

## AHISA MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Federal Budget 2022-23: AHISA welcomes support for student wellbeing and regional connectivity initiatives**

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) has welcomed the Budget's confirmation of recently announced Australian Government initiatives in the schools sector, including resources to support student engagement and funding for Indigenous boarding students.

AHISA's CEO, Ms Beth Blackwood, said the Budget's allocation of a new \$10.9 million Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program to assist families from low-socioeconomic status communities with the cost of boarding school fees was also very welcome.

"In addition to the support for students living in regional and remote areas to attend boarding schools, increased investment in improved regional connectivity – including \$811.8 million for a new Connecting Regional Australia initiative – will significantly expand the educational options for students, both in and out of area," said Ms Blackwood.

"As we have learnt over the past two years, all students must be able to access online resources if they are to have equitable access to off-campus learning opportunities," said Ms Blackwood.

Ms Blackwood said several other initiatives in the Budget, while not directly targeted at schools, would benefit students.

"Additional funding to expand the work of the eSafety Commissioner, expanded apprenticeship opportunities and the continued rollout of already promised Commonwealth Supported Places for undergraduate degrees are initiatives that will all have an impact on school students and schools," said Ms Blackwood.

"Given the effects of COVID-19 right across the community, increased investment in the health and wellbeing of Australians is particularly welcome."

Ms Blackwood said students will benefit from both broad-based community health and wellbeing programs and programs specifically targeting young people and their parents, including:

- A campaign relating to consent, focusing on young people 12 and older and their parents
- A campaign targeted at domestic violence and sexual assault to encourage parents and carers to discuss respect with children, as well as funding to continue delivery of respectful relationship education materials for primary and secondary school students
- Additional funding for mental health initiatives under the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, and for a pilot program to identify evidence-based models of care for people with eating disorders
- Funding for continuation of headspace and Lifeline programs.



“Schools are finding that many students are experiencing increased anxiety due to COVID-19, compounded by the impact of the recent floods in NSW and Queensland and Russia’s attack on Ukraine,” said Ms Blackwood. “An increase in community-based and online health services and access to telephone consultations is essential if families and schools are to help young Australians find the support they need to address mental health issues, when they need it.”

Ms Blackwood also welcomed \$9.7 million for new projects to help teachers and school leaders better identify, understand and respond to the mental health and wellbeing needs of students.

“Student wellbeing and mental health is a priority for schools,” said Ms Blackwood. “We welcome resources to help teachers and school leaders give the most appropriate support to students.”

Ms Blackwood said the Budget also confirms the Australian Government’s increased contribution to the general recurrent costs of school education across all school sectors, with the Budget projections indicating that indexation of recurrent grants will maintain Commonwealth investment out to 2032.

“The Commonwealth’s legislated support for the school education of all students is especially valued by the non-government schools sector,” said Ms Blackwood.

The Australian Government is the major source of public funding for the education of students attending independent schools, contributing some \$5.8 billion to their education in 2019-20.

“The federal government’s contribution was more than matched by parents,” said Ms Blackwood. “There are over 667,000 children attending independent schools and the aggregated contribution of their families to their education in independent schools amounted to some \$7.4 billion in 2019-20.”

Ms Blackwood said an important equity issue is often overlooked in commentary on school funding.

“All students deserve reasonable government support for their school education,” said Ms Blackwood. “For students attending independent schools, the level of that support is dependent on a measure of parents’ capacity to contribute financially to the education of their children. Even so, the contribution of the federal government towards the cost of schooling in the non-government sector makes school choice affordable for many, many Australian families.”

Thirty-five per cent of Australian students are educated in non-government schools.

“The freedom of families to exercise choice in the education of their children – whether that is choosing between government-owned schools or choosing a non-government school – is highly valued by Australians,” said Ms Blackwood. “This Budget gives families continued assurance that this freedom is respected and supported.”

**ENDS**

Contact: Ms Beth Blackwood, AHISA CEO, mobile 0417 180 842.

AHISA is a professional association of 450 Heads of independent schools. Its members lead schools that collectively account for over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments, 70 per cent of independent sector enrolments and 20 per cent of total Australian Year 12 enrolments.