

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2019 Federal Conference Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio Motions

Early Learning

A41. CONJOINED MOTION presented by:

CARRIED

Western Australia State Council (WA), Katherine Branch (NT), South Australia State Council (SA) and Goldfields Eyre Branch WA).

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government for all pre-compulsory school students enrolled in a registered distance education program to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance.”

Explanation (Western Australia State Council):

Currently, students studying via distance education enrolled in a pre-compulsory program are ineligible to receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education component. Most early learning programs require significantly more learning materials than that of older students studying at primary levels, with families having to provide learning resources for these students. If families received this allowance, it would alleviate the cost of suitable learning resources. The majority of children who are enrolled in a pre-compulsory program are found to have better educational outcomes in later years, by forming these important foundations early on.

Explanation (Katherine Branch):

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program. From the website <https://www.education.gov.au/universal-access-early-childhood-education>, “The Australian Government is providing funding certainty for preschool, having committed \$453.1 million in the 2019-20 Budget to extend the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education until the end of 2020. This funding ensures that every child will continue to have access to a quality preschool program for 600 hours (15 hours a week) in the year before school. Universal Access [has] a focus on participation by Indigenous children, vulnerable and disadvantaged children in a range of settings in order to meet the needs of working families, and will be accessible to all Australian children, regardless of their location.” If that was actually what was happening in rural and remote areas, this motion would be unnecessary!

Setting up the classroom for distance education delivery for Preschoolers costs the same, if not more, as for the first year of compulsory schooling. The number of children accessing this pre-compulsory year by distance education is not huge. For example: Katherine School of the Air (KSA) has had a structured Preschool Program in place for over 20 years and currently (Sem 1 2019) has 12 enrolments. On average KSA enrolments have been around 20-25 each year. The NT Government already recognises this cohort of students by making available half of the “NT Correspondence Site Allowance – Preschool” to assist all four-year-old children that are enrolled in pre-school with the Alice Springs and Katherine Schools of the Air.

Extending the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) distance education allowance to include these

students will ensure greater and more equitable participation in Early Childhood Education by rural and remote students. Distance education students could benefit enormously from a minute portion of the billions of dollars allocated to early childhood education and care, including the funding intended to ensure the system is more accessible, affordable and fairer for families.

Explanation (South Australia State Council):

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring that every child has access to a quality early childhood education program and that children who attend a quality preschool program are more likely to do well at school. With increasing discussion among government of funding the expansion of preschool to 3-year olds, extending the AIC to preschool students in the year prior to formal schooling, would ensure the system is more accessible, affordable and fair for families supervising their own children via distance education, or employing a staff member to do so. For preschooling families that have to cover the cost of setting up learning environments for all aspects of their child's early development, it would alleviate this cost and lead to better education outcomes in later years, as well as greater equity with their peers.

Explanation (Goldfields Eyre Branch):

Under the current guidelines, part-time distance education students are ineligible for the Distance Education (DE) component of the AIC allowance, which means families enrolled in the 4-year-old program must bear the costs of maintaining and setting up the classroom in that first year of schooling. Our research has shown that this is a costly impost on families.

The AIC DE allowance is designed to assist families to set up and maintain the schoolroom. The schoolroom must be set up and maintained the day the child begins their education. Full-time or part time, the child needs a schoolroom.

Child Care

A42. Capricornia Branch of the Air (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) requests the appropriate minister that the current transitional provisions using remoteness criteria for In Home Care (IHC) families, be modified to meet the needs of Geographically Isolated families where no other child care is available."

Explanation:

Currently, IHC recipients need to meet the 'Remoteness ARIA index' criteria in order to qualify for the rural and remote transitional provisions available until January 2020. This is quite different to the Assistance for Isolated Children Geographically Isolated criteria.

For example:

A family lives more than 80kms from their nearest child care service in Rockhampton and further than 55kms from the nearest community of Marlborough. They do not qualify under the Remoteness ARIA index, some other families living many kms away from child care would also not qualify. By contrast a family living within the town of Marlborough with access to amenities and the local school there, would qualify according to the ARIA index. By using this ARIA index, Geographically Isolated (GI) families (designated as GI under the criteria for Allowance for Isolated Children, AIC) requiring child care in any form cannot access it. IHC is not currently meeting the requirement needs for these families.

S4. Clermont Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education for an extension to the transitional provisions for In Home Care Educators in rural and remote areas to address the lack of qualified Early Childhood Educators available in those areas in line with the recent extensions approved for Early Childhood Teachers.”

