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| Better Futures Flexible Funding |
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# Purpose

Better Futures aims to improve outcomes for young people transitioning from care to supported independence, up to the age of 21 years. 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 use and administration of Better Futures (including Home Stretch[[1]](#footnote-2)), Flexible funding including funding requests, approvals, appropriate expenditure, and acquittal requirements. Flexible funding is sometimes known as brokerage.

This practice advice does not apply to the Home Stretch (home-based care) allowance or the Home Stretch (independent accommodation) allowance. For information regarding Home Stretch allowances please refer to [providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch>

# Audience

Child protection practitioners, community service organisations (CSOs) contracted case managers, Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) case managers (herein referred to as case managers), Better Futures workers (including community connectors/mentoring coordinators), Agency Performance and System Support (APSS) advisers, divisional Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officers and other key workers supporting young people in scope of Better Futures.

# 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.

Young people are eligible to access a Better Futures service response from 15 years and 9 months until their 21st birthday.

In Victoria, the Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (section 16) establishes a responsibility for the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH, ‘the department’) to provide or arrange the provision of services to support 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.

In Victoria, eligible young people can access flexible funding via Better Futures to support the achievement of their transition goals across housing and living skills, health and wellbeing, employment, education, and community and cultural connections. Applications for flexible funding should be informed by the voice of the young person, and should help build their independence by, for example:

* connecting them to support networks, family, community and culture
* assisting them to develop and build on skills and experience that are right for them
* supporting access to information, advice and assistance that they may need.

Better Futures flexible funding is not available to young people on interim accommodation orders, or those in voluntary placements not subject to an order in scope of Better Futures.

# Considerations for good practice

The transition to independence is a gradual process with planning and preparation starting at 15 years and ongoing support provided as needed until the young person turns 21 years of age. Case managers (and Better Futures workers, post order) play a critical role in supporting this process, undertaking the following key tasks:

* Gathering sufficient information to establish a good understanding of the young person’s situation, strengths, support needs, and independent living skills
* Consulting with the young person to ascertain their future aspirations
* Consulting with carers, family, and significant people in the young person’s life
* Developing the 15+ Care and Transition Plan (or Better Futures Support Plan) in partnership with the young person
* Ensuring goals and strategies are well defined and documented, and undertaking periodic reviews so that young person is prepared for if events do not go as planned or circumstances change
* Identifying supports, entitlements, opportunities, and funding options to achieve identified goals (e.g., NDIS or TILA)
* Where, there are no other available funding sources to cover certain costed items (and they are directly linked to the goals outlined in the 15+ Care and Transition Plan (or Better Futures Support Plan)) applying for:
* Better Futures flexible funding request; or
* Home Stretch flexible funding for eligible young people (post order).

## When is an application for Better Futures flexible funding appropriate?

Better Futures flexible funding should be used to help a young person achieve their goals for independence and should not be used to purchase items that are the responsibility of other programs or persons. For example, this may include items that are

* the responsibility of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or the child protection program (client expenses)
* the responsibility of the young person’s care services provider
* part of the day-to-day responsibilities of carers.

For further information about support for young people in care services please refer to [Support for home based carers in Victoria](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria) <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria>

Better Futures flexible funding should not be used to meet staffing costs, whether direct or indirect.

It is important that Better Futures workers, care teams and case managers consider affordable and cost-effective options and determine whether other funding sources may be more appropriate to support a young person’s needs (for example Medicare, the NDIS, TILA or COMPASS brokerage).

Participants of the COMPASS program should only access Better Futures flexible funding once COMPASS brokerage funding has been exhausted.

A young person’s Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) entitlement of $1500 should also be considered when determining the funding source for proposed expenditure items. Eligible young people should be made aware that they can access TILA between the age of 15 to 25 years of age.

For more information about TILA go to the [Department of Social Services (DSS) website](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/benefits-payments/transition-to-independent-living-allowance-tila) <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/benefits-payments/transition-to-independent-living-allowance-tila>

# Better Futures flexible funding for young people in care

Better Futures flexible funding should be used to help a young person in care achieve their goals that are directly linked to leaving care preparation activities and which are included in their 15+ Care and Transition Plan (and Cultural Plan where relevant).

Whilst a young person is in care, their care team and case manager, in collaboration with their Better Futures worker will support them to identify transition goals, including those that are best supported via the allocation of Better Futures flexible funding. All requests should be discussed with and supported by the young person.

Eligible young people will continue to have access to Better Futures Flexible Funding up until 21 years of age; therefore, the priority and focus should be on items or services that are likely to be expended in the current financial year. If the young person’s circumstances change and they require additional supports or new items not previously requested, a new request for flexible funding can be made at a later date.

## Items funded by Better Futures flexible funding for young people in care

Better Futures flexible funding may be used for:

* creating community connections through participation in sport, recreation and hobbies
* services or materials which benefit personal or vocational development (for example education resources, life skills education, etc.)
* costs associated with travel to interviews for education and training
* job readiness expenses including interview and work clothing
* costs associated with housing establishment – including furniture and whitegoods
* learner’s permit and driving lessons
* cultural activities that support Aboriginal young people to connect with culture and community, including return to country
* counselling related to a young person’s preparedness for leaving care.

