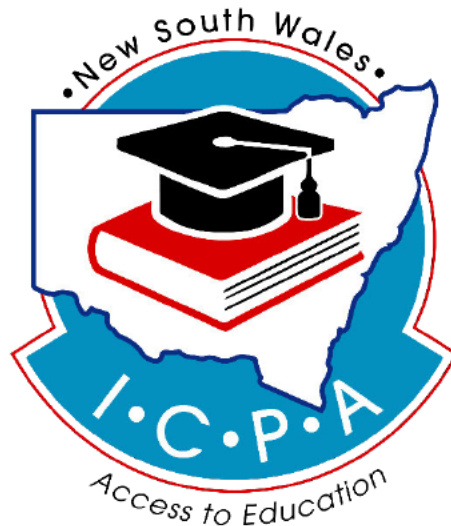


**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc
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Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales Inc.



Submission on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in New South Wales

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ICPA-NSW is a voluntary non-profit advocacy group that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote, and regional areas across the state. ICPA-NSW believes that all students - irrespective of where they live - are entitled to equitable access to education that enables them to participate to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of a community.

The NSW State Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association advocates for members who have children who:

- Attend a rural pre-school or access early childhood education through a mobile service,
- Attend a small rural or remote school,
- Study by Distance Education and School of the Air lessons
- Travel to school by bus or private vehicle (daily, weekly or at the end of term)
- Board away from home to access primary or secondary school at a boarding school, agricultural high school, hostel, private board or maintain a second home,
- Attend a Tertiary institution- University/TAFE/ College

ICPA-NSW would like to provide the following feedback regarding the Inquiry into Foundational and Disability Supports available for children and young people in New South Wales.

1. That Select Committee – On Foundational and Disability Supports available for children and young people in New South Wales.

“That ICPA-NSW requests that the Ministers for Health and Education extend the “Brighter Beginnings” to include developmental screeners, closely reflective of the Royal Far West Healthy Kids Bus Stop, for 3-year-olds in rural and remote areas.”

The Brighter Beginnings program, while welcomed, does not adequately address the Early Intervention identification needs of children in rural and remote areas. The Royal Far West Healthy Kids Bus Stop Program was tailored to each communities' needs, and in Bourke, this included a collaboration between RFW and local health service providers for a detailed health and developmental screener, including Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Psychology, Dental, Hearing, Child and Family Health Nurse, Community Nurse, Aboriginal Health Service to access to these disciplines by families for children, and to create a child centered approach to care, and pathways to NDIS Early Intervention if required for 3-year-olds.

Providing a full developmental screener for 3-year-olds enables families and preschools to work together through this process to develop strong partnerships with health providers into and through primary school to meet the needs of the state's most vulnerable children.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the relevant Ministers for Health & Education to enable access for parents/carers of remote students vital allied health support through funding and/or subsidies that are not covered by NDIS.”

Currently parents/ carers of remote students needing early intervention through allied health support is required to pay for these services. Distance Education Centres are unable to provide timely support to access school or allied health professionals because of long waiting lists or unavailable services. Time is critical for targeted intervention in a child's education.

A subsidy or funding to enable families to access providers of allied health professionals to allow them to access appropriate, timely support for their child or children. Children who do not have a significant disability cannot access NDIS fall through the gaps. The only options their parents have are to pay for it out of pocket or not to access vital support.

“That ICPA-NSW requests Transport for NSW to permanently implement a School Drive Subsidy for geographically isolated preschoolers who are privately conveyed to preschool.”

Transport NSW has acknowledged that bus transportation of preschool aged children is not safe, due to supervision and developmental stage of this age cohort. The significant distances required for families to travel to access Early Childhood Education incurs considerable cost, often becoming a barrier to accessing services. A preschool drive subsidy in line with the criteria for the broader School Drive Subsidy would make preschool attendance a viable option for some children.

“That ICPA-NSW lobbies the NSW Department of Education to financially assist rural and remote families to cover the extra expense of tuition lessons.”

Rural and Remote children are behind in literacy and numeracy and many families are turning to extra tuition support to help catch their children up, so they are not behind before starting secondary school. Each lesson costs \$65 per child per week. For one child having to partake in both literacy and numeracy lessons each week for 52 weeks a year for two years is an extreme cost- \$13,520.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Department of Education to ensure that a qualified staff member trained in literacy learning support programs, teaches the programs, live to geographical isolated Distance Education (GIDE) students.”

Literacy learning support for GIDE families involves the students, home supervisor, parent, classroom teacher and learning support teacher. With new teaching platforms, updated technology, COVID funding and new English curriculum, we have seen an increase in identification and implementation of specific literacy support programs for these students. The experience of several members of our branch in the teaching of literacy support programs for their children has been very poor. For example, an early intervention program for Year 1 and 2, designed for delivery 4-5 times a week for about 1 hour. The home supervisor or parent has been provided with all the resources, but they must deliver the program to the student daily. This has multiplied the stress for both parents and home supervisor in educating their children. Now technology and teaching platforms can allow a fully qualified staff member to deliver this type of program instead of untrained parents and home supervisors. Parents have seen a step in the right direction with a small group of students having their literacy support program taught live on Teams 100 % of time by a trained qualified staff member. Our members have seen a big increase in student outcomes and participation since these programs are being taught live by the qualified staff members.

We are seeking for this to continue across the board, for all students, and importantly for the future to have this as the only way literacy support programs are taught to GIDE students.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the relevant Ministers for Health & Education to enable access for parents/carers of remote students vital allied health support through funding and/or subsidies”.