Explanation:

The recent announcement that some of the transitional provisions would be extended for rural and remote child care teachers is an acknowledgement of the difficulties with finding suitably qualified staff in these areas and this should be extended to the IHC Educator requirements.

Finding suitable Educators to employ for remote families is becoming increasingly difficult. The unique environment in which both employee and employer live and work, is not always an easy one to adjust to for someone relocating to the outback. From 2 July 2018, rural and remote families have been given two transitional concessions to help them access IHC educators until Jan 2020; however, after that educators need to be working towards or have a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). With the new guidelines for qualifications in place, it is and will become even more difficult for those in remote areas to find suitable educators for their families.

S5. Clermont Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the Minister for Education to consider a grace period for In Home Care Educators working in remote areas before they are required to undertake the qualification requirements currently to be implemented in January 2020.”

Explanation:

Finding suitable educators to employ for rural and remote families is becoming increasingly difficult all the time. The unique environment in which both the employee and employer live and work, is not always an easy one to adjust to for someone relocating to the outback. Quite often, taking on a job as an In Home Educator is not the ‘Sea Change’ that some girls are looking for even though they may initially think it is. In many instances there are issues with educators only realising their unsuitability to this environment after they have arrived and wasted quite a lot of time enrolling in the relevant courses. These ‘false’ starts are stressful for the children involved and the entire family; they also have ramifications for the educator. If there was a grace period, in which the educator could work for the family before having to undertake any study requirements to ensure they are suited to the position, this would avoid some of these false starts.

A43. Capricornia Branch of the Air (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) requests the appropriate minister that the qualification requirements for in Home Care (IHC) educators be expanded so that educators caring for school-aged children may have a minimum of school-aged child care qualifications according to each state, and not ECEC Cert III minimum unless caring specifically for under school-aged children.”

Explanation:

IHC provision is for all children aged 0–13 years, and yet the eligibility criteria for educators is targeted only at 0-5 year olds. Where the provision of care is for school-aged children an appropriate equivalent qualification should be eligible. It is almost impossible to find Educators for remote families for many compounding reasons (to name a few: remote location and loneliness, criteria for qualifications, transport limitations, communication/IT limitations, suitability to environment). This inappropriate qualification criteria makes it nearly impossible to find the ‘right’ person to care for older children.

A44. Belyando/Mt Coolon Branch (Qld)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education for the In Home Care Scheme to include the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)'s list of "Approved qualifications for educators working with over preschool age children" as acceptable qualifications (or working towards) for educators employed for "outside school hours care" services."

Explanation:

Currently the In Home Care National Guidelines say, a Certificate III, a diploma or a degree in Early Childhood Education or equivalent qualifications that have a major focus on Early Childhood Education are acceptable qualifications. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), maintains a current list of qualifications approved under the NQF on its website, with these qualifications being deemed acceptable qualifications for IHC educators.

Although due to the unique situation of child care requirements and lack of access for rural and remote families IHC educators are not simply employed for Early Childhood Care Services. Many families have school aged children and require IHC educators for "Outside School Hours Care" service. These educators may have qualifications or be working towards qualifications of particular interest to them in the area of Education and Care (e.g. Teacher Aide, Speech, Learning Support, etc) within "over preschool aged children", however they do not comply with the IHC requirements of "Early Childhood Education" and therefore are not suitable candidates for employment.

ACECQA also maintains a list of "Approved qualifications for educators working with over preschool age children" (e.g. outside school hours care). We would see it beneficial for both families and educators if the IHC national guidelines included this list as acceptable qualifications for IHC educators being employed as "Outside School Hours Care" educators. These families would have broader employee candidates and educators are able to study their area of interest not forced "Early Childhood Care".

A45. New South Wales State Council (NSW)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) requests that the Minister for Education change the age criteria of In Home Care from 0–12 years in primary school, to 0–15 into secondary school."

Explanation:

As a result of the continuing drought and thereafter years of recovery families have had to make the decision to keep their children home to complete the beginning of their high school years via Distance Education instead of going off to Boarding school, as the economic conditions rapidly deteriorate for many of our rural and remote families.

Due to both parents being required out in the paddock at all sorts of times or working off farm to earn extra income, the continuance of In Home Care to enable the children to have the supervision and support of an Educator in an otherwise isolated location is vital.

Children aged between 12 and 15 still require some supervision, especially if at home alone in a remote location. The extension of In Home Care to this age group would enable parents to continue working out on the farm or off farm without neglecting their child's wellbeing.

