**ISOLATED CHILDREN’S PARENTS’ ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA**



**2019 Federal Conference**

**Specific Education Needs Portfolio Motions**

***Specific Education Needs***

**A58. Kindon Branch (Qld) CARRIED**

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Health and Federal Treasurer to extend the Medicare rebate to include patients wishing to access speech pathology and paediatrician appointments through telehealth deliveries.”

**Explanation:**

Currently Medicare rebates for telehealth are available for patients accessing a variety of specialist appointments when they live in rural and remote Australia. These include mental health services, psychologists, occupational therapy and social workers. Unfortunately, speech pathologists and paediatricians are not included on this list and we believe that these are vital services that many rural and remote students access via telehealth and a Medicare rebate should be allocated. Making these appointments more accessible through a telehealth option keeps families in their home town and children in school instead of incurring the costs of travel and accommodation to attend sessions.

Research has proven that speech pathology is just as effective via telehealth as one on one sessions. The government would do well to remember a dollar spent now on early intervention for children with specific education needs could well save thousands of dollars in health care in later years. Firstly, because education is the greatest predictor of health, but also because lesser education will affect employability.

**CASE STUDY**

We live in a rural area, a 1.5 hour-drive from Toowoomba, 3 hour-drive from Brisbane. Three of our four children have special needs.

Our 5-year-old son requires speech therapy which I would like to access through an online service. Medicare does not cover online speech therapy at the moment.  We've applied for an NDIS plan which could fund these therapies. However, this process has taken months and is still not finalized. Furthermore, my understanding is that to be eligible for an NDIS plan, the child must have multiple needs/delays. Therefore, if my son were to just need speech therapy, he would not be able to access NDIS funding for this therapy online. Neither NDIS nor patient travel schemes will cover travel and accommodation for specific education needs either. So, we are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Our 10-year-old daughter is seeing a Developmental Paediatrician, in Brisbane - the closest city that offers this service. We just made an appointment to have a follow up "teleconference appointment" with the paediatrician for next week. The paediatrician’s office told me that there would be a $57 charge for the telehealth appointment that would not be covered by Medicare.

Our 5-month-old daughter, diagnosed with Down syndrome, has an approved NDIS plan and has a need for occupational therapy, speech (for feeding issues) and physiotherapy. Very few therapists are able to come out to our home. Therefore, we are traveling to Toowoomba for the various therapies. The travel costs for the various "NDIS-funded therapies" are not covered by NDIS nor Medicare. These are NDIS-funded therapies and it's our travel costs (not the therapist's) that are not covered by NDIS nor Medicare. We hope to eventually be able to access some of these therapies via Telehealth, however in-person therapy is more suitable at this young age. Again, Medicare rebates for appropriate telehealth consultations would be very helpful for our family.