

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2026 FEDERAL CONFERENCE BOARDING SCHOOLS /HOSTELS / SECOND HOME MOTIONS

A1. New South Wales State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for a significant increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance to reflect the escalating costs incurred by families, and for the implementation of an appropriate indexation mechanism to ensure the allowance keeps pace with rising education expenses.”

Explanation:

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance is intended to support families in rural, remote and isolated areas with the additional costs of educating their children when reasonable access to a local school is not available. ICPA Australia is acknowledged and commended for its ongoing advocacy in this area.

However, the costs associated with distance education and boarding have increased significantly in recent years, placing growing financial pressure on isolated families.

Current AIC payment rates no longer adequately reflect the actual out-of-pocket expenses incurred by families, reducing equitable access to educational opportunities for rural and remote students. Without a meaningful increase and the introduction of a reliable indexation mechanism, the gap between the support provided and the real cost of education will continue to widen.

This motion recognises that isolated families should not be disadvantaged because of where they live. Increasing the AIC Allowance and ensuring it is indexed to reflect rising education costs, is essential to ensure rural and remote students can access educational opportunities comparable to those available to their metropolitan peers.

A2. Boulia-Bedourie-Birdsville Branch (QLD)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to the Australian Government for a comprehensive review and reform of all allowances under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme, ensuring that each component is indexed and maintained at a level that reflects the original intent and level of financial support established when the scheme was introduced.”

Explanation:

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme was introduced in 1973 to assist geographically isolated families in accessing education, with support originally intended to cover approximately 55% of the average boarding school fee. Over time, boarding, travel and education-related costs have increased significantly, while AIC allowances have not kept pace. As a result, the level of assistance provided today no longer reflects the scheme's original purpose or the financial support intended when it was established.

It is essential that the Australian Department of Education formally recognises students from rural, remote and geographically isolated areas as a distinct priority cohort within Australia's National Education Strategy. The Department currently identifies and supports specific groups through dedicated focus areas, including Indigenous education, students with disability, international

education and mainstream schooling initiatives. However, students who rely on the AIC Scheme due to geographical isolation do not receive the same level of recognition despite facing unique and ongoing barriers to educational access.

A comprehensive review of the AIC Scheme is needed to ensure all allowances accurately reflect contemporary costs and continue to provide equitable access to education for children living in rural, remote and isolated areas of Australia.

A3. Broken Hill Branch (NSW)

LOST

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Social Services to review and update the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme policy to create an additional “Significantly Geographically Isolated” category under the AIC eligibility criteria, recognising the inequity experienced by families living in significantly geographically isolated areas.”

Explanation:

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme was established in 1973 with the core intent of supporting the education of isolated children who did not have reasonable access to education. Over time, the eligibility criteria have broadened to ensure more families experiencing educational disadvantage are able to access support.

Under the current AIC isolation criteria, eligibility applies where:

- the family home is 56km or more from the nearest appropriate state school; and
- the student lives at least 4.5km from the nearest transport to school; or
- there is no transport available to access school; or
- circumstances beyond the family’s control prevent the child from attending the nearest appropriate state school for at least 20 days per school year.

While this assistance provides valuable support to rural and remote families, it does not adequately recognise the additional inequities faced by families living in significantly geographically isolated areas. A “one size fits all” approach to support does not recognise the compounding disadvantage created by extreme geographical isolation. Equity is not achieved by providing identical support to all students regardless of circumstance; true equity requires support that reflects the actual level of disadvantage and cost burden experienced by families.

Families in these locations experience substantially greater distances, limited or non-existent transport options, reduced access to essential services, increased travel requirements and significantly higher costs associated with educating their children.

A separate “Significantly Geographically Isolated” category within the AIC Scheme would acknowledge these inequities and provide fairer recognition of the challenges faced by families in the most remote parts of Australia.

Suggested eligibility criteria for a Significantly Geographically Isolated category could include:

- the family home being more than 80km from the nearest appropriate state school; and
- the student living at least 20km from the nearest appropriate school transport to school; or
- there being no transport available to access school.

This additional category would better reflect the realities faced by significantly geographically isolated families and support equitable access to education for all Australian children, regardless of where they live.

