



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc).

"Access to Education"

2013-2014 Pre Budget Submission

From
Federal Council
of the
Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
ICPA (Aust)

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Executive Summary

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, (ICPA Aust), is pleased to provide ideas for the 2013-14 budget, that contribute towards achieving equity of educational opportunity for children and students living in remote regions, thus ensuring they have access to a continuing and appropriate education.

ICPA is focused on making certain demography is not a marker of destiny for students from rural and remote Australia. This submission forms part of our lobby for allowances to assist families and students in rural and remote areas of Australia in order to gain equity in accessing education.

- Early Childhood Programs- the only means of accessing early childhood education for approximately 250 children across remote Australia is through distance education programs. While states and territories have provided such programs, families living in remote areas wishing to access these are bearing the entire costs of administering them. The Assistance for Isolated Children's (AIC) distance education allowance must be extended to encourage families to take part in these particular early childhood programs.
Funding required- \$1 million dollars.
- Distance Education Teaching Allowance- for around 1500 families living in isolated regions of Australia, the only means of accessing an education for their children is via distance education programs. While the AIC allowance assists with the setup of the classroom and ongoing costs associated with this form of education, families need greater assistance if children are to receive the education they deserve. ICPA is seeking the introduction of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (\$4000 per family), as financial recognition of the essential work a tutor (often the mother) performs.
Funding required- \$6 million.
- Tertiary Access Allowance- ICPA continues to lobby for a Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA) of \$4,000. Ideally ICPA would like to see all students who need to relocate to undertake tertiary study, receiving financial support to assist them in accessing their place of study. However, in view of the current financial situation, support must be given to those most in need. Immediate assistance should be available for students from remote areas who constitute a group presently under-represented at university. In 2011, independent Youth Allowance recipients living in remote and very remote regions totalled approximately 800 students. Students living in these areas, who aren't receiving any form of income support, must have equity to tertiary education by way of financial assistance to allow them to access their chosen institution. We are unable to access these figures but suggest they would be few.

Funding these allowances would go a long way to help alleviate and overcome the challenges families face when educating their children in isolated regions of Australia.

BACKGROUND of ICPA

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia had its beginning in the NSW outback of Bourke, in April 1971. Families were struggling with drought and the consequences of such an event, and most importantly, the effects of the drought on the education of their children. The late Mrs Pat Edgley, MBE, called a meeting to save the Bourke Hostel, which serviced families in the outlying district, from closure. Out of this has grown an amazing organisation, with branches of ICPA springing up all over Australia, and eventually the national overarching body - ICPA (Aust). In its 41 years as a volunteer organisation, ICPA has achieved much for families and children who are isolated from access to educational services. ICPA will continue to strive for equity of access to an appropriate education for these children.

OBJECTIVE of ICPA:

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, non-profit, apolitical parent body, dedicated to ensuring all rural and remote students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. It encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of access to an appropriate education for their children and the provision of services required in achieving this. Children may be educated in small rural schools, by distance education, attend boarding schools or school term hostels and sometimes have access to early childhood services. Tertiary students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia frequently must live away from home to access further education.

ACHIEVEMENTS of ICPA:

- Assistance for Isolated Children scheme (AIC).
This is a Federal Government allowance, established under the Australian Labor Party by the Hon Kim Beazley Snr, then Minister for Education, and is paid to parents to help support their isolated student as a distance education student, a living away from home student, or in establishing a second home so students can access education.
- Establishing allowances in each state, funded by State Governments.
- Establishing itinerant teaching services to assist in overcoming the tyranny of distance for distance education tutors and students.
- Supporting retired educators volunteering to assist families to educate their students in remote and isolated homesteads.
- Impetus behind the Country Areas Program (CAP).
- A leading role in improving telecommunication for isolated families, including current technologies used for delivering distance education.
- Respect and credibility across all political parties and government departments.

CURRENT ISSUES of ICPA:

- Advocating for a tertiary access allowance for students who want to further their post-secondary education and must live away from home to do so.
- Advocating for training and financial support for distance education tutors who are working with students in distance education classrooms.
- Advocating for early childhood programs to be available for all rural and remote families, including via an extension of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to four year old students.

Early Childhood Education Extension to the AIC Allowance

ICPA commends the Federal Government on their commitment to the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program. The aim of providing access to quality early childhood education for all children by 2013 supports the equitable participation of rural and remote children. However, the ability to deliver these programs to children learning by distance education will be challenging and is an issue that governments must address urgently.

It is common practice, and widely accepted, in Australia today, that children should participate in early childhood programs, allowing them to develop knowledgeable, confident self-identities, which facilitate a smooth transition into formal schooling. In urban centres, these programs cost the families accessing the programmes little more than a small fee.

The only avenue for many families living in rural and remote areas wanting to access the early childhood programs is through distance education. Recognition of the issues surrounding a four-year-old program being delivered via distance education is essential.

Distance education services are well structured and centres are ably staffed; however, families wishing to access these programs are bearing the entire costs of administering them. In the case of their first child, families are faced with the financial burden of setting up a pre-school classroom.

Presently the distance education component of the Assistance for Isolated Children's (AIC) Allowance assists with both the costs of setting up and ongoing costs pertaining to the classroom; it does not, however, recognise four year old programs. The costs associated with setting up and maintaining a classroom for delivering an early childhood program are the same as for setting up a schoolroom when delivering a full time distance education program and some form of assistance is essential.

