



**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia
ICPA (Aust)**

**In Home Care Research
Geographically Isolated Families**

November 2017

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Executive Summary

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), Early Childhood Education and Care Policy seeks to ensure that an appropriate range of childhood programs and child care be available to support children and families who live in rural and remote areas. This includes objectives for In Home Care services to be affordable and accessible and for families to have access to respite child care if required.

The current In Home Care (IHC) service concludes on 1 July 2018, along with the Nanny Pilot Program (NPP) and will be replaced by the new Home Based Education and Care (HBEC) program beginning on 2 July 2018.

In October 2017, ICPA (Aust) was invited along with other stakeholders to discuss outcomes from the In Home Care Review and the evaluation of the NPP, despite the Review Report not being finalised at this time. The Commonwealth Department of Education and Training also sought consultation with stakeholders for the future HBEC program. In Home Care is a vital resource for families in rural and remote areas where no other child care is available, but can be unaffordable for some. The NPP proved too expensive for country families although quite useful for shift workers, however the uptake was particularly poor by rural families.

Purpose

This survey was commissioned by ICPA (Aust) at the request of Senator the Hon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training's ECEC Senior Adviser as a means to determine the role and uptake of In Home Care in rural and remote areas and ways to improve this.

Methodology

The method of data collection was via a survey formulated through ICPA. The survey was distributed electronically in late October 2017 by email to 2660 ICPA members and the ICPA Facebook page and Twitter. The initiative was promoted through all ICPA networks. As the information was required as soon as possible, the survey only lasted 2 ½ days and 260 responses were received in that time.

The initial question ascertained whether the respondents had ever accessed In Home Care; if the answer was negative then those respondents were directed to the question asking for reasons, and did not progress through the survey. Families having received In Home Care were directed to further questions which drew attention to the number of rural and remote families using In Home Care in each state, how many hours IHC was required, the cost of the service and the out of pocket costs after claiming subsidies such as the Child Care Rebate (CCR) and Child Care Benefit (CCB).

Findings

The survey data showed:

- More than a quarter of respondents are using IHC and highly value the service.
- Of those families who do not access IHC, nearly one quarter cited 'too expensive' or 'unaffordable' as reasons, especially if they required a governess to supervise preschool and school-aged children as well.
- Some families could not access IHC even though they had requested it.
- Many families considered IHC could be much more valuable if the carer could also supervise Early Learning Programs such as Preschool or compulsory school-aged children with Distance Education. Some families indicated they would prefer a subsidised schoolroom supervisor to an In Home Carer.

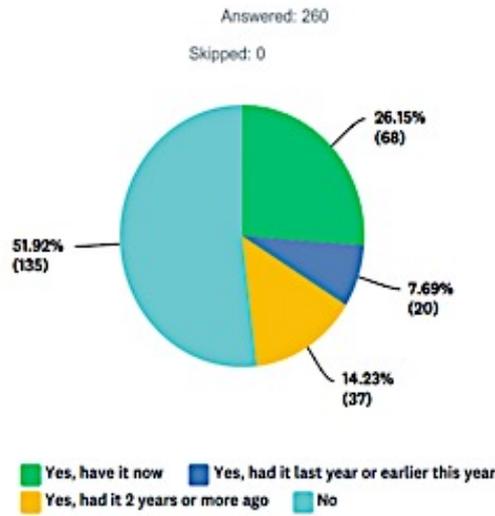
- From the responses, an In Home Carer typically cares for 2-3 children aged from 2-10 years old and works a 40-60 hour week.
- 57.42% of rural and remote families accessing IHC live between 100-800 km away from their nearest child care provider.
- While 28.69% of families answering the question, and accessing IHC, do not know what the hourly rates their service provider charges, 27.87% of the service providers charge \$25-\$30 per hour per child.
- While 40% of families who answered indicated out-of-pocket expenses in employing an In Home Carer of less than \$5/hour, it follows 60% were at least \$5/hour out-of-pocket.
- Since the majority of rural and remote families require their IHC carers to reside fulltime on the property due to distance from the nearest town, extra costs to 46.02% of families who answered include \$30-\$50 per day/night for board and lodging.

