

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



Federal Conference 2017

Motion Update

March 2018

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For the first time in decades ICPA (Aust) has seen a significant focus on rural and remote education with Professor John Halsey chosen to conduct the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE). Members of Federal Council met with Professor Halsey at the last year's federal conference as well as various consultations around the country to discuss rural and remote issues. Many of the motions carried at our last federal conference were raised in our IRRRRE submission as well as recommendations for the use of the Election Commitment funding pledged by the former Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Barnaby Joyce at the National Press Club on 22 June 2016 for regional, rural and remote students. This was also raised in our Pre-Budget 2018-19 submission and included in correspondence with the new Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Michael McCormack.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1094/federal-submissions/federal-submissions-2017/submission-independent-review-into-regional-rural-and-remote-education-2017.pdf>

The report from Professor Halsey in regard to the IRRRRE is now being considered by government.

Concerns included in the IRRRRE submission were also brought to the attention of relevant ministers, senators and members interested in rural and remote issues by mail. We now look forward to seeing many of these presented to the Federal Government as recommendations.

We have had some developments within a number of portfolios as follows:

BOARDING SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS

ICPA (Aust) has been in touch with a number of Federal Ministers and acknowledged and thanked them for supporting families who need to board their children away from home by the 50% increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Additional Boarding Allowance.

ICPA (Aust) has been busy advocating for increases in the AIC Boarding and Second Home Allowances with the Federal Government, through submissions and delegations along with recommendations for the division of the Election Commitment funding for regional, rural and remote students.

Every opportunity has been utilised to further raise the topic of increasing the (AIC) Boarding Allowance in several other submissions beside the IRRRRE by ICPA (Aust), along with the chance to raise the profile of boarding school families within these. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for an increase in the AIC Boarding Allowance through delegations and submissions, along with endeavouring to action further measures to raise the issues faced by these families.

ICPA (Aust) has written to the Minister for Human Services, advocating for an online option for AIC applications. As yet we have not had a response from the Minister. However, we will follow this up and continue to raise the matter at every opportunity. ICPA (Aust) also raised this issue during our meetings with the Department of Human Services in November 2017 and we continue to urge the Department to progress the investigation into providing an online application for the AIC Scheme. At this stage no commitment has been made for this to be able to occur. ICPA (Aust) will pursue this issue, along with other concerns associated with the AIC application, approval and implementation process.

ICPA (Aust) spoke with representatives from the Department of Human Services in January this year when once again there were difficulties for families in receiving AIC Boarding and Second Home Allowances payments at the start of the school year. ICPA (Aust) has offered some suggestions to the Department of Human Services to hopefully see improvement in the promptness and efficiency of the AIC payment as well as communication with families.

Fringe Benefits Tax

ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the federal government in order to remove the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) charged on employees living in rural and remote locations who have to cover huge out-of-pocket costs associated with boarding children away from home for their schooling. ICPA (Aust) further raised this issue in the Pre-Budget Submission 2018-19 lodged late last year. Every opportunity has been utilised to bring attention to this subject in recent months and Federal Council has had discussions with other stakeholder groups, such as the National Farmers' Federation and Australian Boarding Schools Association, about the Fringe Benefit Tax situation and asked for their support in advocating to have this concern addressed.

The Federal Boarding Portfolio is working on a project to raise a better awareness of the necessity of boarding school for a quality secondary education for rural and remote students. A number of ICPA members have assisted with this project and we look forward to launching the results of the project shortly.

COMMUNICATIONS

ICPA (Aust) continues 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 the purpose of educational outcomes.

ICPA (Aust) continues to be a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) <http://accan.org.au/rrrc-coalition> and our members' issues are often discussed in the RRRCC forums. ICPA (Aust) also participates in the RRRCC delegations to speak with those in government and this also affords opportunity to raise concerns in an additional capacity.

Internet

Once again at the 2017 ICPA Federal Conference, members brought forward numerous motions seeking an improved internet experience and two main areas comprised the majority of the motions: fault reporting/repairs, as well as expansion of the Education Port to include all rural students especially those studying at the tertiary level.

