

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.  
"Access to Education"**



**Federal Conference 2020**

**Motion Update**

**March 2021**

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The ICPA Federal Virtual Conference held on the 5 and 6 August 2020 resulted in 35 carried motions. Given the online format of the Conference, the decision was made to limit motions to those not already in Federal Council Policy.

Federal Council is pleased to provide this Motion Update outlining the actions and progress of the 2020 motions, along with the most up to date information and developments on past motions that continue to be actioned as part of current advocacy and policy. Members will also find information on issues which have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ICPA (Aust) would like to remind members that they can contact Federal Council at any time should a concern arise in regards to the education of their children.

## **BOARDING/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME**

Given limitations to motions accepted on the Conference agenda this year, four motions were carried in the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio.

Due to the current climate and the difficulties faced by boarding school students, two motions were tabled regarding the **Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines** for boarding as well as the establishment of an **Isolated Children's Pandemic Advisory Group** made up of State and Federal Education Ministers, relevant authorities, the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and ICPA representatives to address the issue of boarders crossing state borders to access their compulsory schooling.

ICPA (Aust) has welcomed the opportunity to work with the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, the Hon Andrew Gee MP, to discuss ways to resolve the inconsistent and sometimes confusing processes and guidelines around addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to boarding schools and geographically isolated boarding students, especially with regards to the AHPPC Guidelines and border restrictions. It is noted that some further flexibility was given with amendments made to the Guidelines in September. Unfortunately, we are aware these are still broad and inconsistencies continue across jurisdictions and indeed in schools within jurisdictions. We are monitoring this situation and are in regular contact with State Councils to garner their 'on the ground' experiences to raise concerns as appropriate.

ICPA (Aust) had also been working earnestly toward addressing the border restrictions put in place by respective states and territories throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of these on interstate geographically isolated boarding students. We sought the establishment of a formal Isolated Children's Pandemic Advisory Group, made up of State and Federal Education Ministers, relevant authorities, the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and ICPA representatives.

We are encouraged by the Federal Government's desire for a collaborative long term approach to this issue and have reiterated that the establishment of a formal Advisory Group would ensure that in any ongoing pandemic situation, a nationally consistent and practical solution is imperative to provide certainty and clarity to families.

Despite this not yet having come to fruition, in October 2020 we welcomed the opportunity to participate in a roundtable discussion on this issue with other stakeholder groups, including all ICPA State Councils and ABSA. Developments since this discussion have been positive. In collaboration with all ICPA State Councils, a submission was made in November 2020 to Minister Gee indicating the vision of a National Framework to support interstate boarders. This submission was forwarded by the Minister to all State Chief Medical/Health Officers along with a request that a nationally consistent framework be established.

ICPA (Aust) was asked by members to monitor the introduction of the **Religious Discrimination Bills** and

ensure that rural and remote students are not disadvantaged. Work had begun on this motion prior to Conference as this issue had been raised in early 2020. ICPA (Aust) has had several discussions with Members of Parliament, Senators and various individuals and organisations including ABSA regarding the Religious Discrimination Bill. At this stage the Bill has been tabled, however we note there have been no further advancements from our reviews of the legislation. We shall continue our work in this area and monitor the situation closely.

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance continues to be a central focus of the Portfolio. ICPA (Aust) welcomed the commitment by the Government to continue to pay the allowance in 2020 even while some students were unable to access their schools. This commitment has been revoked in 2021 and payment of the allowance will be decided on a case-by-case basis should pandemic restrictions impact school attendance. ICPA (Aust) encourage members to contact the AIC hotline 13 23 18 should they be impacted.

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate strongly for the allowance to be increased across the board and to be aligned with the CPI Education Sub-index, rather than standard CPI rate, as this does not reflect, nor keep pace with, the ongoing rises in educational costs for boarding. The COVID-19 pandemic has extenuated this issue, with the economic impact of the pandemic resulting in negligible increases to CPI and therefore no increase to the AIC Boarding Allowance from 2020 to 2021 and only a limited increase to the AIC Second Home Allowance. This is very concerning as it will result in further increases to out-of-pocket expenses for geographically isolated families to educate their children, which are already proving unsustainable for many. ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise this issue at every opportunity in the coming months.