Some common themes emerge from comments provided by respondents:

- Red tape in the form of paperwork, selection processes and reporting is a disincentive for some prospective and existing families using In Home Care.
- Difficulties in finding and retaining carers is a common grievance.
- Some In Home Care service providers are more popular and more accessible than others.
- The value of the IHC scheme would be greatly enhanced if more flexible; allowing 'carers' to also be tasked with school room supervision in a Home Tutor role during school hours.
- Those families using In Home Care are very grateful to be able to access the service and indicate the current In Home Care model is working well.
- IHC is still unaffordable or unavailable for a significant number of families.

Survey Results

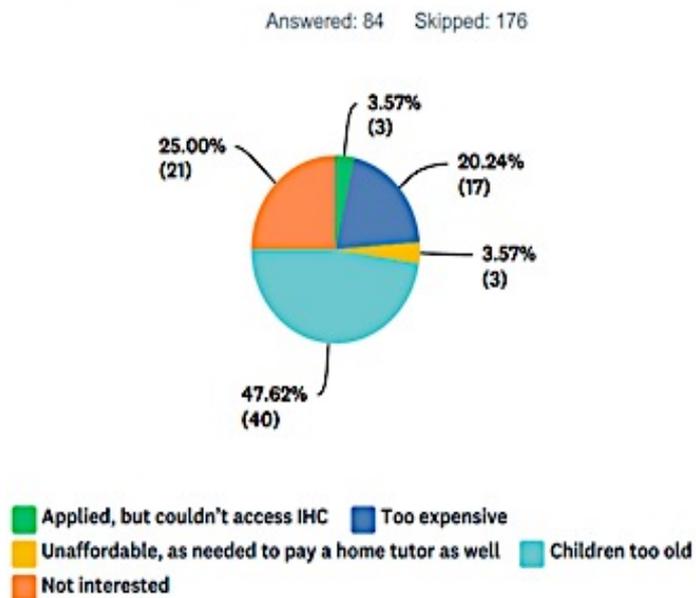
In Home Care usage in rural and remote families



26.15% of the families who responded to the survey use In Home Care now and find it vital to their needs.

Reasons why IHC not accessed

Out of the families who answered 23.81% found In Home Care too expensive for their needs or unaffordable as they needed to pay a home (distance education) tutor as well for preschool and school-aged children.



Comments on why IHC was not accessed:

I have just applied and been given a placement currently looking for someone. I haven't had it previously as I was still breastfeeding and needed to be still around to feed.

We decided to get an au pair to assist us at busy times, usually a young international working holiday maker. These people don't have qualifications but they can assist with other jobs around the house which is worthwhile.

In 2016 I received an IHC position in term 3 but could not find a suitable candidate to fill the position within the timeframe allowed.

I am too close to town (and now my children are too old) but as an advocate for early education for children in rural and remote areas I have always supported and acknowledged the extreme importance of IHC.

When my eldest two children were in primary school (I had a total of 4 in the school room) I would have preferred to have access to a home tutor and cared for my younger children myself rather than teaching and having IHC for the little ones.

HT support for school age children would be better than IHC support.

I pay for someone to come & look after the kids while I do work that I cannot get done with them. I haven't applied for any assistance in paying her.

I have held out till my children have been slightly older, like preschool age. I am currently filling out forms for 2018.

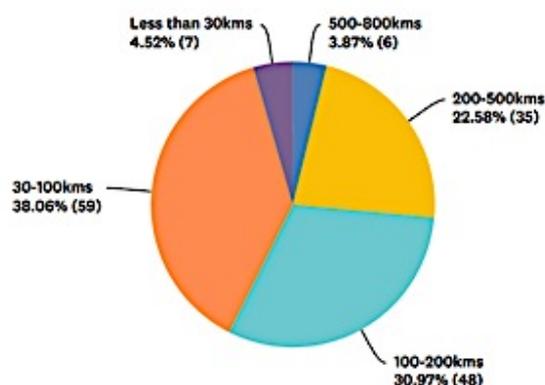
I was informed it was not available in WA.

Requested but they couldn't find someone to provide the service where we live.

