



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

FEDERAL COUNCIL
"Access to Education"

Federal Secretary ICPA (Aust)
505 Ryeford-Pratten Rd
MS 422, CLIFTON QLD 4361
FedSecretary@icpa.com.au

Mr Stephen Hally-Burton
prebudgetsubs@treasury.gov.au

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Dear Mr Hally-Burton

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, (ICPA Aust), is pleased to provide ideas for the 2014-15 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 determined by their aspirations rather than their location.

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 280 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- just over \$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. Greater detail is included in the following pages.

Yours sincerely

Jane Morton
Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)

Early Childhood Education **Extension to the AIC Allowance**

The aim of providing access to quality early childhood education programs as per the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program, is strongly supported by this organisation. However, the ability to deliver these programs to children learning by distance education is challenging and is an issue that governments must urgently address.

It is widely accepted 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 programs little more than a small fee.

For many families living in rural and remote areas, to access early childhood programs distance education mode is the only avenue. Recognition of the issues surrounding a four-year-old program being delivered via distance education is often not well understood.

Distance education services are well structured and centres are ably staffed. Families wishing to access these programs bear the entire costs of administering them. In the case of the oldest child commencing an early childhood program, families are faced with the financial burden of setting up a pre-school classroom.

Presently the Distance Education Allowance component of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme, assists with the cost of setting up and ongoing costs pertaining to the delivery of a program in the classroom and can assist with access to face to face activity meets. The scheme does not 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 for delivering a full time distance education program to those aged five and beyond.

Based on projected 4 year old distance education enrolments for 2014, gathered from all distance education schools throughout Australia, approximately 280 families could be eligible. ICPA estimates the cost to the government for these families to access this allowance, to be a little over a \$1 million per annum.

ICPA requests the Federal Government in this forthcoming budget, to address the financial inequity facing those remote families wishing to access an early childhood program through distance education.

This can be done by extending the AIC Distance Education Allowance to include 4 year olds accessing early childhood programs delivered through the Universal Access to Early Childhood Education Program.

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 DE (previously 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. The 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.

ICPA's Tertiary Access Research (May 2013) found that distance and the huge financial cost of relocation were major hurdles with 53% of the young people from rural and remote areas living from 501 to 2000 kms from the nearest university offering their required course. 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.