At the 2019 Federal Conference, members raised concerns on the Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology for school funding and its impact on regional, rural and remote students and the schools they attend, especially those who must attend boarding school to access their education. ICPA (Aust) has been monitoring this topic closely and since March 2020, has lodged two submissions to the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) in which we accentuated the concerns of our members. We also took the opportunity to participate in a consultation with the Board where we raised the concerns of members and highlighted the unique circumstances of rural and remote families, especially around the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) methodology along with the disregard of boarding operations in the funding measure. ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise our concerns as the opportunity arises.



On behalf of our members this message was published in the August 2020 ABSA magazine "Lights Out" which is sent to every Boarding School and Hostel throughout Australia to thank Boarding Schools for working closely with boarder families to deliver online lessons when the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in temporary closure.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

ICPA (Aust) has continued to work closely with the Federal Government, telecommunications companies and other like-minded stakeholders to seek the maintenance and development of adequate, affordable and reliable communications services for families in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly for educational outcomes.

As part of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) we attend regular RRRCC meetings and associated stakeholder forums and have taken the opportunity to impart the experiences and concerns of ICPA (Aust) members across many communications issues. ICPA (Aust) is also a member of Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and have a representative on the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel where we further raise awareness of communication challenges for rural and remote students and their families.

While there were only 7 carried Communications motions at the 2020 Federal Conference, Federal Council's work in the Communications portfolio has continued extensively.

### **Internet**

Four of the communications motions passed at the 2020 virtual Federal Conference were motions of thanks. ICPA (Aust) was pleased to be able to thank the Better Internet for Rural Regional and Remote (BIRRR) team for their hard work and advocacy towards increases in internet data allowances for on-line lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic on behalf of members. ICPA (Aust) work closely with the BIRRR team in our Communications advocacy and their assistance is invaluable. We also passed on the gratitude of our members to NBN Co and other internet providers for activating extra data allowances during this time.

ICPA (Aust) maintain regular contact with NBN Co and Telstra to ensure that the data and other communications needs of geographically isolated students are at the forefront of their minds and that initiatives introduced during the pandemic, such as the introduction of Sky Muster Plus are maintained and enhanced. We are also working with Telstra and State Councils to establish increased unmetered data for educational requirements of geographically isolated students.

In virtual delegation meetings with the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, we highlighted that for many geographically isolated families, online learning is ongoing and the requirement for adequate and high-quality internet services in regional, rural and remote locations are essential to ensure access to equitable education. Federal Council also sought assurance that the Government would ensure that the initiatives introduced during the pandemic would continue and indeed be enhanced, improved and expanded for these geographically isolated students.

### **Alternative internet services and technology**

Members highlighted at the 2020 Federal Conference that the limited alternatives for internet connectivity and services in rural, regional and remote Australia continue to impede the opportunity for students in these areas to have equitable access to educational opportunities. To that end, members sought to encourage the Commonwealth Government to work proactively and cooperatively with companies attempting to bring diverse universal broadband internet to Australia, including alternative satellite-based internet services and technologies. We have contacted the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) and both Minister Fletcher and Minister Coulton as well as other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators with this request, citing the importance of options and choice when accessing internet services, with the potential of alternative technology providing more affordable, practical and accessible solutions for geographically isolated families.

ICPA (Aust) understand there are already alternative solutions becoming available and we have requested that

the Federal Government continue to support and encourage the development of these new technologies to provide increased choice for members. We will continue to watch this space and keep members informed of any developments in this regard.

### **Telephone**

ICPA (Aust) are acutely aware that access to adequate telephony continues to be high on the agenda for members and we have taken action to ensure that 2020 Conference motions specific to the 3G shutdown are being addressed, along with other issues members have raised in the past.

ICPA (Aust) corresponded and met virtually with Telstra on a number of occasions requesting that Telstra provide a customer end technology roadmap for the transition from existing mobile phone configurations to country 5G due in 2024. We have been assured by Telstra that they are working earnestly in this space and we will certainly keep members informed of developments as they arise.

Federal Council have also sought from the Federal Government, in correspondence with the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, consideration of financial assistance or a rebate for rural and remote customers who use mobile broadband for education to upgrade the equipment they may be currently using to access these services (antennas, boosters that may be rendered obsolete) to ensure ongoing coverage and service in locations whereby alternative telecommunications may otherwise be unavailable.