A46. Belyando/Mt Coolon Branch (Qld)**CARRIED**

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister of Education for the In Home Care Scheme to allow educators who are actively studying Early Childhood Education qualifications to complete a heavily weighted

percentage of their compulsory practical placement hours in their current position as an Early Child Care Educator at their place of employment."

Explanation:

The "In Home Care National Guidelines" state that IHC educators are required to have a minimum Certificate III level qualification or be working towards a Certificate III qualification. For those educators actively studying an Early Childhood Education qualification they are required to complete several practical placement hours in an Early Childhood Service as part of the qualification process.

Given that, Rural and Remote families have no alternative Child Care services available, what does the family do for child care while their current educator is away attending practical placement hours? Especially when the practicum period is being extended from 120 hours to 160 hours, of which only 40 hours can be completed in the IHC workplace. With the increase to 160 hours, this 40 hour IHC workplace allowance still does not minimise the disturbance and stress to the family's child care requirements and/or the need for substitute/relief Child Care educators during that time the educator is away, as they still have to complete the original 120 hours (3 or more weeks) outside of their place of employment.

A47. Dirranbandi Branch (Qld)

CARRIED

"That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Minister for Education to acknowledge and respond to the significant barriers to provision of, and access to early childhood services, specifically long day care and Kindergarten, in rural and remote areas."

Explanation:

These barriers have been identified by families, early childhood providers, and professionals: the difficulty of obtaining qualified staff, viability of services where numbers are low, cost of long day care to disadvantaged families and low attendance because of lack of transport.

ICPA would seek to address these barriers through:

- Waiving the high level of qualifications required for long day care service managers where the numbers are small
- Providing financial incentives and support for people living in rural and remote areas to obtain qualifications, including support for accommodation and travel for practical work and residential training
- Accepting a flexible approach to achieving the required qualifications including a longer timeline for this
- Providing a more flexible approach to the application of ratios, for example through allowing mixed age groups in a variety of ways, to enhance viability for providers
- Subsidisation for providers who are willing to set up services in rural and remote areas to meet the needs of isolated families through a Remote Area Allowance
- Subsidisation of fees for disadvantaged families in rural and remote areas, through increased Child Care Subsidy payments, as these are the children who are most likely to gain long term benefits from such a program and these are the communities where economic and social outcomes will be achieved.
- Develop ways that providers in rural and remote areas can encourage and support attendance at long day care centres through the provision of local transport.

A48. Hillston Branch (NSW)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Australian Government to reassess the funding to Long Day Care Centres in rural and remote communities that act as the only access to preschool programs for 3-5-year-olds.”

Explanation:

In rural towns where a preschool is not viable, we have Long Day Care Centres. These centres must follow the same Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as the preschools and are struggling to both stay afloat and find qualified staff.

As with all small communities, child care is a major factor with young families who are looking to live or relocate into rural areas. Birth rates fluctuate and, during dry times, as we are currently experiencing, utilisation rates decrease. During these times when centres are running at a loss, they need to turn to the community to support them through fundraising but the amount of fundraising possible is limited in small communities.

In Hillston, we struggle to find quality trained staff, especially early childhood teachers, as most qualified teachers prefer to go to schools as they are employed for school hours at a higher rate. Long Day Care Centres already struggling to stay afloat are unable to pay the same rate or are only able to employ teachers for the minimum number of hours.

In rural and remote areas there are often great distances for the children to travel to access the Long Day Care Centres. As preschool children are not allowed to travel on School buses, it means that some children are not able to access preschool programs or are only able to attend the centre one day a week due to the extra travelling costs involved. This in turn affects the utilisation rates of the centres. Reassessment of funding to Long Day Care Centres in rural and remote communities is necessary to allow all children in these areas to access this service. If these centres are lost to the communities the children will suffer!!

Mobile Early Childhood Services

A49. Northern Territory State Council (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) advocates for funding both in the expansion of new Mobile Early Childhood Services and the continuation of these services for all geographically isolated children.”

Explanation:

Early childhood development is increasingly recognised as a key predictor of future outcomes for children. Research has shown that investing time, effort and resources in the early years of a child’s life has significant impacts on their behaviour, learning, health and wellbeing, as they transition from childhood to adulthood.

Mobile playgroups are equipped to service isolated children, however isolated children in some states have no access to early childhood services at all. For example, in the NT there are two mobile playgroups. Both service the top end, neither reach the lower half of the Territory. In the lower half of the Territory, remote Aboriginal communities receive playgroup services but isolated children outside of these communities have no access to a mobile playgroup service at all.

