



ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION
NORTHERN TERRITORY STATE COUNCIL INCORPORATED

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Secretary: Rebecca Cadzow

Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory: Productivity Commission Submission

BACKGROUND to Northern Territory Isolated Children's Parents' Association (NTICPA)

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) is an Australia-wide voluntary organisation of parents and carers, past and present, dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education determined by their aspirations and abilities rather than the location of their home. NTICPA is comprised of three branches (Alice Springs, Katherine and Lones). We have a total of about 100 member families who reside on cattle stations, Indigenous communities, small towns, islands and boats. NTICPA families are farmers, fishers, rangers, police officers, teachers, health workers and tourism operators to name a few.

ICPA is concerned with the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. Isolated students/children are educated in small rural schools, community schools, at boarding schools, school term hostels and by distance education, and may have access to early childhood services. Tertiary students are regarded as those who seek further education, whether it is an apprenticeship, traineeship, university degree or TAFE course. Access to early intervention and services for the diagnosis and management of specific learning needs is a key lobby of the NTICPA.

KEY POINTS

- ALL isolated families who live outside of mainstream towns and communities need access to 'universal preventative initiatives to support all families and children' (Issues Paper, p5 Figure 1).
- The NT Government Early Childhood Development Ten Year Plan contains no reference to children who are not attached to an Indigenous community. Services and outcomes must surely be for ALL children.
- NTICPA fully supports the submission of the Katherine Isolated Children's Services (KICS) to this Productivity Commission's study into Expenditure on Children in the NT.
- Access to early diagnosis and intervention for learning difficulties is critical for children to reach their potential. Affordable access to Allied health professionals is an important element of management of learning and social difficulties.
- The attraction and retention of professionals and support staff servicing children and families in the NT is critical to the success of programs designed to prevent harm to children.

NTICPA acknowledges this study is about government expenditure on children and family services relevant to the prevention of harm to children.

What services are available in your community?

Knowing what services are available and accessing them is a challenge for all Northern Territory geographically isolated families, however non-indigenous remote families, i.e. those not living in aboriginal communities, outstations or homelands, are often not a focus in communication strategies, so regularly express to ICPA their difficulties in finding services and specialist help, especially in the early identification and intervention areas of education, health and specific needs.



"Equality in Education Outback"
Website: www.nt.icpa.com.au

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Once services are identified, we have evidence of families seeking assistance to reach those services, due to the additional costs (travel, work commitments and accommodation) incurred with geographical isolation. ICPA have anecdotal feedback about specialist services being available at the local remote health clinics that don't extend beyond indigenous patients. In this submission, NT ICPA wish to highlight the gaps in services available and delivered to all rural and remote families, not just those isolated Territorians identified as having high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

How can services be improved?

Attraction and retention of professionals to deliver services to communities in the NT is a long-running issue. Research indicates that the ability to access affordable and appropriate educational services is a major factor in determining if a family will remain in rural and remote locations. For instance a doctor's family considers leaving Tennant Creek when their children enter secondary school because support to educate their children in a bigger centre is not available. Professionals with children moving to rural and remote areas need confidence their children will have access to quality educational opportunities.

Assisting remote families with the costs of and access to education for their children will help to attract and retain people to work in communities. Continuity of quality staff would be beneficial in any programs aimed at the prevention of harm to children.

Mobile Early Childhood Services and Katherine Isolated Children's Services (KICS)

KICS have submitted an evidence-based and well-referenced submission to this Productivity Commission's study into Expenditure on Children in the NT. Isolated families, indigenous and non-indigenous, in the Katherine Region have benefited from the mobile early childhood services provided by KICS for 30 years. KICS requires certainty of funding and additional funding to maintain its level of services. KICS provides opportunities for play, socialisation and early development observations and is often the *only* early childhood service accessible for isolated families. KICS provides opportunities for the integration of non-indigenous and indigenous children and parental interaction; a highly valued outcome for creating a sense of community. Additional funding for KICS would enable more visits to more remote stations and communities. NTICPA advocates for funding to enable KICS' expansion or for a mobile early childhood service to be established to service isolated families in central Australia. These families currently have no access to such services if they cannot access a Families as First Teachers (FaFT) or Stay and Play program on an indigenous community.

Contacts

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