



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

Submission

**to the
Australian Government Department of Health**

**for the
Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce Consultation**

**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), is pleased to provide a submission to inform and guide the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce in identifying areas for priority action. ICPA (Aust) appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important area of government decision making.

ICPA (Aust) is a national, voluntary, parent body representing families who live in rural and remote Australia. Our goal is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all geographically isolated children and thus ensure they have access to a continuing and appropriate education. ICPA (Aust) seeks to have all elements of education (i.e. cultural experiences, social contacts, participation in sport and enrichment activities) available to children regardless of the location of their home. Due consideration must be given to factors which affect the education of these children that do not necessarily need to be considered within the context of metropolitan education.

ICPA (Aust) is focused on ensuring demography is not a marker for destiny for students from rural and remote Australia and advocates that this review examine methods to extend Medicare rebates to include video consultation for clinical services provided by allied health professionals.

There is a disparity in allied health services in rural and regional areas with residents in these areas having access to significantly fewer allied health professionals than their urban counterparts.

Students in rural and remote locations have limited access to services provided by speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists or psychologists due to geographical location. Visits by allied health professionals to rural schools are infrequent, which compromises educational outcomes for many students.

Utilisation of telehealth services can be of great benefit to families in geographically isolated locations who would otherwise have to travel considerable distances or encounter lengthy delays to access face-to-face consultations with relevant allied health professionals.

Medicare rebates are currently available for video consultations between specialists and patients in rural and remote locations throughout Australia under the Government's Telehealth programme. However, this does not extend to allied health professions.

The provision of a Medicare rebate for services provided via telehealth by allied health clinicians to rural and remote families with children experiencing developmental delays, was a topic of debate at the recent federal conference of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (ICPA Aust).

For distance education students, who have no daily face to face access to appropriately qualified teachers and are reliant on often untrained distance education tutors, it is essential that timely consultations are provided by allied health professionals to ensure that specific learning needs are properly assessed and that student management plans are effectively implemented. Students with developmental difficulties often require frequent and timely consultations and these can be enabled via telehealth services for many families otherwise unable to access allied health professionals due to geographical location.

ICPA (Aust) recommends that an equivalent Medicare rebate be provided to families in rural and remote locations who need to use telehealth clinicians for children with developmental difficulties under the 'Chronic Diseases Management Scheme' and similar item numbers, to those who have in-person consultations.

Consultations with allied health professionals can be satisfactorily performed in locations where the technology is available, providing improved and more equitable access to health services for some children in geographically isolated areas. The cost to families to access such services should also be equitable. Research indicates comparability between telehealth delivered assessment and intervention by face-to-face interactions.