Currently parents/ carers of remote students needing early intervention through allied health support are required to pay for these services. Distance Education centres are unable to provide timely support to access school or allied health professionals because of long waiting lists or unavailable services. Time is critical for targeted intervention in a child's education. A subsidy or funding to enable families to access providers of allied health professionals to allow them to access appropriate, timely support for their child or children. Children who do not have a significant disability cannot access NDIS fall through the gaps. The only options their parents have are to pay for it out of pocket or not access vital support.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Education and Early Childhood to ensure that rural and remote schools have access to in person counselling sessions for students.”

There are students requiring counselling face to face in rural and remote schools, however, due to the lack of services being available locally, they don't have access to an appropriate face to face counselling service. Our local TP1 School, Naradhan Public School, has not had access to a regular school counselling service for over three years. The school has a significant need for regular face-to-face counselling to support students academically and emotionally and are being disadvantaged by not having this support. This year, there has been a change to the School Counsellor allocation from ½ a day a fortnight to the school (the same day is shared with another school in the district) to two full days and a half day per term, however, in this time the Counsellor needs to travel to the school and does not allow sufficient time for cognitive assessments to be administered in the school counsellor time allocations, nor does it allow for discussion with the staff about the next steps needed to be addressed for each of the students requiring any other services that may or may not be provided for through the Dept of Education. The school is required to pay for OT & speech pathologist visits from its own budget and with this limited funding, it is not sufficient to employ an SLSO (Student Learning Support Officer) to assist students. Schools are obligated to fund services for students' needs outside of Dept of Education services due to wait times and lack of facilities in the area. The teaching staff are also feeling the absence of a regular school counsellor, who had previously provided support with classroom management strategies and learning adjustments to ensure every student was supported.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the Minister for Education and Early Learning to ensure that Principals work with families of students with learning disabilities to implement educational support for these students.”

Every student should be able to access professional services outside of the DoE to suit their Independent Learning Plan. ILPs need to be assessed on a regular basis with the support of independent disability trained staff along with the principal and classroom teacher.

Parents of a student with Level 2 Autism at their local Central School are struggling to find support in implementing learning programs to address the educational needs of their son. The student has access to the NDIS funding to employ an OT and other disability trained staff independent of the DoE for assistance for English & Maths for two hours per day. When the Principal was contacted by the parents about this support, they indicated that they have the final say as to whether they will allow it or not.

The student has participated in regular online tutoring at home for Maths & English and achieves 75% - 100% in all assessments but when he is in the classroom environment he struggles. It appears that the principal is not prepared to work with families for better outcomes for all students.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Rural & Remote Health for travel and accommodation assistance to be made available for rural and remote families travelling to access in person specialist Allied Health services not covered by Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) for geographically isolated and ‘at risk’ children.”

Children with specific education needs and developmental delays require access to appropriate specialist Allied Health services which often require in person consultations. Adequate and uniform assistance should be available to assist geographically isolated, vulnerable, and at-risk children accessing in person specialist sessions with expenses such as travel and accommodation when extensive travel is required to attend these consultations.

In NSW there are only a couple of services in Metropolitan Sydney that can be claimed for and are inaccessible for the majority of rural and remote families.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Education and Early Learning ensure that rural and remote schools have access to in person counselling sessions for students.”

There are students requiring counselling in person in rural and remote schools, however, due to the lack of services being available locally, they don't have access to an appropriate face to face counselling service.

‘That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Department of Education ensure a more accessible school-based platform for assessment and diagnosis of any learning and well-being support requirements of children living in rural and remote NSW. This enables early identification and timely interventions without the need to access consultation outside the school.’

The NSW Department of Education schools have psychologists allocated to their schools through the school counselling service however they are unable to formally diagnose conditions such as ADHD, autism, mental health conditions and Specific Learning Disorder, ie. dyslexia. In rural and remote areas there is often very limited access to health professionals or specialist services. These are generally also highly transient positions making it extremely difficult for patients to develop any rapport with that professional - one of the most important factors of childhood diagnostics. Accessibility of services should run absolutely parallel between young people in rural and remote areas and their metropolitan counterparts. Specialised support can be extremely difficult to access by families who are already vulnerable and disadvantaged due to isolation. Taking into consideration the additional needs or complexities is paramount especially because multidisciplinary assessments are often required further delaying diagnosis. The follow-on effect delays support and early intervention and impedes a child's ability to grow and thrive. We are not asking for additional Learning Support allocation and fully understand the shortage of specialised services within rural and remote areas. Utilising the current psychological health and wellbeing resources available within the NSW Department of Education would provide more timely and streamlined assessment and therefore earlier intervention processes within the schools. Growing up in a rural or remote area should never be seen as a disadvantage. There should be no barrier for accessing services especially those that can change the trajectory of a life.

“That ICPA-NSW asks the Minister for Education and Early Learning and the Minister for Health to provide funding or subsidies for rural and remote Distance Education children that require allied health support.”

Currently remote students requiring allied health professional support are required to pay for services out of pocket as the Distance Education Centres are not providing the necessary support or the online allied health service linked with the school has large waiting lists. We ask that subsidies are provided so that parents of remote children are able to use private allied health professionals so that local providers can be accessed if available and to avoid wait lists to ensure that the appropriate support is provided in a timely manner. Allied health support for children who are not classified as disabled cannot access funding through NDIS therefore paying for it out of their own pocket.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide these branch motions and explanations to the inquiry Foundational and Disability Supports available for children and young people in New South Wales.
