

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) REPORT

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ICPA (Aust) is working hard to ensure rural and remote families can and will access high quality, affordable early childhood learning and child care; whether this is through Preschool or Kindy, Mobile Early Childhood Services including Mobile Playgroups, Long Day Care Centres in small rural towns or In Home Care (IHC).

Early Learning

AIC Distance Education Allowance for Pre-Compulsory school students and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

ICPA (Aust) will continue to promote both the extension of the AIC Distance Education allowance for those children who are studying an approved preschool/kindy program by distance education the year before formal schooling, and for improved access to preschool in rural and remote areas. The Federal Government has again provided funding, this time \$453.1 million to states and territories for preschool until the end of 2020 under the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, see: <https://www.education.gov.au/universal-access-early-childhood-education>.

Parents with pre-compulsory school aged children attending a Preschool Program at a Long Day Care Service are eligible for the Child Care Subsidy even though they do not meet the activity test requirements and are entitled to 36 hours of subsidised care. This is a great incentive for families who need to travel many kilometres to town in order to access preschool and so it is rather disappointing that we cannot yet access assistance for our preschoolers studying by distance education. However, we will not give up!

Federal Council welcomed the recent news from the Education Council that Early Childhood Teachers have been given an extension of the transitional provisions in rural and remote areas to address the lack of qualified Early Childhood Teachers in Long Day Centres there. This is being worked out in the various states and territories, as from January 2020 where there are more than 60 children under school-age, a second Early Childhood Teacher 'or suitably qualified person' is required to care for those children. Federal Council is watching this with interest to see whether it will also mean an extension to the transitional provisions in In Home Care.

Mobile Early Childhood Services

The [Community Child Care Funding](#) (CCCF) Round 2 opened for Child Care Services including Mobile Early Childhood Services in disadvantaged communities earlier this year, with the aim of improving access to early learning opportunities for vulnerable children and families. ICPA (Aust) hoped that this extra funding would have helped some Mobile Early Childhood Services providing child care. This was also accessible to In Home Care Services. Unfortunately, Mobile Playgroups do not qualify for the CCCF, though some funding for them has been provided by the Department of Social Services. Mobile services such as the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) are also partially funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). KICS needs a further \$40,000 to maintain their vital service to pastoral stations and communities in the Northern Territory by the end of the year. They would like to also increase their service to provide a mobile playgroup to properties and communities out of Alice Springs but unfortunately, at this stage, there is no funding available for new Mobile Early Childhood Playgroups in rural and remote areas.

In Home Care (IHC)

Federal Council has received many complaints and concerns from member families since the new In Home Care model was implemented on 2 July 2018. Numerous letters have been written to the Minister for Education, rural politicians and the Department of Education and we have followed up

with this on delegations and whenever the opportunity arose. Hopefully the initial teething problems are now settling down.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement that the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for IHC families increased from \$25.48/hour/family from 2 July 2018 to \$32.00/hour/family and up to \$38.40/hour/family for Additional CCS from 1 January 2019 as per the later version of the IHC National Guidelines, see: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ihc_national_guidelines_-_december_2018.pdf. It has risen marginally again by the CPI at 1 July 2019. The Additional Child Care Subsidy is mainly used for children's wellbeing if they are at risk, for example. However, it can also be a temporary measure to help care for children in families experiencing financial hardship or disasters such as floods, cyclones and bushfires. Families are also encouraged to review their incomes to make sure they are receiving the correct percentage of CCS. Federal Council also welcomed the news that 200 more IHC places, an increase to the 3000 existing places, were made available, particularly for Queensland families.

The Department of Education informed IHC services in disadvantaged or vulnerable communities that they could apply for once-off Special Circumstances grants under the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) to address any current lack of viability or natural disaster issues such as drought, the North West Queensland floods, Tasmanian bushfires etc. during the 2018-19 financial year. Funding to some IHC service providers was reduced in July 2018, the service providers then passed on the added costs as new levies to families. The CCCF Special Circumstances Funding and the CCS increase should have made IHC more affordable. ICPA has heard though that since 1 January, some IHC service providers have increased their fees and not removed the levies, whereas other services have reduced their fees.