### **Regional Tech Hub**

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the launch of the Regional Tech Hub, a Federal Government initiative to offer free, independent advice to regional Australians on the best internet and mobile phone connection for work, study and lifestyle needs. The establishment of the Regional Tech Hub comes as a direct result of requests from ICPA (Aust), its members, other stakeholders and organisations, for regional, rural and remote communications assistance to be made available. We are working closely with the Hub staff and are a part of the Regional Tech Hub Stakeholder Reference Group. Federal Council encourage members to familiarise themselves with the Regional Tech Hub and access their services when required via their website <https://regionalttechhub.org.au>, through the Regional Tech Hub Facebook page, Twitter, by email: [helpdesk@regionalttechhub.org.au](mailto:helpdesk@regionalttechhub.org.au) or contact the Hub's hotline on 1300 081 029 .

### **Portable internet supply for transient GI students**

An ongoing concern for members is the lack of access to internet services for transient geographically isolated students who study via distance education, which is often reliant on connectivity to access the curriculum and other aspects of schooling. ICPA (Aust) has continued to raise this issue in a variety of forums and we can reassure members that there is activity in regards to progressing a practical solution for these families. Federal Council would welcome any case studies from families who face this conundrum so we are able to ensure your needs are recognised.

## **CURRICULUM**

With no Curriculum motions at the 2020 Federal Conference, Federal Council have focused on our ongoing relationships with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to ensure that the perspective of our rural and remote students are considered in decisions made in regard to the Australian Curriculum. We continue to participate in regular ACARA stakeholder meetings as part of the Parents and Principals Peak National Bodies group and have had the opportunity to provide feedback on several topics and specifically NAPLAN recently. We have welcomed the Parent Updates from ACARA which we have been sharing in the Branch Bulletin and trust members have been finding these useful. Federal Council were pleased to assist in the "ACARA Parent Vox Pops re Australian Curriculum", which provided feedback from parents in

the format of 1-2 minute videos addressing questions related to the Australian Curriculum. We encourage members to access the ACARA and NAPLAN websites for further curriculum information and updates.

### **Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum Review**

Federal Council continues to follow the progress of the Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum Review. The aim of the Learning Area Review is to declutter the curriculum, improve manageability and reduce content across the eight Learning Areas as well as improve the Australian Curriculum with some revision and updating of content. As part of the consultation process, a new Review of Curriculum website will be used during the public consultation phase of the Review (28 April- 8 July 2021), to assist members of the public with resources, FAQ and other information during the consultation. At the conclusion of the Review, explanations of the changes made to the curriculum and the reasons for these changes in each learning area will be explained in a section on the ACARA website and each state curriculum authority will also decide how they wish to share their information.

### **National Assessment Program- Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**

With federal, state and territory education ministers now agreeing that all schools will gradually transition from the current paper-based tests to the computer-based assessments, with the aim for all schools to undertake NAPLAN online by 2022, ICPA (Aust) continues to participate in discussions around how to manage the devices and ensure that the download and upload required for the NAPLAN Online platform will be obtainable for schools no matter where they are located. Several states have raised points around a shortage of devices to implement NAPLAN Online and concern for schools that do not have reliable (or any) internet at their school and we are closely following these conversations.

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a national shift to online learning from home for the majority of students across Australia. The acknowledgement of the challenges faced by families who were forced to work from home and facilitate schooling for their children in their home environment were well documented. It is with this in mind that Federal Council, while there were no motions presented at our conference this year, have pursued a campaign to increase awareness of geographically isolated families who must undertake distance education at all times, as they have no other choice for educating their children, especially emphasising the role of the tutor in these environments and the necessity for this role to be recognised financially by the Government.

To that end, Federal Council have instigated a range of actions aimed at raising the profile of geographically isolated distance education families and to reinforce our Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) advocacy, given the increased understanding gleaned from the COVID lockdown period of the extent of the role a family member assumes when school must occur from home.

In November 2020, Federal Council wrote to the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education and other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators imploring the Government to recognise the estimated 1500 families for who distance education is a way of life because of where they live. Federal Council appealed for the inception of a DETA as a way of acknowledging those who must undertake this role. We also raised this topic as a key issue during virtual delegation meetings and in meetings with representatives from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment. We continue to seek updated numbers of geographically isolated distance education AIC recipients to assist with our advocacy around DETA and other topics.

