

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

**"Access to Education"**

## **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Application Survey 2018**

### **Synopsis**



**APRIL 2018**

## **Summary**

Since 1971 the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), has represented families living in rural and remote regions of Australia. Our goal is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all children living in rural and remote areas, thus ensuring they have access to a continuing and appropriate education determined by their aspirations and abilities rather than the location of their home.

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme assists families with children who do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school, due to geographic isolation, a disability or other special health condition.

Types of Allowances under the AIC Scheme:

- Basic Boarding Allowance,
- Additional Boarding Allowance,
- Second Home Allowance,
- Distance Education Allowance and
- Pensioner Education Supplement

With the exception of Additional Boarding Allowance, all allowances are free of means testing.

## **Purpose**

This survey was commissioned by the Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), to identify the key issues experienced by rural and remote applicants of Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC). The aim of the survey was to provide anecdotal evidence from ICPA members and survey respondents around these issues. It also addresses the need to review and streamline the application process for AIC and the provision of an online application for AIC.

## **Rationale**

Since 1973, successive Australian Governments have provided financial support through the AIC Scheme to families with children who do not have reasonable daily access to an appropriate government school. Changes are needed to ensure that the AIC allowance meets the needs of families in the twenty-first century.

The AIC guidelines acknowledge that families in isolated areas incur additional costs to educate their children and the AIC Scheme in the form of allowances aims to alleviate these. Timely assessment and payment of these allowances is paramount.

## **Methodology**

The method of data collection was through a survey formulated by ICPA (Aust). The survey was distributed on 24 March 2018 via the ICPA (Aust) Branch Bulletin and Facebook, containing a hyperlink to the online survey. The survey closed 4 weeks later on the 22 April 2018. ICPA members and non-members were able to participate.

A number of polar (Yes/No) questions were used to qualify members for initial participation and a further set of polar questions guided members to open questions regarding the types of challenges and key factors that impacted on their AIC application process.

The survey was completed by 331 participants.

The survey results were presented to the Minister for Human Services, the Shadow Minister for Human Services and the Department of Human Services in May 2018.

## **Findings**

### **Questions**

- **Are you an ICPA member?**

Yes 64% No 36%

- **Do you currently receive the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) payment or have you recently applied for the AIC Scheme and waiting for your application to be processed?**

Yes 87% No 13%

- **Which AIC payment do you receive?**

AIC Boarding Allowance: 48%

AIC Distance Education Allowance: 57%

AIC Second Home Allowance: 6%

- **Was your initial application for the AIC Scheme a straight forward process?**

Yes: 77% No: 23%

- **Has the renewal – End of Year Circumstances Review process for AIC (for ongoing payment) been straight forward?**

Yes: 38% No: 41% N/A: 21%

- **Have you had a problem with the initial AIC application process or AIC renewal – End of Year Circumstances Review process?**

Yes: 59% No: 41%

- **Have you had any issues adding another applicant/child to AIC payment?**

Yes: 14% No: 47% N/A: 40%

- **Have you used the AIC dedicated phone number 132318 for queries or to resolve issues?**

Yes: 77% No: 23%

- **If you have called the AIC dedicated phone number, what was the wait time for your call to be answered?**

Average wait time 27 Minutes

- **Was your query resolved during the first call?**

Yes: 41% No: 59%

- **If more than one phone call to the AIC dedicated phone number was required, how many follow up phone calls did you make before your query or issue was resolved?**

One: 6% Two: 18% Three or more: 41% Never: 34%

- **Have you visited a Centrelink Service Centre in relation to your AIC application?**

Yes: 27% No: 73%

- **Were your queries resolved at the visit?**

Yes: 35% No: 65%

- **If more than one visit to a Centrelink Service Centre was required, how many follow up visits did you make before your query or issue was resolved?**

One: 24% Two: 10% Three or more: 3% Never: 63%

- **Do you feel an online AIC application option would assist you in the application process?**

Yes: 84% No 16%

## **Summary of Comments**

- **AIC payment**

Most of the issues of delayed payment, have escalated over the last couple of years.

Cancelled due to forms not arriving, being lost once in Centrelink's hands.

Processing taken up to 5-6 months to be processed taking multiple phone calls and Centrelink visits to progress the process or to find out where the application process was up to.

Stressful, frustrating, with the urgency of payments required to assist payment of boarding fees.

- **Forms**

Confusing. Long-winded. Lengthy.

Forms misfiled, lost or never received.

Families sent forms in the same envelope and Centrelink had recorded some forms as being received and not others.

- **Renewal forms**

Troublesome.

Either not issued or lost in mail system leading to payments being cancelled.

Late arriving in the first place to families and despite prompt return, system generated a cancellation notice.

Postal system issues.

Frustration with not being able to check the progress of application online.

- **132318 Phone Service**

Did not speak to knowledgeable service personnel.

Wrong information being given leading to delay in processing of application, different answers from different personnel.

Often phone call answered by general Centrelink helpline whom were not able to answer specific questions.

Not supportive.

Lengthy wait-time before call answered.

Told to go online and to complete application.

Only option to resolve issues and often unable to ring during open times, cannot visit service centre due to distance.

Multiple phone calls to resolve and often not resolved.

- **Online Service**

No recognition of receiving forms by Centrelink, either if posted, uploaded or taken into service centre.

Online service concerns – quality of internet service, dropout.

- **Service Centres**

Staff not versed in AIC, told unable to help.

Told the service centre does not deal with AIC applications, go home and ring AIC number.

Too far to attend a service centre.

Acknowledgement must be made that there were positive comments from families that had had no issues with the application, initial and renewal forms, phone service and service centres.

## **Conclusion**

**The findings of this survey reveal the key issues evident for AIC applicants, which are impeding the timely payment of the AIC. The AIC payments are critical to the ability of families from rural and remote areas of Australia, to access an education for their children who do not have daily access to an appropriate government school.**

**The survey responses have highlighted issues around the AIC forms, the AIC dedicated helpline phone service, the service centres and processing times. Of concern is the indication provided by many members that the processing times of AIC applications can be up to 5 months.**

**The statistical data and comments collected in the survey, supports the need for a review of the AIC application process and the option of applying and viewing progress of applications online.**