Without a more equitable tiered approach to assistance, families in the most isolated parts of Australia continue to shoulder disproportionately high costs simply to access the same basic educational opportunities available to less isolated students. This undermines the intent of the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme, which was originally established to ensure that geographic isolation would not prevent Australian children from accessing a fair and reasonable education.

A4. Northern Territory State Council

LOST

“That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Australian Government to review the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme and introduce a tiered payment structure or additional GI loading based on geographic isolation and distance from educational services, recognising the significantly higher costs incurred by families in remote and very remote Australia.”

Explanation:

ICPA NT acknowledges and thanks the Federal Council for its extensive advocacy regarding the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme. However, the current AIC payment does not adequately recognise the substantially higher costs incurred by families living in remote and very remote Australia.

The current fuel crisis has exacerbated this situation and now more than ever, each additional km travelled makes such a costly difference.

While all geographically isolated families face additional costs in accessing education compared to their urban counterparts, the level of financial burden varies significantly depending on a family's location. Families living hundreds of kilometers from schools, airports and essential services incur considerably greater expenses than those living closer to educational centres.

These additional costs include, but are not limited to:

- travel to and from boarding schools, airports and distance education events;
- accommodation during educational visits, school events and travel periods;
- increased fuel costs;
- vehicle maintenance and wear and tear;
- lost income associated with extended travel times;
- access to educational resources and services.

A tiered payment structure (or GI loading) based on geographic isolation or distance from educational services would provide a fairer and more equitable distribution of support, ensuring assistance better reflects the actual costs faced by families.

ICPA NT notes that the Northern Territory's Student Assistance Scheme (NT SAS) already incorporates distance-based assistance (grouped into multiple zones), recognising that the costs associated with education increase with geographical isolation. A similar approach within the AIC Scheme would ensure support is better aligned with the realities faced by remote and very remote families across Australia.

CASE STUDY 1: A family property on the Barkly Tablelands in the NT travels 740km (one way) to attend contact events at Katherine School of the Air. A whole day's drive, a whole day's pay for a home tutor, a whole day of lost work for the parent, an extra night's accommodation on Friday night as it's too far to head home after In-school has finished. Extra fuel costs, wear and tear on vehicles. 4 x In schools per year, plus school camps, sports camps and more.

CASE STUDY 2: A family living north of Mataranka on the main Stuart Highway travels 64km to Katherine School of the Air (one way). They receive the same AIC as Case Study 1, but incur a far less cost and time burden to attend in-school events etc.

CASE STUDY 3: A family on the NT/WA border travels 926km to Darwin to get kids on a plane to go back to boarding school. At least one night's accommodation, usually two as you need a day to get supplies for school, haircuts and medical appointments.

A5. South Australia State Council

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Social Services work with Treasury, Department of Social Services and Services Australia to approve and implement a policy change to apply the Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) to Geographically Isolated applicants whose verified boarding fees exceed the combined value of the Basic Boarding Allowance and Additional Boarding Allowance without being subject to parental income testing.”

Explanation:

In 2025, the average cost of boarding fees in Australia was \$27,266, yet under the current eligibility criteria, the Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) is received by less than 12% of families receiving the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance.

Eligibility is determined through parental income means testing rather than the actual financial burden faced by families, despite the ABA being intended to assist with boarding costs exceeding the Basic Boarding Allowance of \$10,555. The ABA is currently capped at \$3,027 per student annually; however, this represents the maximum payment available, with many eligible families receiving only a portion of this amount due to the parental income means test.

We request that, upon review of the ABA eligibility criteria, families whose verified boarding fees exceed the combined value of the Basic Boarding Allowance and Additional Boarding Allowance (\$13,582) automatically qualify for the ABA component without being subject to parental income testing. Whilst we understand the Additional Boarding Allowance is intended to provide additional support for lower income families, it is evident that it is not providing adequate additional support given less 12% of boarding families receive it.

For geographically isolated families, boarding school is essential to accessing secondary education, and costs routinely exceed the Basic Boarding Allowance, placing considerable financial pressure on families, particularly those with multiple children.