The DETA advocacy was again included in the 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission earlier this year and is a key focus in our recently updated DE Briefing Papers. As part of this update, we have included a comparison of costs to the Federal Government to add a \$6000 DETA for families undertaking DE compared to the Boarding and Second Home Allowance expenses. The table shows that for the most part it would cost the Government far less to implement a DETA than to provide the Boarding or Second Home Allowance for families who are

unable to educate their children at home due to the challenges of providing a DETA tutor.

**AIC Allowances Comparison – Boarding, Second Home, Distance Education**

Second Home		Boarding		Distance Education		
Up to three children	Up to \$19443.84 per family per year (2021)	One child	Up to \$11 011 per family per year (2021)	One child	Current	With addition of \$6000 DETA
					\$4278 per family per year (2021)	\$10278 per family per year
		Two children	Up to \$22022 per family per year (2021)	Two Children	\$8422 per family per year (2021)	\$14422 per family per year
		Three children	Up to \$33 033 per family per year (2021)	Three children	\$12633 per family per year (2021)	\$18633 per family per year

With a desire across Federal and State Councils and branches to raise the profile of the plight of Geographically Isolated Distance Education (GIDE) families and to see the DETA come to fruition, ICPA (Aust) also embarked on an awareness campaign, declaring 1 December 2020 as our inaugural GIDE Day, using the day to honour the ongoing plight of geographically isolated families who must educate their children at home at all times and call for recognition for these families. We received positive responses and support from a range of individuals and other organisations and we look forward to continuing to hold GIDE Day into the future.

Following on from GIDE Day and documented acknowledgement by Governments of the challenges parents faced educating their children at home during COVID-19, Federal Council have most recently written to the Prime Minister urging him to consider, recognise and acknowledge GIDE families in this regard. We have not yet received a reply to this correspondence, however, continue to remain optimistic that our advocacy will be heard.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

ICPA (Aust) continues to pursue equitable and affordable Early Childhood Education and Care services and support for families living in rural and remote areas. This issue has never been more concerning and is proving beyond the reach of many, despite the Federal Government’s commitment to Universal Access to Early Childhood Education.

**In Home Care**

With 2020 motions focused on the inadequacy and endemic incongruity associated with the In Home Care system for rural and remote families, Federal Council have addressed these issues as part of broader advocacy on the inappropriateness of the Scheme in geographically isolated contexts.

Our In Home Care advocacy has focused on the overarching recommendation that **“an In Home Care Program (IHC), or sub-program thereof, be established specifically for rural and remote families”**. A motion letter sent to the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Hon Andrew Gee MP along with other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators gave an insight into the unsuitability of the current Scheme and requested a new

scheme, or amendments to the current Scheme, which consider the unique circumstances and needs of rural and remote families. This included specific reference to motions this year:

- dispensation for families who must provide board and lodging for their educators which would result in reducing families' gap payments; and
- amendments to the Scheme which allow an educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time and to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family(ies).

ICPA (Aust) has endeavoured to exemplify the ineptness of the current In Home Care Scheme and unsuitability of a blanket approach to Early Childhood Education and Care in rural and remote areas through the sharing of various case studies and examples of issues initiated by the implementation of the COVID-19 Relief Childcare Package.

To this end, we continue to await a response to our correspondence, however Federal Council had the opportunity to raise the topic during virtual delegation meetings with Minister Gee and his staff late last year and were assured by his office that the concerns outlined in our motion letter have been forwarded to the relevant people. We also raised In Home Care as a major topic of consideration in meetings with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE). With recent staff changes within DESE, we have made contact with the new In Home Care team raising our concerns and forwarding our updated Briefing Papers for their reference.

### **AIC Distance Education Allowance for Pre-Compulsory School Students and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education**

In 2020 ICPA (Aust) took the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments<sup>1</sup> and our ongoing request for an AIC Distance Education Allowance for Pre-Compulsory School Students was included as a major point for consideration. The ICPA (Aust) submission pointed out the challenges and expenses associated with providing a distance education pre-compulsory program and highlighted that ineligibility for AIC for this relatively small cohort of children is at odds with the Federal Government's commitment to "Universal Access to Early Childhood Education". The final report, released in November 2020, acknowledged this request from ICPA (Aust), referring directly to our remarks in section 3.2.7. It was also included as a key recommendation by the committee:

*"the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth support early learning programs through the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme Distance Education Allowance in the 2021 Budget."*

ICPA (Aust) gratefully welcomes this acknowledgement of the need for AIC expansion to early learning students and has implored the Government to accept and implement this recommendation, both through our 2020-21 Pre-Budget Submission and in meetings and follow up correspondence with the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education. We look forward to the 2021 budget in anticipation.