ICPA (Aust) has discussed and continues to raise these issues by email, phone, written submission and in meetings with the Regional Minister for Communications, other members of government and nbn. With regards to fault reporting and repair, we have noted the confusion and difficulty in reporting faults and Federal Council continues to advocate for a simpler, direct process along with the necessity for the creation of a Rural and Remote Communications Help Centre that understands rural and remote customers' needs and can assist them with troubleshooting problems in addition to providing correct information for securing communications products and services. In an attempt to ensure customers' problems are tended to and resolved as quickly as possible, nbn has created "nbn Local" which allows stakeholder groups to escalate reports of nbn service difficulties on behalf of their members directly to an nbn Local area representative if the regular channels of reporting are not resolving the problem. ICPA is now able to facilitate our members' contact with the nbn Local representative for their area to assist if nbn service problems are unresolved after being reported to their RSP. Members are encouraged to contact either their State Council or Federal Council if they are experiencing difficulty in resolving their internet issues.

ICPA (Aust) continues to strongly advocate for the nbn Sky Muster Education Port Service to be available to all rural and remote students with a Sky Muster service at home, regardless of whether they study via distance education, at a small rural school, board away from home needing to use the service when home on school breaks for assignments, or study at the tertiary level. We have spoken

to a number of other groups who now also support this request. At this time, we have not had any progress in seeing the Education Port expansion come to fruition however we have had interest in the issue from a number of people in government. ICPA (Aust) will keep the issue in discussions wherever possible.

ICPA (Aust) was asked in one motion to encourage Sky Muster Retail Service Providers to attend Federal Conference to hear first-hand the communications motions raised by members as many of the issues brought forward in recent times are RSP related. Federal Council has been personally inviting RSP representatives where possible and we have given them a date claimer for the conference. In April, formal invitations to the conference will be sent to the RSPs as well.

Telephone

ICPA (Aust) has had regular discussion with Telstra Country Wide (TCW) since the Federal Conference around the issues raised by the motions and other topics.

Faults

Telstra Country Wide want to ensure that issues regarding phone line installation for Distance Education schoolrooms as well as for our members are attended to in a reasonable timeframe. ICPA can assist and take cases directly to Telstra Country Wide (TCW) if any members are having difficulty with landline installation. Members can contact Federal Council to have their cases followed up with TCW. TCW has also provided ICPA with a list of their Area Managers and problems or questions with faults, installation etc. can be taken to them by members if they have attempted regular fault reporting without success. To try to improve the fault reporting process and outcomes for rural customers, in late 2017 TCW expanded the capacity of the RRADIO support team for those on radio system phones with more agents who are trained on these services and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The RRADIO team can be contacted by either phone (1800 RRADIO) or email radio@team.telstra.com TCW has also relaunched their defined range of network extension devices as well as conducting additional training in their regional stores on these products including how staff can help customers identify, purchase and install the right device for their needs.

Universal Service Obligation

Since the release of the Productivity Commission's Report following a review of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), a key concern of members has been the retention of landline phone services. On December 20, 2017 the Federal Government announced that they will be implementing a new Universal Service Guarantee (USG), "which will ensure all Australians have access to voice and broadband services, regardless of where they live." The USG will cover both voice and data. The Federal Government expressed a commitment to ensuring that those living in regional and remote areas continue to have guaranteed access to voice and broadband services. <https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/australian-government-response-productivity-commissions-inquiry-telecommunications-universal-service> .

ICPA (Aust) and RRRCC have met with numerous government representatives and strongly voiced our members' concerns over a potential loss of landlines and the possibility of landlines being replaced by VoIP services which do not adequately meet the need of those living in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) also maintains that Australians living outside of large metropolitan centres must have at least two methods of accessing communications (i.e. landline and satellite internet) due to distance to other means of communication and the implications for safety when one service fails. This message seems to have been understood and supported by many in government and we are hopeful that this consideration for voice services for those in regional, rural and remote areas will continue to be upheld.

Mobiles

The need for expanded mobile coverage in mobile black spot areas, and recognition of areas which are outside mobile coverage where a rural school is located, requiring either an additional loading or a variance of eligibility criteria in any future Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) funding rounds has been mentioned by ICPA (Aust) in numerous forums including meetings with the Regional Communications Minister, members of government, ACCC and Department of Communications. At the 2017 Federal Conference, Telstra Country Wide offered to investigate mobile possibilities in areas containing a rural school and they asked ICPA to provide information on rural schools outside the mobile service footprint. ICPA State Councils assisted in providing lists where possible of these schools and the lists have been passed on to TCW and we continue to have discussions with them on this.