Basing ABA eligibility on verified boarding costs, rather than parental income, would provide fairer and more equitable support while maintaining the integrity and purpose of the scheme. In addressing concerns surrounding ABA eligibility criteria, it is important this does not detract from the ongoing need to increase the Basic Boarding Allowance, which supports educational access for all eligible families.

Boarding Example Costs

Family 1 Lives 150 km from their closest town, Coober Pedy and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in the far north of South Australia

Son (Yr9) at boarding school in Adelaide.

Home to Adelaide is 998 km one-way (1996 km return). Boarding Fees of School \$32,160 Basic Boarding Allowance Received

\$10,553 Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$650

Boarding costs my family \$18,055 after his scholarship is applied. \$11,204 Federal Government support.

Gap \$6,851

*Boarding scholarship Yes. Without his scholarship, and relying solely on the AIC, our family would not have been able to afford to send him away to provide a secondary education - without his scholarship, our family would be out of pocket for a \$20,956 gap each year after the application of the AIC at the current rate we receive. That's just the boarding side, with tuition also extremely high.

*With a second child nearing the end of her primary education and needing to go to boarding school for her secondary education, it is a genuine concern for our family whether we will be able to afford it. If she does not secure a scholarship, we will be unable to afford to educate her, which is going to lead to some extremely hard times for our family.

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 2 Lives 205km from their closest town (Coober Pedy) and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in the far north of South Australia.

Son (Yr12) & Daughter (Yr8) are at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 990km one way, 1980km return.

Boarding Fees of Schools is \$50,948.00

Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) Received \$21,110.00 Additional Boarding Allowance (ABA) Received \$1782.91 Boarding costs my family \$50948.00

I receive \$22,892.91 federal government support.

Gap \$28,055.09

*does not receive the benefit of any scholarships

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 3 Lives 105km from their closest town Oodnadatta and 220km from the slightly larger centre of Coober Pedy and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in the far north of South Australia. Son (Yr7) & Daughter (Yr9) at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 990km one-way (1980km return).

Boarding Fees of School \$56,000

Basic Boarding Allowance Received \$10,780/child

Additional Boarding Allowance Received Child 1 \$224 / Child 2 \$225 Boarding cost my family \$56,000, I receive \$22,010 Federal Government support.

*one child on boarding scholarship

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Gap \$33,989

Family 4 Lives 150km from their closest town Peterborough and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in South Australia.

Daughter (Yr8) at boarding school in Adelaide.

Home to Adelaide is 387 km one-way (774 km return). Boarding Fees of School \$29,748

Basic Boarding Allowance Received \$10,555

Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$ under process so NIL

Boarding cost my family \$29,748 and I receive \$10,555 Federal Government support.

Gap \$19,193

*does not receive the benefit of any scholarships

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 5 Lives 50km from their closest town Orroroo, which sits within the Federal electorate of Grey. Son (Yr11) at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 325km one-way (650km return).

Boarding Fees of School \$31,860

Basic Boarding Allowance Received

\$10,555 Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$0

Boarding cost my family \$ 31,860. I receive \$10,555 of Federal Government support.

Gap \$21,305

*Boarding scholarship

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 6 Lives 83km to the nearest town, 175km to the nearest public high school and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in the far North East of South Australia.

Son (Yr 9) and daughter (Yr 7) are at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 800km one way (1600 km return).

Boarding Fees of School \$58,896

Basic Boarding Allowance Received \$21,110

Additional Boarding Allowance Received (still waiting to hear if approved and the amount) Scholarship received \$4,958

Discounts \$1,348

Gap \$31,478.58

*small scholarship received

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 7 Lives 150km from their closest town Coober Pedy and sits within the Federal electorate of Grey in the north-west of SA.

2 sons (Yr 10 and Yr 7) at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 800km one-way (1600km return).

Boarding Fees of School \$32505 + \$31860 = \$64365 Boarding Scholarship

\$16300 + \$15930 = \$32230 Basic Boarding Allowance \$21580 Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$0

Boarding cost my family \$64365. I receive in scholarships \$32,230 and I receive \$21,580 of federal government support.

Gap \$10,555

*Boarding scholarships

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 8 Lives 45km from their closest town Woomera and 210km from the slightly larger centre of Port Augusta, sitting within the Federal electorate of Grey.