### **Mobile Early Childhood Services**

While we have been assured that funding for ex-Budget Based Funded Early Childhood Services such as Mobile Playgroups is ongoing and grants are made available via Future grant opportunities which can be found at [www.communitygrants.gov.au](http://www.communitygrants.gov.au) and [www.grants.gov.au](http://www.grants.gov.au). Federal Council continues to advocate for funding to expand and maintain Mobile Early Childhood Services in geographically isolated areas and communities where there is no Early Childhood service at all.

ICPA (Aust) highlighted the need for extended, guaranteed funds for these services and organisations in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments and we were pleased to see this acknowledged by the Committee, making the key recommendation that:

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Employment\\_Education\\_and\\_Training/RemoteEducation/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/RemoteEducation/Report)



*“the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth modify funding arrangements for mobile early childhood education to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services in the 2021 Budget.”*

In correspondence with the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Hon Andrew Gee MP and in our 2021-22 Pre-Budget submission, ICPA (Aust) has appealed to the Government to implement this recommendation to assist in providing much need early childhood education services to geographically isolated children. ICPA (Aust) will certainly be keeping abreast of anything which may come to fruition from this recommendation.

Given the finite and insecure nature of Federal Government funding for the provision of these services and the resources and activities required across vast distances in challenging geographically isolated contexts, Federal Council has embarked on an alternative solution to this issue, following requests at Federal Conference. Correspondence was sent to key Ministers, MPs and Senators along with the Federal Treasurer, advocating for geographically isolated children to be acknowledged as ‘in need’ of benevolent assistance for early childhood educational purposes, allowing the Not-For-Profit organisations serving them to be considered for Deductible Gift Recipient status. This would allow these services to access additional funds from other sources and not be completely reliant on Federal funding. We were pleased to receive replies from several members of parliament in support of this request and look forward to further developments in this regard.

## **RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL**

Three new motions were raised at the 2020 Federal Conference relating to Rural Schools and School Travel.

### **Rural Schools**

#### **National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP)**

A commitment by the Government to invest \$247 million over four years (2019-2022) to continue the National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) was welcomed in 2019 and a motion to seek assurance for ongoing funding beyond 2022 was carried at 2020 Federal Conference.

Federal Council sought ongoing surety for the Program to continue after 2022 in a letter to then Minister for Education Hon Dan Tehan MP and other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators. Our letter highlighted the important role chaplains play in rural and remote school communities, especially given that other support services are not always easily accessible in these areas. We cited the unique challenges and pressures faced by rural and remote students which may impact upon their education and the value of the Chaplaincy program in addressing these issues. Federal Council were pleased to receive recent correspondence from the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education the Hon Andrew Gee MP indicating that the Federal Government has committed to permanent funding of the NSCP.

### **School Travel**

#### **Student Concessional Fares including access to Corporate Airfares Program**

Our advocacy on this motion has been a stepped process, with contact in the first instance being made with the Australian Boarding Schools Association and Services Australia to garner an understanding of the processes involved in the Corporate Airfares Program and its features. From these conversations, we understand that while the Corporate Airfares Program is available as an alternative to direct bookings (that is, recipients of ABSTUDY can choose between accessing these flights or choose to book themselves), they are in fact not always the cheapest option or ‘discounted’.

Following on from this, Federal Council wrote to Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, reiterating our longstanding request for a fares allowance to be introduced to the Assistance for

Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme, along with requesting the option of access to the Corporate Airfares Program *where those fares may be cheaper than booking directly.*

While we cannot say there has been any developments on the broader issue of the request for a fares allowance in the AIC, Federal Council will continue to pursue this and access to the Corporate Airfares Program will be included within this advocacy.

### **Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)**

Federal Council have written to then Minister for Education, Hon Dan Tehan MP and other relevant Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament to request an increase to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for geographically isolated students travel to Canberra to enhance their learning in civics and citizenship education. We have highlighted anomalies with how rebates are calculated, specifically that the sliding scale used to determine allocation of funds to schools is unrealistic when applied to rural and remote schools. ICPA (Aust) requested a more pragmatic approach be taken to address this issue which recognises the extra costs associated with travel from a rural or remote area compared to a large urban centre, through a change to the methodology used to calculate the funds allocated for the scheme which takes this into consideration. We welcomed positive responses from those we wrote to, supportive of our position on the PACER issue and giving some assurance that it would be followed up on our behalf.