Don't know much about it e.g. what is the age?

Distance from the nearest town that provides child care

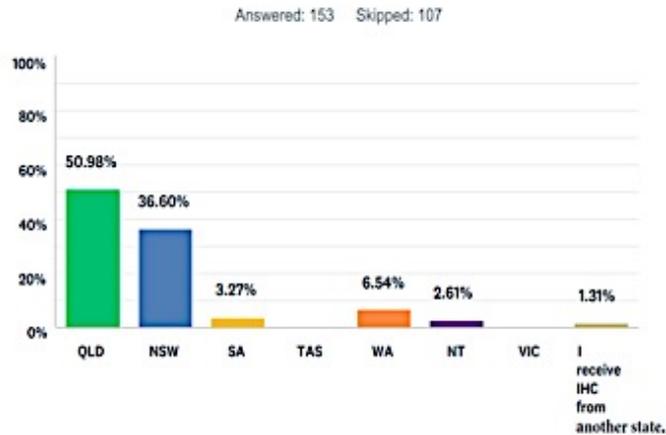
Answered: 155 Skipped: 105



57.42% of rural and remote families who have accessed IHC live between 100-800 km away from their nearest child care provider.

State in which family lives and if receiving IHC from another state

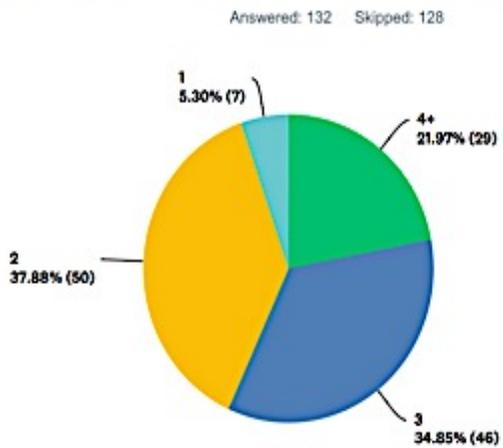
More than half of the families living in rural and remote areas access IHC from Queensland and a few families find they can access IHC interstate (QLD) easier than from their own state.



Comments:

- I receive IHC from another state – QLD (I live in NT)
- I receive IHC from another state – QLD (I live in WA)
- Would look at IHC from Queensland (I live in SA)

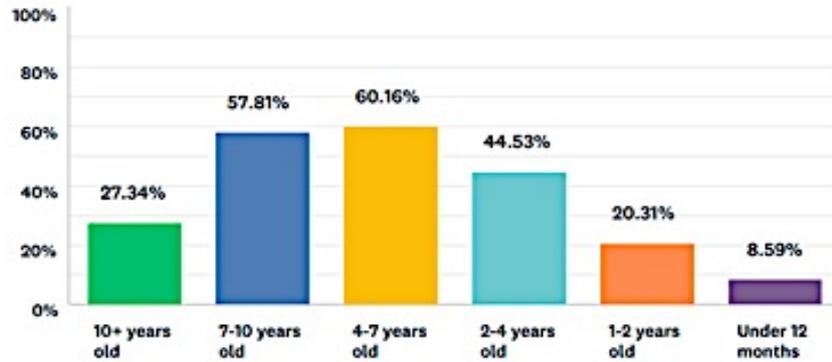
Number of children looked after by the In Home Carer



37.88% In Home Carers care for 2 children closely followed by 34.85% for 3 children within the family in rural and remote areas.

Ages of children looked after by the IHC carer (more than one indicated if it applies).

