

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Department of Education

on the

Updated Inclusion Support Program Guidelines

from the

Federal Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

ICPA (Aust)

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The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the updated Inclusion Support Program (ISP) Guidelines. ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. This encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The member families of the association reside and work in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of achieving access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

ICPA (Aust) applauds the ISP objectives, “To provide parents and carers of children with additional needs with access to appropriate and inclusive ECEC services that assist those parents and carers to increase their activity, including work, study and training” and the guiding principles¹, which include:

- “Access - eligible services, regardless of their geographic location or service type, have equitable access to support from the program to include children with additional needs.
- Participation - the program supports the active and meaningful participation of all children including children with additional needs, in eligible mainstream services.”

From the guidelines ICPA (Aust) understands that the only children that are eligible for this proposed support are those approved by the Department of Education and who meet the requirements for the Child Care Subsidy, through services such as Centre-based Day Care, Out of School Hours Care or Family Day Care. Centre-based Day Care providing a preschool or kindergarten service will also be able to apply to the Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) for an Additional Educator to help care for children with additional needs instead of just those with a disability.

Long Day Care and sometimes Family Day Care is available in some small rural and remote towns and communities and ICPA (Aust) is pleased to see these changes within the ISP which should assist under school-age children with additional needs, as it often takes years and many trips to the city for children in rural and remote areas to be assessed properly, diagnosed with a disorder intervention commenced. Additional needs may include speech delays and impairments, sensory disorders, Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), dyslexia, learning difficulties, challenging behaviours, as well as physical problems such as trauma, poor hearing, and sight defects or even mental health conditions exacerbated by the prolonged drought.

However, In Home Care, the only child care service available to many rural and remote families, is not an eligible service for this program, nor is there any provision of the service for preschool/kindergarten children studying by distance education. Rural and remote children are a vulnerable, disadvantaged group and every consideration should be given to all children, “regardless of their geographical situation or service type” as quoted in the guiding principles above.

Recommendations

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the proposed expansion of the Inclusion Support Program to meet additional needs of children in Centre-Based Day Care but it should be further expanded to include geographically isolated children with additional needs cared for by In Home Care Educators, and to those children receiving an approved Kindergarten/Preschool program delivered by distance education in rural and remote areas. As Dr John Halsey recommended in his Independent Review for Regional, Rural and Remote Education Final Report January 2018², “Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning.”

¹ https://docs-edu.govcms.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/isp_guidelines_version_2.0_-_consultation_draft.pdf

² https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/01218_independent_review_accessible.pdf