Although not addressing the incongruity of the methodology for calculating the rebate, Federal Council draws members' attention to the recent announcement by the Federal Government of the increase to the PACER rebate by 50% across all Zone categories. More information can be found on the PACER website <https://www.pacer.org.au/2021/02/12/rebate-increase-for-2021/>

Federal Council will continue to request for this anomaly to be addressed and hope to raise it during delegations planned in the coming months in Canberra.

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS**

At the 2020 Federal Conference, the importance of affordability and access to Telehealth Services for geographically isolated students was high on the agenda. Following on from the initiatives introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic to expand telehealth availability, members requested that subsidised telehealth services be increased and extended to permanently include vital Allied Health Services and specialists required for the positive educational outcomes of geographically isolated children.

In correspondence to the Minister for Health, Hon Greg Hunt MP, as well as other relevant Ministers, Senators and MPs, ICPA (Aust) requested that adequate and appropriate assistance be provided to geographically isolated students who do not have easy access to face-to-face healthcare due to distance by way of expanding access to telehealth services, with the recommendation made that a permanent Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item number for telehealth consultations be assigned to assist with the cost of vital Allied Health Services and Specialists such as Speech Pathology, Speech-language Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Paediatricians and Psychologists to support the specific educational needs and learning difficulties of geographically isolated children including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). We outlined the deep concern and hardship that our members endure to educate children with difficulties associated with specific education needs and the issues associated with accessing appropriate support in rural locations.

This matter was also raised in a virtual delegation meeting with the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, Hon Mark Coulton MP. During this meeting and in a response to our motion letter on behalf of Minister Hunt, we have been informed that the Government is investigating a long term and sustainable plan for telehealth to be retained following on from the measures introduced during the

COVID-19 pandemic.

In several recent submissions we have also reiterated the important role telehealth can play in addressing the inequity of access to support services for children in rural areas, highlighting that while telehealth cannot be a replacement for face-to-face, on-the-ground support, it does provide increased access to otherwise unattainable or limited services for rural and remote students with disability.

Federal Council will continue to advocate for provision and expansion of telehealth services for geographically isolated students with specific education needs and keep members informed of developments in this regard.

## **TERTIARY**

Significant measures implemented during the 2020-2021 year continue to impact positively on the rural and remote tertiary cohort.

### **COVID-19 and Gap Year Students**

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the 2020-21 Budget announcements that support young people currently on a working gap year who have been affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 on their ability to fulfil their working criteria, to demonstrate independence for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY, addressing the tertiary motion brought to Federal Conference in 2020.

Young people from regional and remote areas who are qualifying for Youth Allowance as an independent under the Concessional Workforce Independence Criteria (CWIC) will be automatically considered, for the six-month period between 25 March and 24 September 2020 to have:

- Earned 75 per cent of the National Training Wage Schedule weekly rate (unless in receipt of a higher income); or
- Worked 15 hours per week.

Also announced for young people who are planning on taking a working gap year in 2021, is a temporary pathway for achieving independence for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY, for those who earn at least \$15,000 through agricultural work during the period 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021. Both these measures have passed legislation. Visit [here](#) for eligibility and COVID-19 measures.

### **Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)**

Federal Council has continued to highlight the long-standing motion for the introduction of a Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA) and this remains one of our Tertiary Portfolio priorities. The announcement by the Federal Government of the Tertiary Access Payment in 2020 which partly fulfils the request of members for a payment for rural and remote students to access a tertiary education was welcomed.

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a one-off, means-tested payment for school leavers from 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) in the next available study period following year 12 or equivalent and their parental income is below \$250 000. This payment has been initiated in response to recommendations from the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphthine Review) and part of the Job-Ready Graduates higher education reforms package. It aims to improve tertiary education attainment and retention rates of students from regional and remote communities by assisting students with the costs of relocating to undertake tertiary study including start-up expenses, costs of living, direct costs of education or training and the cost of traveling home in semester breaks.

The TAP commences in the 2021 academic year. Applications are open now and students are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Students relocating to study at a university should apply through their participating

university and students relocating to study at a non-university higher education provider must apply through Services Australia.