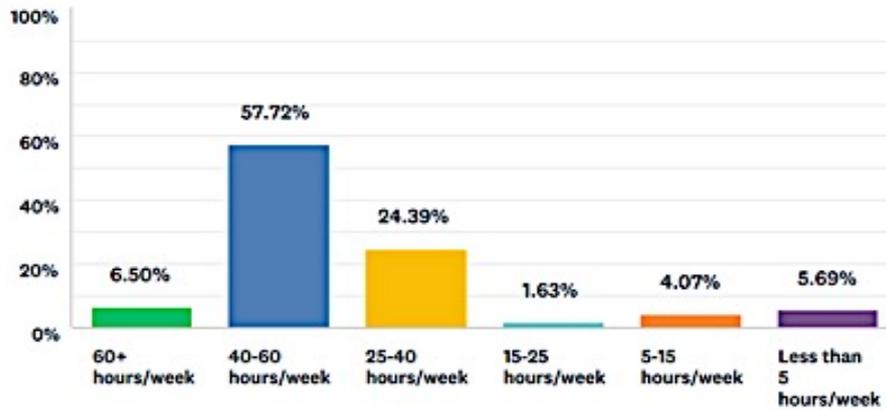
Answered: 128 Skipped: 132



60.16% children looked after by the IHC carer are 4-7 years old.

Hours per week that families access IHC

Answered: 123 Skipped: 137



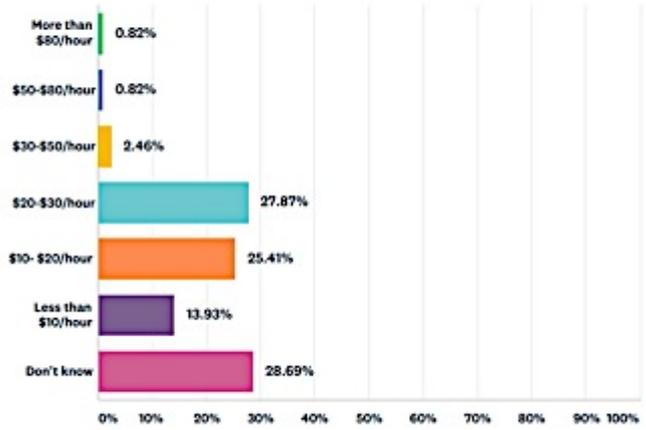
Most families that answered this question who access IHC require care 40-60 hours per week.

Hourly rate of IHC the service provider charges per child

Answered: 122

Skipped: 138

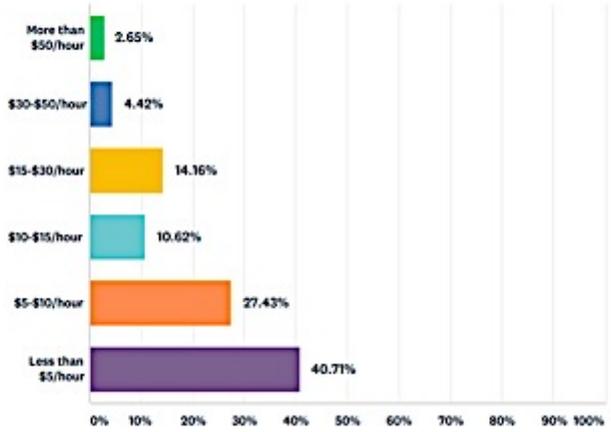
28.69% of families who answered and who are accessing IHC do not know the hourly rates their service provider charges. 27.87% of the service providers charge \$25-\$30 per hour.



After subsidies, the out-of-pocket costs/hour for IHC per child

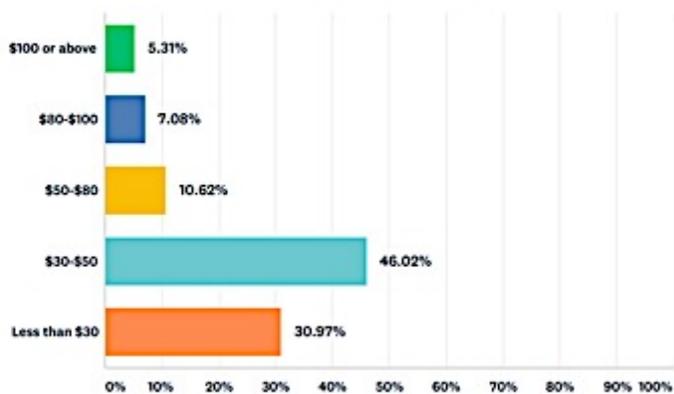
Answered: 113

Skipped: 147



Meals and accommodation charges for the IHC carer, per day/night if needed

Answered: 113 Skipped: 147



Since the majority of rural and remote families require their IHC carers to reside fulltime on the property due to distance, extra costs to 46.02% of those who answered include \$30-\$50 per day/night for board and lodging.

