

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS REPORT

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ICPA (Aust) has continued to work on specific education needs motions passed at the 2018 conference as well as motions from previous years. Specific education needs continues to be a space where it is difficult to make perceptible progress. Broadly, issues include: early identification of learning difficulties, access to services and the cost of accessing services. These issues have been pursued by ICPA (Aust) in submissions to inquiries, delegation briefing papers and by correspondence with relevant Ministers during 2018/19. At the 2018 Federal ICPA Conference, three specific education needs motions related to:

- A need for travel and accommodation allowances for rural and isolated families travelling to access face-to-face allied health services,
- A need for equitable subsidies nationally for accommodation and travel for children with specific or special education needs to attend appointments with qualified specialists, and
- The establishment of mental health resources which specifically assist geographically isolated students and families, particularly around the issue of bullying.

Access to services for specific education needs

ICPA (Aust) has written to the Ministers for Health and Education to explain the national need for rural, regional and remote families to access travel and accommodation assistance to attend appointments with qualified professionals in order to diagnose and manage specific learning needs. ICPA (Aust) has also promoted this issue at meetings of the National Rural Health Alliance which has rural representation from a wide variety of health professionals' organisations.

Travel and accommodation costs to attend appointments for early identification and intervention for special needs and learning difficulties can be very costly for rural and remote families; costs not subsidised by NDIS, patient travel schemes or education systems. ICPA (Aust) urges state councils to also pursue this issue with state health and education departments, though it is clearly a nation-wide issue

Medicare rebate for speech pathology

Rural and remote students and young children with special education needs can benefit from access to appointments with Allied Health professionals. Families are grateful for advances in telehealth and the availability of Medicare rebates for occupational therapy and mental health consultations, for example. Still *no rebate* exists for Speech Language Pathology (SLP) via telehealth delivery despite demonstrated effectiveness. Parents can claim \$52 per session for 5 sessions a year for *face-to-face* consultations.

ICPA (Aust) has continued to pursue this 2017 motion through correspondence and meetings with relevant Ministers and the Treasurer, as well as through representation on the National Rural Health Alliance member council. In April this year, ICPA (Aust) submitted comments on the *Report of the Allied Health Reference Group: Review of the Allied Health Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items*. The report was recommending an MBS item number be allocated to speech pathology consultations by telehealth for severe speech disorders. ICPA's position is *any* speech disorders affecting education and wellbeing should be eligible to be treated by telehealth, with an MBS Item number, as they would be covered if the child lived in a city and could access face-to-face consultations.

Mental health, bullying/cyber bullying

While mental health resources for parents and students, especially around cyberbullying, are being developed by many organisations and government, few target geographically isolated students or

boarding students specifically. ICPA (Aust) has written to the Ministers for Health and Education to garner their support for the development of such resources. The government recently launched the [Student Wellbeing Hub](https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/) <https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/> which has resources for teachers, parents and students. Potentially, links to resources specifically for geographically isolated families might be on this site. ICPA (Aust) is exploring several lines of inquiry to find ways to develop the resources this motion is asking for.

Mt Isa School of the Air (MISOTA) has been working on a program starting with creating a “friends” program and sections on resilience. They had “[Eyes Open- Social Media Safety](https://www.eyesopensocialmedia.com.au/)” <https://www.eyesopensocialmedia.com.au/> attend their Home Tutor Week in May 2018 to discuss cyber bullying and found they tailored their presentation appropriately for their ‘audience’. Eyes Open does school consultations and offers resources. MISOTA purchased access to the resources for every family in their school. In Term 4 2018, MISOTA launched “Tips for Transitioning” around moving from distance education to boarding. This was the next phase of their program and also has an emphasis on cyberbullying.

Another organisation working in this space is [Dolly’s Dream Foundation](https://dollysdream.org.au/) <https://dollysdream.org.au/> In March this year, Dolly’s Dream partnered with the Northern Territory Government and the Alannah & Madeline Foundation to deliver the Dolly’s Dream eSmart program to ‘give teachers, students and parents tools and support to implement cultural change around bullying and cyber-bullying’. The Dolly’s Dream eSmart program includes: Delivery of the eSmart Digital Licence, an online safety tool for Grade 6 students, implementation of Dolly’s Dream eSmart framework for 10 schools in high priority regions, two parent, teacher and student Dolly’s Dream Connect workshops for 50 NT Government schools.

In March 2019, the Australian Government launched a national awareness campaign and developed resources to help keep children and young people safe online. The national campaign aims to raise awareness and to help parents, carers and teachers to ‘Start the Chat’ about online safety. Media activities will build on the awareness messages from the advertising campaign and direct people to where they can get more detailed information, including for Indigenous and NESB communities and people living in regional and remote Australia. For more details and resources go to esafety.gov.au/start-the-chat.

Drought and the Queensland floods have generated much concern about the mental health of children/students at home in rural and remote areas and in boarding schools. UNICEF’s February 2019 Drought Report *In their own words: The hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people* highlighted the impact of drought on children and the need for psychological help. ICPA (Aust) networked with UNICEF in initial discussions for their report and we support calls for additional resources and mental health assistance for children, families and schools in rural and remote communities who are struggling through unprecedented challenges because of drought and other occurrences such as the monsoonal event that impacted North Queensland in early 2019.

Workshops for rural and remote parents of gifted students

Earlier in 2019, ICPA (Aust) obtained an indicative costing from the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) at the University of New South Wales of \$14,000 to run three two-hour interactive webinars for parents and educators of rural and remote gifted and talented students. The cost of running face-to-face seminars across a multitude of locations (as was done some 12 years ago) is now considered prohibitive. If ICPA (Aust) or another party can secure sufficient funding, GERRIC should be able to develop the workshop resources and deliver the webinars for rural and remote families. GERRIC regularly runs workshops for parents and students in Sydney. This proposal stems from a 2016 motion and funding options are being explored.