In the Northern Territory, in our discussions with the Territory Government, we have not been able to identify state government funding for such services. We understand the existing services are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services or Prime Minister and Cabinet. We appeal to all governments to fund early childhood programs that reach all isolated children.

A50. Katherine Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for sufficient funding for the continuation of rural and remote mobile Early Childhood Services under new funding models.”

Explanation:

The Katherine Isolated Children’s Services (KICS) has been operating since 1988 and is a highly regarded provider of supported playgroups for children who are socially or geographically isolated, employing a mix of Early Childhood Teachers and experienced staff and covering 760,000 sq km of the Katherine Region, NT. In 2018, KICS transitioned to being funded through the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) Office through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding stream. Funding has become uncertain and inadequate with the contracts due for renewal in December 2019.

Organisations such as KICS must be able to continue to operate and to be funded at levels commensurate with their needs.

Early Childhood Education and Care – Other

A51. Queensland State Council (Qld)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Minister for Education to create a standalone Rural and Remote Early Childhood Branch that encompasses all areas of child care and child care funding.”

Explanation:

Presently, Playgroups, Mobile Playgroups, In Home Care, Preschool and Day Care are all administered and funded by different Departments within the Government creating confusion and time delays. Having a standalone Rural and Remote Early Childhood Branch would create greater access to information, funding and care for providers and families.

A52. Western Australia State Council (WA)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government, and supports each State ICPA organisation with their lobbying, to implement a nationally recognised and administered Working with Children Check (WWCC).”

Explanation:

WA State Council fully support the implementation of a nationally administered police clearance, specifically for children and thank Federal Council for their continued lobbying on this issue. Currently a person who wishes to obtain a WWCC for work purposes, are checked nationally, then it is administered at a state level. Employees that move interstate and who already hold a WWCC from the previous state they were working in, are expected to reapply for a WWCC in the new state they are applying for employment in. This process causes lengthy delays in employing staff of up to eight weeks, causing disruptions to students and families.

A53. Alice Springs Branch (NT)

CARRIED

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, and the Minister of Education to continue working with other states and territories to speed up implementation of a nationally consistent approach to Working with Children Checks (WWCC) including mutual recognition across the board.”

Explanation:

It is reported that a backlog of Ochre Card applications at the beginning of 2019 is causing problems throughout the NT schools, including the Alice Springs School of the Air (ASSOA). This backlog has been confirmed with SAFE NT, who says that one of the factors for the backlog is implementation of the National scheme, which is causing teething issues and more work in the short term. However, they

say, once it is implemented properly it will save time and streamline the process. Anything to streamline and reduce the complexity of WWCCs will be helpful. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse's "Working with Children Checks Report" 2015 (WWCC Report) states: "A national approach to WWCCs would help to facilitate compliance with WWCC laws by streamlining and reducing the complexity of the current schemes" (p.50).

A nationally consistent approach will be better at protecting children. "We are of the view that the level of protection children receive from WWCCs will be equalised and enhanced across all jurisdictions if these benefits are realised and a nationally consistent approach is achieved" (WWCC Report, p.48) Staff of ASSOA also work across state and territory borders, so mutual recognition of WWCCs across borders would be helpful. Additionally, across the territory, when teachers, governesses and other staff who work with children are recruited from interstate it would be helpful for them not to have to apply for an Ochre Card if they have a nationally-recognised WWCC from another state or territory. This would allow them to commence work in the Territory without unnecessary delay upon arrival. This has been confirmed by SAFE NT, who state that once the national scheme is completed, interstate recruits would not have to apply for an Ochre Card immediately, but only once their current card expired.

The WWCC Report also states:

"We are of the view that implementing a combination of the models outlined above is needed to achieve an adequate national approach to WWCCs. This will harmonise the WWCC schemes, better integrate the eight schemes, improve information sharing, improve portability and enhance continuous monitoring. To achieve this national model, we have recommended that state and territory governments amend their schemes to include consistent standards across key aspects of the schemes and allow WWCCs to be portable. Further, we have recommended that the Commonwealth Government facilitate and manage a national model for WWCCs by establishing and operating a centralised database; streamlining the recording of WWCC decisions, ensuring they are visible and accessible to all jurisdictions; and improving the continuous monitoring of WWCC cardholders' national criminal history." (p.55)

Reference:

https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_working_with_children_checks_report.pdf