Survey comments regarding the current IHC system and suggestions for the new model commencing July 2018:

- Our current IHC system is fantastic and the people at the xxxx IHC (in regional QLD) are such a wonderful group of people to deal with. It would be such a shame to see changes to this system for those of us that currently access this service. It is not like we can just duck down the road to the child care centre if we need it and then there has to be a place available. Hope that our system is not affected too much.
- We 100% need In Home Care out here. The help In Home Care has to helping families you can't put a price on. A lot of families can't afford a fulltime stockman/ helper for the men out here, and the wives have to be there next to them. Families out here see enough with drought, fires etc. to know that In Home Care is there to take just a little bit of stress off, I can never be more great full and as I said before you just can't put a price on it. We are currently in a drought, feeding over 7000 head of stock just to keep them alive, knowing that In Home Care is there to help my children, is just stress that isn't there for me at the moment. I don't actually know what we would do if it wasn't there.
- More positions need to be made available to meet the demand of rural isolated families. I believe these need to be managed independently and not managed by a third party to ensure the needs of rural circumstances are completely understood. A more simplistic approach to the application and reporting process. Even when a rare position becomes available it is very rare to find a suitable candidate.
- Current IHC model has worked beautifully for our family. I appreciate having a live-in educator - it has provided much needed support to our family as I am a full time working mother on the land. The current payment structure also works extremely well, if we had to pay up front, we wouldn't be able to access this service. The current model is great.
- Due to the ridiculous amount of paperwork now involved in IHC we stopped using the system. Girls are less interested in being on the scheme as there is so much paperwork to fill out - forms, time sheets etc. Continuous phone calls also come from the IHC office which is unnecessary - if girls were unhappy I'd be the first to know about it and they're not going to wait for an IHC caller to tell them to leave the position. It's very difficult finding ANY staff to work and live with families in the bush. The restrictions and paperwork now with IHC make it unworkable for many families. So much pressure is put on the girls when they start because of the influx of emails/forms and phone calls from In Home Care and they are also coming to terms with living in the bush away from their family and adapting to this lifestyle. I feel like the government has made this scheme unworkable so they can eventually phase it out. Also, costs to us in Admin fees have become ridiculously high. I think if you are serious about keeping this scheme to help remote families then get back to basics and keep it simple.
- The key issue for my family was not the rate of pay or the out of pocket expense. It was the clause that IHC cannot be used during school hours.
- IHC is an amazing help to those that cannot gain access to town child care to allow us to go to work alongside our business partners/husbands & be effective members of our businesses.
- So much time spent in sourcing, interviewing and checking staff. Then travel to interview only to find out they are inappropriate. System really needs a service to match good quality candidates to families, to do the advertising, research, interviews etc. Then staff only stay for a short time so it just becomes ineffective cost wise. I just decided to carry the load myself. It's a heavy load.
- There has to be a more user-friendly method of communicating between IHC (xxxx Family Day Care) and the Station (the parents and carer). Filling out the lengthy weekly time sheet with

exactly the same information every day seems to be a waste of time, then scanning it and emailing it. An online template would be a time saver for all. We find our IHC provider hard to deal with and inflexible. They need to realise that there are 3 parties involved in this contract, the carer, parents and IHC providers therefore communication needs to flow freely between the 3 and common sense has to prevail.