Members also asked ICPA to request the Minister for Communications to investigate speeds being offered by mobile network suppliers. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is currently running a broadband monitoring program and are seeking volunteers whose service can be monitored.

<https://www.accc.gov.au/consumers/internet-phone/monitoring-broadband-performance> .

ICPA (Aust) has advocated for satellite broadband, which is not part of the monitoring, to be included. An ACCC consultation received more than 400 responses from consumers and industry participants on its broadband speed discussion paper last year.

<https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Broadband%20Speed%20Claims%20-%20Consultation%20outcomes%20report.pdf>

On February 17, 2018, the ACCC published guidance principals to help ensure RSPs do not mislead customers. The ACCC will publish a best-practice broadband speeds advertising guide for providers in the coming months.

<https://www.lifehacker.com.au/2017/02/the-days-of-dodgy-broadband-speed-claims-could-be-numbered/>

The ACCC is also in discussion with the Federal government about the possible introduction of a fixed broadband performance monitoring and reporting (BPMR) program in Australia.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

Every opportunity has been utilised to further raise this topic within several other submissions completed by Federal Council, along with the opportunity taken within these to raise the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success.

A list of resources to assist members looking for a governess or distance education tutor has also been made.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/76/distance-education-tutoring-document>

Federal Council will continue to pursue the DETA through delegations and submissions, along with endeavouring to action further measures to raise the profile of the role of the distance education tutor.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance

At the 2017 Federal Conference, members requested Federal Council lobbies for a streamlining of the DE AIC process for distance education families. This request was raised at a meeting with representatives from the Department of Human Services and followed up in a letter to the Minister for Human Services. At this stage no commitment has been made for this to be able to occur.

Supporting distance education families

With the demise of the Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (VISE) program across Australia, members requested that ICPA (Aust) support any similar programs to be established to cover the loss of this vital service. With this in mind, ICPA (Aust) has been in contact with and offered ongoing support and assistance in any way to the new Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (AHVISE) program and has endeavoured to keep members updated as much as possible on the development of this new program. ICPA (Aust) has also recently compiled a document for members outlining options for distance education families looking for tutors/governesses to assist with distance education for their children. ICPA (Aust) also offered their unwavering support and assistance to ICPA WA and WA distance education families in the recent situation arising from the WA government proposed closure of SOTAs in that state.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

ICPA (Aust) is working very hard to ensure rural and remote families can and will access high quality and affordable early childhood learning and care; whether that be through Preschool, Mobile Early Childhood Services including Mobile Playgroups and the new In Home Care model through the New Child Care Package, which commences 2 July 2018.

Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

ICPA (Aust) will continue to promote both the extension of the AIC DE allowance to 4-year-olds and increased access to preschool in rural and remote areas when we can, especially as preschool is seen to be such a vital part of a child's education with STEM subjects and the recent Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program <http://www.ella.edu.au> becoming essential parts of it; so if children miss out at this early stage, they will definitely not be school-ready and lag further behind their peers when they start school. We have also emphasised the need and support for play-based learning during the preschool year.

Preschool Teachers

After last year's federal conference, Federal Council wrote a standalone letter to relevant ministers requesting that a qualified teacher or Diploma qualified educator be employed to fill a vacant position when an Early Childhood teacher is not available in rural and remote areas, especially in small part-time rural and remote Centres. This was also included in the letter to Minister Birmingham as well as the IRRRRE review. Unfortunately, we have had no response to this as yet.

National Partnership Agreement

On 3 February 2018, the Federal Government announced a further \$440 million for preschool education in 2019. This is in addition to the Government's \$428 million investment for preschool in 2018. This will benefit over an estimated 348,000 children in 2019 across all preschool settings and brings the total Commonwealth investment in preschool to \$3.7 billion since 2008. Importantly, it will provide funding certainty for preschools and long day care centres as the government implements school and child care reforms this year.

<https://www.education.gov.au/national-partnership-agreements>

National Quality Standard

The Australian, state and territory education ministers agreed to changes to the National Quality Framework (NQF) to ensure quality education and care in Australia continues to improve in the most efficient and effective way. Most changes commenced 1 October 2017 in all states and territories (except Western Australia, which will commence by 1 October 2018). The 2018 National Quality Standard (NQS) and some related changes commenced 1 February 2018 (including in Western Australia).