IHC educators are required to have at the minimum, a Certificate III in ECEC or be working towards same from January 2020. There are two transitional provisions for IHC educators in remote areas prior to that:

- An IHC educator providing services in a remote or a very remote area will meet the qualification requirements for IHC educators if the IHC educator has access to, and utilises the expertise of, an educator with at least a Certificate III in early childhood education and care for at least 20 per cent of the time care is provided to a family. This may be by means of information and communications technology (ICT).
- An educator, who has been continuously working in a remote or very remote area for at least 15 years is exempt from the qualification requirements until 1 January 2020.

It was expected that these provisions would be available to all geographically isolated families but apparently the Remoteness ARIA index has been used as the isolated measure and so some families have been excluded.

ICPA (Aust) sought departmental clarification on the issue of IHC educators supervising distance education. The Department of Education pointed to Family Assistance Law; citing that only caring for children completing their homework in outside of school hours care, not supervising formal schooling, is permissible for the family to receive CCS for that care. ICPA (Aust) is seeking an exemption to this as distance education teachers are not physically present with their students during school hours, and as isolated children cannot access face-to-face teaching in a school like their peers due to the tyranny of distance, a supervisor has to be with them at all times. This is of particular concern with children under 13 years of age. The Department of Education has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal schooling hours' but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

Supervising children studying by distance education is counted as volunteering for the Child Care

Subsidy Activity Test, but only for a maximum of 36 hours per fortnight and as long as the IHC educator is employed for out-of-school hours care for the children and/or caring for younger members of the family (and the other parent is working).

Skills IQ Cert III & Diploma ECEC Update of Training Packages

ICPA (Aust) provided feedback to Skills IQ earlier this year as they updated the Certificate III and Diploma for ECEC training packages. Note that students now have to gain their Cert III in ECEC before applying for Diploma training in ECEC and that work placements for Cert III in ECEC have been increased from 120 hours to 160 hours, of which 120 hours must be in a regulated ECEC service (only a maximum of 40 hours can be in the family workplace in IHC though). This means an IHC student educator in a rural/remote area would have to be released for at least 3 weeks to undertake work placement in a regulated ECEC service, often many kilometres away; a costly exercise for the student and a long period to leave the family without their IHC educator.

National Quality Framework (NQF) Review

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), held consultations in cities and regional centres in states and territories with stakeholders earlier this year to gather information for the National Quality Framework (NQF) Review which ICPA (Aust) attended. The NQF has not been updated since 2014. ACECQA are also considering whether to include ex-Budget Based Funded (BBF) ECEC services, Mobile EC Services and IHC in the NQF, (these are not currently in the NQF) which could impact affordability for families in the bush and involve much more regulation of ECEC services. ICPA (Aust) was able to participate in a NQF survey that was also conducted. We emphasised that special considerations such as flexibility were required in ECEC for rural and remote families and that educators need the option of being employed whilst working towards their Cert III in ECEC from January 2020 instead of families only being able to accept qualified educators, which are very hard to find and retain in remote areas. Findings will be presented to the Education Council at the end of this year and further consultations will be held early next year with the Review completed in 2021-22.

Working with Children Check (WWCC)

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Federal Government in the implementation of a national WWCC certification. A national working party has started on this, but it will take some time to complete due to the different rules and regulations of states and territories. Unfortunately, we have received no further news regarding a national certification at this stage. An announcement is due and Federal Council will forward any information as it becomes available.

Working Holiday Maker Visas

The Minister for Home Affairs confirmed through his department, the Working Holiday Maker Visa news of 7 November last year. Several changes were made regarding employers being able to retain trained and experienced employees doing agricultural (plant and animal cultivation) work for up to 12 months, rather than the previous 6 months, with the additional provision of a third-year visa enabling working holiday makers to work for longer in regional Australia. The media release can be read at: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/news-media/archive/article?itemId=12>. Unfortunately, this does not apply to nannies and distance education tutors at this time, just seasonal workers, though the Minister has indicated that the government will see how these developments pan out before considering any more changes. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for nannies and distance education tutors on Working Holiday Maker Visas in rural and remote areas to be considered as doing 'agricultural work'.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with the Federal Government and other stakeholder groups to advance the needs of the ECEC in rural and remote Australia. We encourage members to be involved by forwarding any case studies to us and we will continue to share developments as they arise.