- Governess' living and working on stations teaching kids School of the air do not fit the normal mould but we all have to make it work.
- I haven't used the service yet but am very happy with our current understanding of how much it will cost & how it works. A fantastic option for us.
- Be covered for more things like food, internet, accommodation when in town for child care related events.
- I believe that the new system needs to recognise that even though our children attend school we are still responsible for them all day - there is no dropping them off like city parents. Our educators should be allowed to assist our children with schoolwork. I would also like the government to recognise that mums on stations are often the equivalent of full time (40 hours per week) in the business then teach school on top of that and in my situation I work as nurse to maintain my registration. This is another area that In Home Care needs to acknowledge and be flexible around- nursing requires shift work and weekend work and in my case given that the hospital is 250 km away I have to stay away. I would like to see the new system allow us to use our In Home Carer around our situation and be more flexible.
- Utilising IHC subsidy for educators is of the highest importance.
- I would not be able to teach my children without IHC help.
- A set fee structure across all In Home Care agents. The difference in fees between these can mean that a family with 'agency x' pays 55c/child/hr whilst a family with 'agency y' is up to \$1.50/child/hr.
- It is quite expensive to use IHC. If things get harder for us as a family in the bush, it will be the first thing that we will stop using.
- In Home care is not allowed to be used in conjunction with schooling. This is where it is most needed. Educators should be able to help and assist with the distance education schooling. The children would benefit with their learning if low income earning families like my own did not have to try and run a classroom on their own then have an educator that can only do after or before care hours to suit. It is needed to benefit the child in both areas. I can't afford a governess to teach. I need help through in home care! It's essential to our everyday life and wellbeing!
- The IHC has changed substantially since I first started 9 years ago. It would be great to allow us to include minor cleaning and governessing. Sometimes these things are more important. Sometimes we just can't get to mopping the floor and someone to come in and do that once a week would be great.
- It is ridiculous that we cannot use In Home Care for home tutoring our distance education children because we still may have younger children who also require looking after. Why must we not have access to free education as we are out of pocket to pay a home tutor plus also needing the care of younger children who do not have access to child care.
- The In Home Care system is great for our family. Without their program I would be unable to hire carers for my children and be unable to help on the family property as well as give them the quality education they deserve.
- IHC was a great solution to a number of problems with child care/education etc. in rural & remote areas.

- I would have one suggestion for DE families in that the mother or family member may become the registered carer when nobody else is available due to the isolation /distance or a family having no accommodation or room in the house to accommodate an additional person.
- If the mother or a family member is able to become the registered carer once they finish their years of teaching in the DE classroom they will also have a record of employment and acknowledgement for the years of service teaching their children, just like any other teachers' aide.
- This is an important service to isolated families living in remote areas. I used this service quite a while ago and it helped use to have someone in the home to assist with our children whilst we were trying to cope with feeding our animals and running our property during the drought.
- It needs to be fair and utilised by those most in need.
- It is such a valuable service, most of us wouldn't be able to afford in-home help with our kids if it wasn't for IHC. It is especially important when all / some the children are young and at pre-school.
- We used to use In Home Care but have gone over to using a nanny 4 days a week.
- When you live in remote towns or stations there is always an added cost living here. Fuel for travels, 4WD vehicles for roads, flight costs because of location. As great as it is to get the subsidy it can still leave living and paying for an IHC expensive and I would consider myself paying very little for an important service I need but cannot pay anymore for.
- Without In Home Care's Assistance I would not be able to afford an educator to teach my children and so would have to do this myself and I would then be unable to work.
- Selection criteria changed to allow in Home Care during school hours.
- Better time sheets. There should be a maximum rate you should have to pay. Going on last year financials we had to pay our Governess \$450 per week, I would maybe expect that at a private boarding school but not for care at our home.
- We have child care available one day a week during school hours in our nearby town. I feel that priority should be given to families without childcare available or with minimal days of child care available. Also, perhaps there should have been a question to ask if you do not use IHC why this is so.... We have not used IHC for a few years as we found the hours were not suitable (we wanted to go to work on the property but would need to be back for lunch breaks so it was pointless). We have since hired a nanny for 4 days a week to fill the void of child care.
- The figures provided only indicate my IHC hours for before and after school care...
- Additionally, I pay my service provider to work a second job with me (Teacher) that includes school hours. I can't claim for these through our current IHC... additionally I pay an extra \$550 per week for school hours care (with no subsidies) as I have to work on our cattle station... Our business is a partnership and I need to work to make our business work... my employer earns more than I do, but this is the only way... Help with paying for a teacher in home would be wonderful!!
- The current system is working very well, don't change it.
- The new model must remain affordable for rural families who have no access to other care or mainstream schooling. Primary school children must be recognised as requiring care as they cannot be left unsupervised to complete school. Families must have flexibility to choose their educator and conditions, as what suits one family does not suit another.
- This is a wonderful scheme and I would be devastated to lose it.
- We employ this help & don't claim any subsidy etc.
- It has been invaluable to me!