Information on the TAP can be found at:

[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment)

[www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment)

[www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-university-students](http://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-university-students)

[www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-vet-and-nuhep-students](http://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-vet-and-nuhep-students)

### **Job-ready Graduates Package**

In October 2020, the Job-ready Graduates Package passed Parliament. This legislation contains important changes to Australia's Higher Education system and provides some additional support for regional and remote students sought by members at previous Federal Conferences.

- **Fares Allowance** - from 1 January 2021 the Fares Allowance waiting period for Youth Allowance and Austudy will be reduced from 6 months to 3 months before the first claim can be made. This will allow students to access a return trip home from their place of study under Fares Allowance in their mid-year break.
- **Reintroduction of the HECS-HELP upfront payment discount** - from 1 January 2021 the HECS-HELP upfront payment discount can be claimed. This discount provides an incentive for students to pay their student contribution either partially or fully and receive a 10% discount providing the payment is \$500 or more.

Federal Council will continue to bring the current, previous and ongoing issues that rural and remote students face when accessing a tertiary education to the forefront of Government's mind at every opportunity.

## **TRAINING**

There was one Training Portfolio motion presented at the 2020 Federal Conference requesting that ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to ensure assistance packages/schemes similar to the Coronavirus Supplement, which are established to support young people through times of specific economic impacts, include rural and remote apprentices and trainees receiving the Federal Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA).

Federal Council wrote to the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships, Hon Steve Irons MP and Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston in relation to this issue. Correspondence to Assistant Minister Irons' office was referred to Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash for reply.

In the response from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment on behalf of Minister Cash it was indicated that LAFHA is appropriated under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program and eligibility for LAFHA is not linked to the income that an apprentice receives as part of their employment nor subject to parental income tests.

The Department highlighted recent measures introduced to assist apprentices, trainees and employers, which include:

- the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy measure, which assists businesses to retain their existing apprentice or trainee; and
- the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements measure for employers of any size or industry that engages an Australian Apprentice (which includes apprentices and trainees) on or after 5 October 2020. Employers may be eligible for a subsidy of 50 per cent of wages paid to an apprentice between 5 October 2020 and 30 September 2021, to a maximum of \$7,000 per quarter.

Members are also encouraged to contact an [Australian Apprenticeship Support Network \(AASN\)](#) provider to discuss eligibility for apprenticeship support.

While the above measures are welcomed support for trainees and apprentices, the response from the Minister unfortunately did not specifically address the concern of LAFHA recipients not being eligible for payments including the Coronavirus Supplement. Correspondence received from Department of Social Services also did not specifically address these concerns and Federal Council will continue to raise this issue at every opportunity in the coming months.

Other longstanding member issues within the Training Portfolio include:

- The need for a significant increase to the Federal LAFHA and alignment to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), in order to provide more assistance to apprentices and trainees who are ineligible for dependent Youth Allowance but must live away from home to access an apprenticeship or traineeship.
- The broadening of the Relocation Scholarship eligibility criteria to include apprentices and trainees to assist with the cost of relocation expenses incurred when embarking on vocational education, training courses and apprenticeship pathways away from home.

All issues within the Training Portfolio continue to be raised through every avenue available to ensure all rural and remote young Australians have the opportunity to pursue the Vocational Education and Training (VET) pathway, apprenticeship or traineeship of their choice, regardless of their geographical location.

## **CONCLUSION**

As outlined in this motion update, since the 2020 Federal Conference Federal Council has undertaken a variety of actions to pursue the current and previous issues that were raised through members' motions. These include correspondence, submissions, media releases and face to face and virtual meetings with politicians, government departments and organisations.

We have had responses to many of the motions and there have been some positive developments within a number of portfolios. All portfolios will continue to follow up on those motions where no response has been received and raise the profile of our members' issues through all avenues available to us. Federal Council remains committed to advocating on behalf of our members. Our current advocacy information is also contained in our recently updated Portfolio Briefing Papers available in the Portfolio section of the ICPA website.

Federal Council wish to remind members that the 2021 Federal Conference will be held in Longreach on 28 and 29 July 2021. Please do not hesitate to contact Portfolio leaders if you have questions regarding the issues outlined in this document or in relation to formulating motions for the upcoming Federal Conference. Contact details can be found [HERE](#).

Updates on our various lobbies and other related issues are regularly posted on our [Facebook](#) page and listed on our [website](#).