



9th December 2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee Secretary

Submission to Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010.

Since the recent changes to the Independent Youth Allowance eligibility came into effect this year, the Injury Control Council of Western Australia (ICCWA) has had contact from many agencies, organisations and departments about the negative impact this has had on young people and their families in areas classified as inner regional in the South West Region.

ICCWA is the peak not for profit organisation involved in injury prevention and community safety promotion in Western Australia. ICCWA's prevention programs are applied in a variety of community settings, including Aboriginal communities, and cover a broad range of injury and safety issues around alcohol, capacity building, youth, community safety, community violence, falls prevention, the safe communities model and suicide prevention.

ICCWA has managed and coordinated the Resilience Project in the south west region of Western Australia since 2005. This is a multi-level suicide prevention project, which was funded by the Department of Health and Ageing's National Suicide Prevention Strategy. The Project has focused on what communities can do to prevent suicide – with community resilience being the central theme. As part of the Resilience Project, we work with local communities, agency networks and working groups on Community Action Plans. The plans are based on the key objectives of: connecting to community; lobbying to address service gaps and access issues; providing community and service provider education about building individual resilience; and increasing awareness and knowledge of referral pathways and support services. This suicide prevention project won national recognition when awarded the Suicide Prevention Australia LIFE Award for Healthy Communities in 2009.

The Resilience Project operates in the six communities of **Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Bridgetown, Manjimup and Collie**. Three of these communities are classed as inner regional and three are considered outer regional. Having worked closely with key mental health, youth and community safety stakeholders in these six communities since 2005, we find it difficult to understand why this regional classification should affect access to income support for regional youth. The only university in the region is Edith

Cowan University, which covers *some* degrees and diploma courses. Many of our young people need to attend university courses in Perth. As you can see from the following table, distances to Perth are still significant and preclude attending university courses while still living at home, whether located in inner or outer regional locations.

Distance from community to Perth CBD

Town	Classification	Distance km's
Bunbury	Inner Regional	173
Busselton	Inner Regional	231
Collie	Inner Regional	202
Margaret River	Outer Regional	304
Bridgetown	Outer Regional	268
Manjimup	Outer Regional	269

The South West Region is the most populated area in WA outside the Perth metropolitan area. Many young people have and will be affected by the changes to Youth Allowance eligibility. Greater Bunbury (encompassing Bunbury, Dardanup, Capel and Harvey) population of 66,117 and a South West population of 157,817, with 13% or approximately 20,500 young people aged 15 – 24 years. According to the City of Bunbury website the Greater Bunbury population is forecast to reach 100,000 people by 2030.

Case for establishing equitable access to youth allowance in the South West Region of Western Australia.

- Clearly what is considered to be acceptable commuting distance to a university or training institution is not realistic for all of these inner regional areas. The closest of our represented communities (Collie) is 202 km and Busselton is 231 km, with Yallingup 257 km from the Perth CBD. Although we have a regional university in Bunbury, the courses offered, are limited. Students living in Dunsborough, as opposed to Margaret River, are equally disadvantaged in consideration of ability to commute to a Perth or regional university. Should there be regional campuses or universities that offer their preferred course nearby, in many cases, they still have to relocate. Where there is no option of commuting, it creates a two tiered system which clearly disadvantages inner regional south west students from tertiary participation in choice of further education, unless they are willing to delay their university studies for 18 months or two years.
- It is for a variety of reasons that some young people from regional areas do not see access to university as an option for them. Access to Youth Allowance and a financial contribution to living away from their home is one of those barriers. Financial stress, distress to families and subsequent mental health problems are potential outcomes of barriers to accessing tertiary education (within a reasonable period of time of achieving tertiary entrance). This is a vulnerable time in a young person's life. The uncertainty of future is already impacting on

young people as they, and their families, are forced to make decisions based on financial constraints, decisions that their close neighbours do not have to consider. These issues are significant factors to community inclusion and resilience. The importance of this inquiry into extending youth allowance payments to eligible inner regional students within 12, rather than 18 months, is a factor that needs to be considered in relation to youth mental health and wellbeing, with 1 in 6 children and young people in Australia currently have a mental health problem.

- Popular belief would have the coastal strip of the South West of WA, indicated as “inner regional”, deemed as an economically wealthy area. However, the statistics indicate some significant gaps in education and youth employment. In these areas there still exists a burden of socio economic disadvantage.
- Students from regional areas are less likely to finish Year 12 and are significantly under-represented in tertiary education. Regional students are also much less likely to achieve a tertiary qualification than their metropolitan counterparts. For this reason, it is important that we support the young people who *are* eligible for tertiary entrance to attend the *course of their choice*, within a reasonable amount of time after completing year 12. Making income support available to these potential students gives them a real chance at following through with their intention to attend university and provides them with much needed financial support to live away from home while they study. This isn't a choice, but a necessity for these students, whether from inner or outer regional communities in the South West Region of WA.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. ICCWA look forward to the opportunity to further represent the issues of the South West Region of WA to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee via teleconference this week.

Yours truly,

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