- Need to be more lenient with IHC throughout the school day. More support for low income families.
- I think the current In Home Care system is working very well. Great facility for rural families.
- Providing IHC to isolated families would be of great help.
- We need support for the whole family unit to continue. Each family is unique so the model needs to be flexible in its breadth, reach and application.
- The IHC system became too expensive and had to discontinue use.
- Needs to be in more states instead of NT and WA people using QLD.
- I would like to see a commitment by families to still access local day care/kindy facilities, so these facilities are not lost in small towns.
- I was not lucky enough to have this system available when my children needed child care having to drive to the nearest town. I think any model on mine would be excellent and that advice from current parents and the ICPA is the best option.
- Would like to be more informed about it and if it is available in WA.
- It is one of the most essential innovations and services that the government currently provides to the remote areas of Australia. It allows farming wives to be an active contributor to the business by providing child-care, and this, in many cases, ensures the viability of many family farms. Without it many farming families would not survive.
- A lot more communication between client and carers would be good.
- I like the current system because I don't have to work out wage rates, superannuation etc. (as opposed to a fulltime employee). However, it is difficult to work out an accurate CCB/CCR at times as incomes for the coming year in a rural enterprise can change dramatically depending on many variables. There have also been times I have missed out on CCR because I was unaware the form had to be filled out before the end of the year. IHC staff can be helpful in negotiating these issues and having staff locally who understand our rural child care situation is important. I use In Home Care to help pay for a governess and would not be able to afford this otherwise.
- Let rural remote families be aware of it. Is it a subsidy for au pair whilst mum works in paddock / farm business?
- The current system has been very good for me, and I would not be able to live where I live and educate my children if I couldn't access I am yet to see any information regarding the new model? The current IHC system needs to have the cap lifted. Families waiting to join regional IHC providers are being turned away/going on wait lists and opting to battle it out without help rather than move to an inner-city provider. The current system works really well for us otherwise and we feel supported by our provider and confident that our Educators are qualified to safely look after and grow our little people!
- The model we currently have is working well for before and after school care. If we could find a solution to help with funding schooling hours that would be a terrific help to the rural and remote families that are home schooling their children.
- Make it affordable and safe and encourage qualifications for carers.
- Less red tape. To be more flexible.
- The current system has supported me very well as I can access a child care benefit even though I live isolated. I am able to have assistance with the wage to employ a person to provide this support and education which has been extremely important through the prolonged drought in Queensland. The Nanny Pilot program does not appear to support me in the same way. Isolated women need this program. I need this program as I work on property (self-employed) and work off farm to assist with bill paying also. I need to have a live In Home Carer and be

able to access maximum child care hours to enable me to survive the drought and continue running our agribusiness. I need In Home Care to remain.

- There needs to be information put out about the IHC system. There are people who would access it but are currently not aware of it or how it works.

Additional Comment:

- I am a widow, work on a property in NSW and have 3 children, two of which travel to school on the school bus, whilst the remaining child is at boarding school. I have received IHC since 2008 but as I really need out of hours child care, as I work all day I find I cannot receive any assistance. In Home Carers are becoming more qualified and yet are only allowed to do child care and so they are quickly bored as they feel they do not have enough to do. I know of other mothers in similar situations but obtaining IHC is now impossible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Limited places, lack of flexibility and affordability are the main criticisms of the IHC program.

As a service delivery model, the current In Home Care program is generally considered to work. The program could be improved by examining the more successful and popular regional service providers and extrapolating their success to reach more families in need of IHC. More regional service providers are required to cater for the needs in each state.

As the future HBEC criteria are requiring carers (or educators as they are known by the Department of Education and Training and service providers) to have more qualifications, the employment of these carers in the distance education home school room becomes a logical next step. Preschool or Kindergarten in QLD is offered in many Long Day Care Child Care Centres now. ICPA believes HBEC educators could similarly provide preschool or kindergarten to isolated families. As these educators become more qualified they should be encouraged to use their skills.