

Early Childhood Report

Jane Hughes – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

Wow what a ride 2020 was! Amongst the turmoil of a future unknown we saw many wonderful services going online to help support families especially support for Early Childhood Education.

There were no Early Childhood Education motions put forward at our March 2020 State Conference.

Throughout the past year, I attended two (2) meetings with the Strategic Advisory Group for Parenting Connection WA. Topics covered were in regard to:

- COVID-19,
- Wanslea support groups for parents,
- Updates on Play group WA,
- Update on the new Parenting Connection website.

I received an email on 12th June advising that the Parenting Connection WA microsite is now live at:
<https://parentingconnectionwa.com.au>

I have been contacted by Matheus Garde from Wanslea several in the past year regarding their In-Home Care service and how they can support remote families. It has been wonderful to work productively on ensuring that the best services are available for rural remote families.

The Early Childhood sector saw a lot of changes during 2020 regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. IHC suffered greatly with many families not being able to pay their home carers as the government cut funding; claiming that as parents were now having to work from home as part of the self-isolation, they would not need carers, which for many families this simply wasn't the case.

On 8th June 2020, the Hon. Dan Tehan MP announced that the CCS would be returning to normal as of 13th July.

Please find below the announcement from Minister Tehan.
<https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/return-child-care-subsidy>

IN HOME CARE

A transition payment was provided to childcare services from 13th July until 27th September 2020 on top of the Child Care Subsidy, this amounts to 25% of the fees received in the reference fortnight in February. There were several conditions for the period of the transition, these can be read at the following link

<https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/return-child-care-subsidy>

The Government also eased the activity test until 4th October to support eligible families whose employment has been impacted as a result of COVID-19. These families received up to 100 hours per fortnight of subsidised care during this period.

The IHC guidelines have now corrected the terminology from 'Carer to Educator' the term carer is now no longer in use.

The most recent In-Home Care National Guidelines can be found at the following link: (Updated August 2020)
<https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/home-care-national-guidelines>

I discovered while reading the updates that they have now listed SOTA arrangements as being on and off air where this was previously a 'grey' area.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND HOME SCHOOLING

Commonwealth funding is provided to State and Territory governments for the purposes of providing distance education, including School of the Air (on-air and off-air) arrangements. Families cannot receive childcare subsidies during the time a child is engaged in formal schooling, including for a tutor or governess to supervise the provision of distance education where the care (or part thereof) is for the purpose of the child to undertake a State or Territory education program.

This longstanding policy is stipulated in section 85BA (1) of the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and further clarified in Part 2, Section 8 of the *Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017*. Care provided while a child is completing homework does not constitute formal schooling.

It is wonderful to see the Education in Remote and Complex Environments Report handed down in November had two (2) of the key recommendations that directly addresses long term policy for ICPA.

A copy of these two (2) recommendations are below. ICPA (Australia) have followed this up with the Minister for Regional Education Mr Andrew Gee who has assured them he will continue to advocate for this change.

3.27 The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc. (ICPA Australia) noted that while all jurisdictions offer early learning programs delivered by distance education, families accessing the programs bear 'the entire cost associated with administering, resourcing and teaching the lessons.'²⁹ ICPA Australia noted that no support is available for early learning programs through the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) distance education allowance, and that CCS payments are unavailable because these children are still in their parents' care. As a result of this, 'less than 200 children access recognised 4-year-old programs in their homes through distance education'.³⁰

3.39 ICPA Australia expressed concern that funding for mobile playgroups is provided on a temporary basis, and that there is no funding available for KICS to expand into surrounding areas. ICPA Australia called for 'flexibility and surety of funding for these services'.⁴²

ICPA Federal Council continues to work towards kindergarten students being eligible for AIC allowance and a National Working with Children Check.