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/latest-news/2018-nqs-commences>

Mobile Early Childhood Services

Early childhood education and child care in rural and remote areas which was previously provided by Budget-Based Funding (BBF) has been assisted and supported in its transition to the New Child Care Package by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) through the Department of Education and Training. Some of these services have been able to access some of the \$61 million non-competitive restricted grant funding which was available to BBF Services who provided 50% of child care to rural and remote areas. This has been a great help, although some services have had to also access funds from their states. No doubt families accessing these services may need to pay extra fees.

Mobile Playgroups, despite being a vital resource in geographically-isolated areas have also been supported by PwC and although we have been given assurance that their funding will continue for a limited time, they have had to look elsewhere for funding with dedicated business management plans: either through their states and/or the Department of Social Services. We would appreciate any further feedback regarding these Playgroups in their transition to the new arrangements.

Child Care

The New In Home Care (IHC) Model

ICPA (Aust) has attended several workshops, conducted an IHC Survey and participated in teleconferences and lodged submissions to ensure that Department of Education and Training have listened to us in preparation for the new model which commences 2 July 2018. The Department has collated information from their Nanny Pilot Program trial and from the IHC Review and noted results from our IHC Survey.

The Department of Education and Training are employing In Home Care Support Agencies in each state to work with families and Service Providers to help provide IHC at a reasonable cost for all, access to Service Providers within their state and provide more places for IHC educators, a total of 3000 at this stage. The Activity Test has been widened to enable unpaid workers in the family business, volunteers, those studying /training or looking for work may also qualify in receiving the new Child Care Subsidy (CCS). The National IHC Guidelines have now been finalised and the IHC from 2 July 2018 webpage has just been updated providing helpful information in all aspects of IHC. <https://www.education.gov.au/in-home-care>

ICPA (Aust) has recently been informed by the Department of Education and Training and confirmed by Minister Birmingham's office that even though the National IHC Guidelines still say that IHC educators may not supervise distance education, they can continue to supervise DE students outside of 'formal schooling hours' (i.e. on-air or audio lesson hours) when the schoolwork is classified as 'homework' from the Department's point of view, which should help a great deal. The Department has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal schooling hours' but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time. However, we will now be raising the safety issue of students being 'alone' and therefore unsafe, particularly when younger students under 12 years (which should not happen from a legal point-of-view) are participating in on-air lessons with no IHC educator available for those hours and we will seek that time to also fall under IHC.

We have also written to the relevant ministers regarding the introduction of IHC educators turning 18-years-old through the year, instead of the minimal age being 18. As IHC educators will need to have a relevant Certificate III qualification or working towards one, this may be problematic. The Department has just provided two ways for families in rural and remote areas where IHC educators can be exempt from having their Cert III in ECEC, but only up to 18 months from 2 July 2018.

1. 20% of the time is spent with a suitably qualified person i.e. by emailing, Skyping or through phone calls (if gap year teenager for example)

2. If having had 15 years' prior experience in Child Care

Working with Children Check (WWCC)

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Federal Government in the implementation of a national WWCC certification. A national working party has started working on this, but it will take some time to occur due to the different rules and regulations of states and territories.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with the Federal Government and other bodies available to us to further ECEC concerns and we will share any more developments with you.

RURAL SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TRAVEL

ICPA (Aust) has seen more of an emphasis at last year's federal conference on the increasingly expensive but necessary airline travel costs of students accessing boarding school as well as concerns raised about the quality of the nation's road network in regard to the safety of school travel for rural families.

ICPA (Aust) Federal Conference 2017 saw two motions similar in nature presented and passed A55 and A56. Both motions requested ICPA to lobby relevant airlines and transport companies for affordable 'Student Concessional Fares' for students travelling between place of residence and place of education. These motions have been passed at previous years' Federal Conferences and is ongoing. These motions have been expressed through discussions with Government on visits to Canberra over recent times and Federal Council continues to raise these issues at every given opportunity.

At the end of 2017 Federal Council had a teleconference with the various state Rural Schools and Travel Portfolios to give everyone a chance to express where their States are within this Portfolio. There was much discussion around what States currently have, what is needed and how best to move forward.

