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| Better Futures eligibility and referral |
| Practice advice updated December 2021 |
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## Purpose

Better Futures is a new service and practice model designed to improve outcomes for young people transitioning from care to supported independence, up to the age of 21. It is guided by a Better Futures (Advantaged Thinking) practice framework and support is tailored to meet the individual needs of young people.

This practice advice outlines the eligibility criteria and referral process for young people living in care services (formerly out-of-home care) who are on specific orders and referred to the Better Futures service.

## Audience

Better Futures workers, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) child protection case managers, case managers delivering contracted case management in community service organisations, and case managers in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Agency Performance and System Support (APSS) advisers and other organisations working with young people.

## Introduction

Better Futures aims to support young people achieve successful and independent adult lives; helping them to have an active voice in decisions about their future and guiding their transition to adulthood and independent living across a range of life areas, including:

* housing
* health and wellbeing
* education
* employment, and
* community and cultural connections.

These five life areas are referred to as “offers” under the Better Futures Advantaged Thinking Practice Framework.

Young people are eligible for Better Futures support from 15 years and 9 months until their 21st birthday.

The model promotes early referrals at 15 years and 9 months ensuring all eligible young people are aware of and are linked to a post care support service. Early referrals also provide Better Futures the opportunity to offer secondary consultations to care teams in the development and implementation of the 15+ Care and Transition Plans.

When young people are in care and still some time away from transitioning to independence, the primary role of Better Futures is likely to be the provision of secondary consultation to case managers and care teams and facilitating access to flexible funding to support the implementation of the 15+ Care and Transition Plan. As young people near the point of leaving care (approximately six months prior to cessation of their order), their circumstances are reviewed, and the Better Futures service response may intensify to ensure their smooth transition from care.

Better Futures service response includes:

* direct case work support (levels of support will flex up and down according to their needs, existing support networks and the transition goals identified)
* information and advice
* access to flexible funding to facilitate the young person’s access to housing, education, employment, health and wellbeing support
* community connections, and
* Home Stretch.

## Transition Planning

Preparing young people to transition from care to independence is a critical part of case planning, with all care team members sharing responsibility for preparing young people to transition to independence. Young people should have an active voice in the planning process and should be supported to articulate their needs, goals and aspirations.

From 15 years of age, young people should have:

* ongoing opportunities over time to develop independent living skills
* involvement in decision making
* a 15 + care and transition plan
* essential documentation, identification, possessions and life records
* a cultural plan (where relevant)

For more information on case planning for young people aged 15 years plus, refer to *Leaving care* in the [Child Protection Manual](file:///C:/Users/Kcai1808/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/SWE5YKJR/Child%20Protection%20Manual) <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/>.

The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, establishes cultural support as essential for Aboriginal children in care services to maintain and strengthen their Aboriginal identity, and encourage their connection to their Aboriginal culture and community. The development of cultural plans with Aboriginal young people is a critical component of care team planning.

For more information about cultural plans, refer to *Cultural plans* in the [Child Protection Manual](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au) <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au >.

## Eligibility for Better Futures

In Victoria, the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (section 16) establishes a responsibility for the Secretary to provide or arrange the provision of services to assist in supporting a person under the age of 21 years to gain the capacity to make the transition to independent living where;

* the Secretary has had parental responsibility for the person; and
* on the Secretary’s responsibility ending, the person is of an age, or intends, to live independently.

Young people in foster care, kinship care, residential care are eligible for Better Futures from 15 years and 9 months if they are subject to a:

* family reunification order,
* a care by Secretary order, or
* a long-term care order.

Young people subject to a permanent care order on or after the age of 15 years and 9 months are also eligible for Better Futures.

Young people on interim accommodation orders and family preservation orders are not eligible for Better Futures.

## Referral to Better Futures

### Procedures for case managers

* The child protection case manager/contracted case manager/Aboriginal Children Aboriginal Care (ACAC) case manager determines that a young person is eligible for a referral to Better Futures at 15 years and 9 months.
* Case managers discuss a Better Futures referral with the young person, engaging them in the process and obtaining their verbal consent to the referral. Note, where consent cannot be obtained for practical reasons, referral to Better Futures should still proceed.
* The case manager sends a Referral for Service via the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) to the relevant Better Futures provider, attaching the 15+ care and transition plan and other relevant documentation (for example the cultural plan, the client overview document, areas of concern, the actions table from the case plan, the placement referral document, care and placement plan, assessment and progress record, essential information record, health or education assessments, individual education plan, an NDIS plan, meeting minutes, or contracted case management quarterly reports).
* You should also include information regarding security alerts or safety risks.

### Procedures for Better Futures providers

* Depending on Better Futures local area implementation arrangements referrals are accepted on CRISSP by:
  + a nominated Better Futures provider/s who is the central point for referrals for Better Futures in that area/s; or
  + an ACCO for Aboriginal young people; or
  + a Better Futures provider who is the sole provider in the area; or
  + other agreed local arrangements.
* The Better Futures provider in receipt of a referral undertakes an initial screening to determine the likely required Better Futures response based on information available.
* The Better Futures provider initiates contact with the referrer within five working days to advise of Better Futures allocation and prioritisation processes.
* The Better Futures provider seeks additional information from the referrer if required.

For more information on the Better Futures CRISSP referral process refer to CRIS/CRISSP User Guides and for details regarding other related [Better Futures practice advice](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures) documents go to: <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

### Better Futures referrals post order

A young person may have left care some time ago or moved to a new location and may not have established links with a Better Futures provider. These young people might self-refer to Better Futures, and in these circumstances the provider should:

* confirm the young person’s eligibility for Better Futures via CRISSP
* create a new CRISSP case if the young person is determined eligible
* provide details of the referral at the local allocations meeting to ensure necessary records are updated.

## Additional information

Additional practice advice documents and information can be found on department’s website via the:

[providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

[providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch>

[providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care>

[services.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care) <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care>

[Funded Agency Channel](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au) <<https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au>>

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