Son (Yr8) & Daughter (Yr10) at boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 521km one-way (1042km return).

Boarding fees of School \$65,010

Basic Boarding Allowance Received \$20,816 (for 2 children) Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$0

Boarding cost my family \$65,010. I receive \$20,816 of Federal Government support.

Gap \$44,194

*does not receive the benefit of any scholarships

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

Family 9 Lives in a remote area, approximately 297 km from the nearest town of Coober Pedy, within the Federal electorate of Division of Grey.

Their daughter (year 9) attends boarding school in Adelaide. Home to Adelaide is 700km one-way (1400km return)

Boarding Fees of schools minus scholarships: \$37,124 Basic Boarding Allowance Received: \$21,110

Additional Boarding Allowance Received \$0

Gap: \$16,014

*Boarding scholarships

** these figures do not include school fees or incidentals

A6. South Australia State Council

CARRIED

“SA ICPA thanks ICPA (Aust) for its ongoing advocacy and commitment to securing an immediate increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance to cover 55% of the average cost of boarding for geographically isolated students.”

Explanation:

SA ICPA sincerely thanks the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia for its continued advocacy on behalf of rural and remote families regarding the inadequacy of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance.

For many geographically isolated families, boarding school is essential for children to access secondary education. However, boarding costs have continued to rise significantly, while the AIC allowance has not kept pace, placing increasing financial pressure on families.

SA ICPA acknowledges and appreciates the important work of ICPA (Aust) in advocating for a meaningful increase to the allowance, appropriate indexation and equitable access to education for rural and remote students regardless of postcode. SA ICPA is committed to supporting this advocacy and is willing to assist in any way possible to help progress this important work.

A7. South Australia State Council**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) encourages the Federal Government and relevant departments to commit to the continuation and long-term funding of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (CRSP) beyond the current pilot program ending in 2029.”

Explanation:

The Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program (CRSP), introduced in 2024 as a pilot initiative, was warmly welcomed by the Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia (ICPA) members and provided successful applicants with the opportunity to attend boarding school at a subsidised financial cost.

For many families living in regional and remote Australia, boarding school is the only viable option for children to access compulsory secondary education. The CRSP provided significant financial relief and is an important acknowledgement by the Federal Government of the financial pressures faced by geographically isolated families seeking equitable educational opportunities for their children. With the current pilot program due to conclude in 2029, ongoing funding and long-term commitment to the CRSP would provide certainty for families and continue supporting students who, through no fault of their own, are unable to access quality secondary schooling locally.

A8. Alice Springs Branch (NT)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) are thanked and supported in their ongoing efforts working with the Minister for Education, Treasury and Prime Minister Cabinet to:

- 1) Continue and expand the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program beyond its pilot.
- 2) Consistently provide feedback for the review of the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program.”

Explanation:

Since the initial 2024 pilot, the scholarship program has been dormant, with no commencement date set for further scholarships (there is a review process and members have been notified that this will happen towards the end of the pilot).

Continuing the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program beyond the pilot stage would provide certainty for families, improve educational access and equity for regional and remote students, and ensure long term support for those who have no viable alternative to boarding schooling.

A9. Cojoined Motion Louth Branch (NSW) along with Westmar – Inglestone Branch (QLD)**CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates to relevant ministers to support the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who would like to provide financial assistance to employees residing in geographically isolated areas, to enable their children to attend boarding school.”

Explanation Louth Branch (NSW):

In many rural and remote locations there is limited or no access to suitable compulsory education facilities and therefore boarding school is the only option. This can often become unaffordable to families, especially when there is more than one child, so families are forced to relocate to employment with closer access to school facilities, resulting in further loss to the already diminished workforce of remote regions. In recognition of conditions, the Australian Tax Office already offers FBT concessions for employer provision of housing where there is a lack of sufficient residential accommodation in remote locations.

Similar concessions should also apply when employers financially assist with the schooling costs of employees' children where there is a lack of appropriate schooling facilities available in those same

remote locations. Currently when employers offer financial assistance towards the cost of schooling, the payment is deemed a Fringe Benefit and taxed at the applicable rate of 47% so any contribution made by the employer is compounded with almost half the amount again in tax.