Following the above discussions Federal Council made a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport into the Operation, regulation and funding of air route service delivery to rural, regional and remote communities. The inquiry submission date closed on the 5 February which the inquiry is still to reach an outcome. You can see our submission here: <https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1118/federal-submissions-1/regional-air-fare-inquiry-submission-feb-2018.pdf>

We are pleased to see Qantas has two state trials in place at present for the public, one in Queensland and the other in Western Australia. Also, Rex Airlines have 'Bush to Boarding' scheme available between any Gulf port and Cairns in Queensland and from Brisbane to Mount Isa via Toowoomba, Birdsville and several other small towns. We are satisfied these are being utilised by our members but need a much wider concessional scheme to include all geographical-isolated boarding children from all of Australia to ease the monetary pressures that compulsory education has on families. Federal Council had correspondence with Rex Regional Airlines inquiring about any further Bush to Boarding routes that may become available and we are working with state councils to identify routes that boarding students may frequent within the various states. ICPA (Aust) is currently collating this data and in the process of replying to Rex Airlines with this information.

The above Inquiry gave Federal Council an opportunity to raise motion A57 asking Council to lobby Federal Ministers for equity, so that, given the limited secondary boarding options within some states, all Rural and Remote students receive a Student Travel Allowance that reflects the actual costs involved to get students from their home, to their place of education within Australia. This motion has been raised in the above inquiry and has also been brought to the attention of Government to

alert them of the situation of different allowance schemes being offered in different states. This being so, the point was made that there is not a Federal travel allowance under the AIC, however there are fares allowance under ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance which shows a discrepancy in Commonwealth Allowances if they were tabled side by side.

For the safety of our families on the road, we have seen a motion A58 passed at Federal Conference requesting the importance of continually improving our regional and remote roads network to a safe and all-weather access standard, for the benefit of our children and families being safe while travelling these roads to attend education and related services. This motion has been raised by Federal Council with Government and we hope to have further discussions on this. It has also been raised with Rural Stakeholder groups in hoping they would support a call for road improvements.

TERTIARY

The tertiary motion update starts on a very positive note with the welcome change in Youth Allowance for those rural and remote students qualifying for independent Youth Allowance through part-time work or earnings. As of January 1, 2018, the time regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria is 14 months. These criteria will allow students to finish Year 12, take a working gap year, start university the following year and if they have fulfilled all the criteria, be eligible for independent Youth Allowance from the start of their university year. Visit the Youth Allowance website [here](#) for further information. ICPA (Aust) has been lobbying for this change for many years and now the efforts have been rewarded.

Fares Allowance

Federal Council is waiting for a response to correspondence to the Minister for Social Services in relation to the request the Fares Allowance criteria of first return trip timing for Youth Allowance to be aligned with the ABSTUDY criteria.

Centrelink

In November 2017, Federal Council met with the Department of Human Services, Department of Social Services and Department of Education and Training in Canberra and many Youth Allowance issues were discussed including the Centrelink issues our members have reported with incorrect information being received from staff.

The implementation of the Australian National Audit Office's audit of the Administration of Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY recommendations are in progress which includes improved communication of eligibility requirements to prospective and current Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY recipients as well as the provision of ongoing guidance and training to departmental staff. Efficiency measures are constantly being reviewed and improvements to the application platform are being monitored and implemented. The Department is keen to be informed of any issues as part of their quality and improvement processes.

Youth Allowance

An overview of Youth Allowance was compiled by ICPA in consultation with the Dept. of Human Services and was updated at the end of 2017. It can be viewed on the ICPA website [here](#).

Rent Assistance (RA)

Federal Council has consulted with the Department of Human Services prior to Federal Conference 2017 in relation to the motions relating to rent assistance. The advice was check with Dept. of Human Services for individual queries as there are many variables. Some points included:

- Rent Assistance (RA) can be paid to dependent or independent YA students depending on their living arrangements circumstances.

- A student has to qualify for the Away from Home (AFH) rate of YA before RA can be paid.
- Student eligibility for RA over semester breaks depends on whether the student is maintaining their term accommodation during this period, that is, they are still paying rent and still have access to the property
- The dates used for assessment of RA are: study dates and dates the student must vacate the accommodation (if at all).

Along with following up on issues we have not yet had a response to, ICPA (Aust) will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues through the avenues available to us and at every opportunity and we will inform members of any developments.

We look forward to seeing many of you at this year's Federal Conference in Canberra on 1-2 August 2018.