childhood Teacher in a long day care centre can be outlined for comparison as –

| | Childcare | School |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Base Salary | 94,478.80 | 157,842 |
| Directors Allowance | 7,745.92 | |
| Educational Leader Allowance | 4,253.32 | |
| Recruitment bonus | | 20,000 |
| Rural & remote relocation support | | 8,000 |
| Rural Teacher Incentive (Includes value of rental subsidy) | | 25,000 |
| Stamp Duty relief (not paid if rental subsidy paid) | | 10,000 |
| Retention benefit | | 5000 |
| Experienced Teacher Benefit | | 10,000 |
| Climatic Allowance | | 3000 (approx.) |
| Additional Personal leave days | | 3 days |
| Additional Annual leave value in \$ terms | | 26,307 |
| TOTAL | \$106,477.24pa | \$265,149pa |

The disparity is clearly immense and contributes to the ECEC worker shortage for centre based care in rural and remote Australia. This disparity will not be rectified by a possible 15% increase over two years. Early childhood services are significantly limited in their budgets to make up this gap.

It is crucial to find long term solutions to address pay parity of Early Childhood professionals in rural and remote locations to ensure recruitment and retention of educators is achieved while viability of the ECEC centres is preserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Incentives and structures which allow Early Childhood professionals to work in rural and remote areas without disadvantage in comparison to their urban colleagues.
- That pay package parity of Early Childhood Teachers in rural and remote locations across all Early Childhood Education settings be addressed.

Increased financial assistance coupled with incentive programs for skilled employees for rural and remote services would allow approved providers to attract and retain qualified early childhood educators and teachers. Services would then have the capacity to support children to meet necessary early childhood outcomes. The risk for rural and remote communities if this is not achieved, is that children will be disadvantaged at the start of their education through compromised delivery of early childhood education and care which can impact their progress in the education system and have long lasting effects.