Based on past and projected 4 year old distance education enrolments, approximately 250 families Australia wide would be affected.

ICPA requests the Federal Government address the financial inequity facing those remote families wishing to access an early childhood program through Distance Education.

An extension of the AIC Distance Education Allowance, to include 4 year olds accessing early childhood programs delivered through the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program by distance education is essential to alleviate the present inequity.

ICPA estimates that there are 250 families who would be eligible to access this allowance, a total cost of \$1 million per annum.

Distance Education Distance Education Teaching Allowance

The Australian Government is committed to delivering quality education programs that are accessible by all Australians. For many young people living in remote regions, their only access to education is to study by distance education. While distance education services are well structured and distance education centres ably staffed, it is clear that distance education provision is founded on the assumption that all children have ready access to a person able to teach the program in the geographically isolated classroom. This person is the distance education tutor and they must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program.

The distance education tutor is a person who frequently is the mother of the students, and must be available to commit between six and eight hours each day to the geographically isolated classroom to teach the distance education program, in addition to whatever preparation time is necessary. The role of distance education tutor requires dedication and is a commitment that often lasts many years. A distance education tutor must be capable and confident in delivering the distance education program, thus allowing rural and remote students to achieve educational parity with their urban peers who have face-to-face access to professionally trained teachers and support staff on a daily basis.

Tasks required of the distance education tutor include setting up a classroom, keeping students engaged in the curriculum, dealing with disciplinary issues, ensuring students link in via the internet or telephone for their formal instructions and a variety of extra-curricular activities, receiving and returning completed lessons to distance education centres, marking school work before it is returned, as well as dealing with family commitments and the everyday running of a business in a remote area. Distance education tutors spend similar time to a teacher in a mainstream school preparing daily lessons and teaching their students, with no remuneration or recognition for the work they do. The delivery of distance education is not possible without the commitment of distance education tutors who are accountable for the face-to-face delivery of educational support, supervision and educational evaluation of their students.

For many women, the roles they undertake in the operation of family agricultural businesses have changed and multiplied over the years. With the responsibility of the distance education tutor position often falling on the mother, fulfilling this position further compounds her workload. This can place increased pressure on other family members and may necessitate the employment of additional staff.

Due consideration must be given to the encumbrance on approximately 1500 families in geographically isolated areas for whom distance education is the only means to educate children. The vital role of the distance education tutor should be recognised through the payment of an allowance, which acknowledges the essential work they perform.

ICPA requests that the Federal Government introduce a Distance Education Teaching Allowance in financial recognition of the essential work distance education tutors perform.

This Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) should be:

- for families who qualify for the Assistance for Isolated Children scheme – Distance Education Allowance
- paid per family
- an annual payment of \$4,000.00, indexed to the CPI.

Based on figures received from DEEWR, it's estimated that there are 1500 families who would be eligible to access this allowance, a total cost of \$6 million per annum.

Tertiary Education Tertiary Access Allowance

Engaging in tertiary education should be an option for all Australian students. Ability to access education is one of the key considerations in determining whether a student can take up this option. Equity of educational access for rural and remote students is restricted and they continue to be under-represented in tertiary education.

In Australia in 2012, many students living in rural and remote areas continue to be denied the right of access to tertiary education due to lack of affordability. Distance has an associated cost factor and these students residing in rural and remote Australia require financial assistance to access their place of study. This assistance should not be dependent upon being a recipient of student income support payments such as Youth Allowance (YA). While the costs associated with relocating have been recognised through the provision of Relocation Scholarships, only students receiving dependent Youth Allowance have benefited from this change.

The logistics for rural and remote students to journey to an institution offering tertiary studies is often beyond their financial means. The high up-front costs of accessing and paying for accommodation, travel to access their place of study, along with the cost of living away from home, all impact on rural and remote student access. ICPA considers it vital for the Federal Government to create an allowance that will enable all rural and remote students to have the equivalent access to tertiary education that is available to most students living in the urban areas of Australia.

To further their education rural students must, by definition, leave home to access tertiary studies. The support mechanisms of Youth Allowance, and part-time work that many students undertake, contribute to supplementing the living costs of students once they can actually access their chosen tertiary institution. The greatest barrier to this access to higher education is the lack of adequate financial means to fund the access. The current measures for student income support, (Youth Allowance, Austudy and Abstudy), do not adequately recognise the extra costs incurred by all rural and remote students attempting to access tertiary education.

Students, who wish to commence tertiary studies immediately following completion of their secondary education, invariably require assistance to access their chosen tertiary institution. They have limited funds to assist in accessing their place of study and some students cannot defer their studies in order to meet the workforce criteria for gaining independent Youth Allowance and hence receive financial support for day-to-day living. Students receiving independent Youth Allowance who must relocate from the family home still require financial assistance with the relocation required to access their tertiary establishment.

ICPA requests that the Federal Government introduce a tertiary access allowance as financial assistance to rural and remote students who must live away from home to access tertiary education.

The tertiary access allowance advocated by ICPA will enable rural and remote students to access their place of study including securing their place of accommodation, assisting with relocation expenses, travelling to their institution for enrolment to commence study and facilitating travel home during the year.

This allowance should:

- Not be reliant on students receiving income support payments such as Youth Allowance.
- Be an annual payment for the duration of the student's full time course.
- Be a minimum of \$4,000 per year indexed to CPI.
- Not to be received in addition to a Relocation Scholarship.

ICPA is unable to give an estimated costing for this allowance, as we are still researching the number of students affected.