The cost of accessing compulsory education for geographically isolated children should not be taxed, irrespective of who is bearing the cost. Affordable access to boarding schools for employees who work in remote areas provides their children with equitable access to school facilities as those in non-remote regions. It also serves to keep valuable families in remote Australia, supporting an already challenged workforce.

Explanation Westmar – Inglestone (QLD):

Many employers/employees in rural and regional areas find secondary schooling of employees' children a hard time for all. Many families leave their place of employment to educate their children for secondary school, causing upheaval for both the employer and the employee. Many employers would like to assist with some of the costs associated with secondary schooling in order to retain their valuable employees, however they are hit with the double whammy of the cost of the assistance as well as the burden of the FBT. If the FBT component on boarding school fees of rural and remote employees' children was removed, it would provide a greater incentive for employers to assist with some of the schooling costs.

Rural and remote living is not for everyone. It is for the vital minority working to provide food, fibre and resources for the benefit of the whole country. The families that do so should be supported not penalised. The removal of FBT would help sustain our small rural communities.

Example: Employer Pays \$30,000 Boarding School Fees - FBT Calculation

Item	Amount
School fees paid	\$30,000
Type 2 gross-up factor	1.8868
Grossed-up taxable value	\$56,604
FBT rate	47%
FBT payable	\$26,604
Total Employer Cost	\$56,604

A10. Bourke Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocate to the Federal government for tax deductibility of boarding school fees for children in remote and geographically isolated communities."

Explanation:

Children in remote and geographically isolated communities are denied the educational choice that families in metropolitan and regional centres can take for granted. For many families, secondary schooling options are limited to a single local school or distance education, regardless of whether either option is the right fit for the child. Where the only local option is unable to meet a family's needs, geography becomes a direct barrier to equitable access to education.

This is not only an education issue; it is a workforce and community sustainability issue. Remote towns rely on essential professionals, skilled workers and business owners to remain viable. When families are forced to leave a community so their children can access appropriate secondary schooling, those towns lose the very people they need to sustain local services, economic activity and long-term growth.

The reality is that families are already making these decisions. It is common to hear committed residents say they cannot stay in a remote community once their children reach high school age. That reality should concern governments. If policy settings make it financially impossible for families to remain in remote areas while securing an appropriate education for their children, those settings are actively undermining regional and remote workforce retention.

Families do not ask for special treatment; they ask for fair treatment. Children who must live away from home to access compulsory schooling should not be disadvantaged simply because of where

they live. Parents in isolated areas should have genuine choice about the schooling that best meets their child's educational, social and wellbeing needs.

Tax deductibility for boarding fees, distinct from school tuition fees, would provide targeted and practical support to families who have no realistic alternative if they wish to access appropriate secondary education. It would also help employers attract and retain key workers in remote and isolated communities by reducing one of the major financial barriers to staying.

This reform would deliver benefits beyond individual families. It would support the retention of GPs, teachers, police officers, small business owners and other professionals whose presence is critical to the strength of remote communities. A tax deduction for boarding fees would recognise a simple principle: when geography removes educational choice, public policy should help restore it. This is a practical measure to improve educational equity, strengthen remote communities and support the families who choose to live and work in the bush.

A11. Western Australia State Council

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) advocates to Standards Australia and relevant education authorities to ensure rural, regional and remote stakeholders are meaningfully consulted during any review, amendment or implementation process relating to Australian boarding standards."

Explanation:

For many geographically isolated families, boarding is not a choice but a necessity to access secondary education.

National boarding standards directly impact:

- student wellbeing and safety,
- operational requirements,
- accessibility and affordability of boarding,
- and the sustainability of boarding providers servicing regional Australia.

ICPA WA believes rural and remote families, boarding students, boarding providers and regional communities must have meaningful input into the development and implementation of boarding standards to ensure they remain practical, equitable and workable across diverse regional settings.

Meaningful consultation should include:

- rural and remote families,
- boarding students and parents,
- government and non-government boarding providers,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,
- disability stakeholders,
- agricultural and pastoral communities,
- and relevant education and wellbeing professionals.