# Better Futures flexible funding for young people post-care

Better Futures flexible funding should be used to help a young person to continue achieving their goals for independence after they have left care. The use of flexible funding should be in accordance with the agreed plans and aspirations of each young person in order to foster their confidence and independence.

Better Futures workers support young people to move towards sustainable independent living post care. This support (and associated flexible funding) may gradually reduce over time, if appropriate. For example, a young person may be receiving flexible funding as a contribution towards payment of their utility bills, and this contribution may gradually decrease as the young person’s capacity to cover these costs increases. It is important that consideration be given to the sustainability of arrangements beyond a young person’s 21st birthday when Better Futures support ends.

## Items funded by Better Futures flexible funding for young people post-care

Better Futures flexible funding may be used for:

* supporting young people to make community connections such as joining a sporting club, pursuing a hobby, or participating in cultural activities and camps
* cultural activities that support Aboriginal young people to connect with culture and community, including return to country
* services or materials which benefit personal or vocational development (for example education resources, life skills education)
* costs associated with housing establishment – including furniture and whitegoods
* independent living skills education such as cooking and financial management
* costs associated with travel to interviews for employment, education and training
* job readiness expenses including interview and work clothing
* learner’s permit and driving lessons, and where appropriate, contribution towards purchase of a motor vehicle/registration/insurance (note: motor vehicle contribution requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, based on circumstances of the young person, links to identified goal/s and availability of flexible funding)
* counselling
* access to health and community services
* health and dental care that cannot be covered by Medicare.

# Administrative tasks

## Completion of flexible funding request form

The Flexible funding request form is available from [providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures>

Funding requests should clearly demonstrate how the funding will assist the young person’s transition goals as outlined in the 15+ Care and Transition Plan (and Cultural Plan where relevant) and/or the Better Futures support plan.

The young person should be part of the planning process and agree to accessing Better Futures flexible funding. Case managers should, where appropriate, encourage young people to participate in the flexible funding application process. For example, a young person could be responsible for researching and exploring available product options and prices. This provides an opportunity to develop their financial management skills.

Case managers (whilst young people are in care) and Better Futures workers (post-care) are likely to be the primary applicants of flexible funding requests. Requests may also come from Community Connections workers, and other specialist services such as mental health services, family violence, and alcohol and drug services.

Case managers should consult with their team leader before emailing Better Futures flexible funding request forms to the appropriate Better Futures provider. In many instances Better Futures workers will initiate flexible funding requests within their own organisation – workers should always consult their team leader prior to completing the request form. Consultation will help to ensure that the flexible funding request is in line with the relevant support plan.

Case managers and Better Futures workers should record all steps associated with flexible funding requests on CRIS or CRISSP, including initiating the request, the request outcome, expenditure and acquittal. All flexible funding request forms should be manually uploaded onto CRIS or CRISSP (via Client Expenditure component).

In a small number of instances, a Better Futures provider may not have a flexible funding allocation within their organisation. In this case, the Better Futures worker should email the flexible funding request form to the Better Futures provider responsible for allocating flexible funding in that area.

In the early stages of Better Futures implementation there will be some young people who have left care without being referred to their local Better Futures provider. In these circumstances, young people can make requests for flexible funding directly to the Better Futures provider in their local area. This connection may occur via the Leaving Care Hotline phone 1300 532 846 or email [leavingcare@mcm.org.au](mailto:leavingcare@mcm.org.au) <leavingcare@mcm.org.au>

## Approval process

Case managers should submit request forms via email to the Better Futures provider, with the necessary supporting documentation attached (for example rental agreements and subletting arrangements, quotes or invoices). Better Futures workers, community connectors or mentoring project coordinators should submit flexible funding request forms to the relevant Better Futures provider administering flexible funding within their local service area.

Urgent requests requiring an immediate response will be processed as soon as possible. In circumstances where an urgent response is needed to meet a specific need, the requestor must contact Better Futures directly and discuss urgency and negotiate and agreed response timeframe.

Senior representatives (Team Leader and above) within each Better Futures organisation are responsible for approving funding requests up to a maximum of $5,000 (per young person). The Better Futures provider assesses the request and records the outcome (approved/not approved/more information and any reasoning) on CRISSP.

Flexible funding requests of more than $5,000 (per young person) need to be considered by a Better Futures flexible funding panel (as determined by the local department area). The panel should include:

* the Better Futures provider responsible for managing flexible funding in that area
* senior representative from the Better Futures provider
* a community service organisation representative (preferably a placement provider in the local department area)
* child protection
* Placement and Support Planning [[2]](#footnote-3)

All panel decisions should be made and communicated in a timely manner. Consideration can be given to the establishment of virtual panels to keep face to face meetings to a minimum. Local areas should ensure robust administration processes for applications of more than $5,000 including:

* panel establishment
* communication methodology
* agreed decision making timelines and quorum numbers, including capacity to respond to urgent requests within 24 hours
* communication channels (back to the applicant).

## Expenditure process

Approved funding must be expended in the same financial year that the request was made. Better Futures providers and case managers are required to record all approved flexible funding allocated and expended funds for each young person on CRISSP or CRIS (Client Expenditure component).

Where there are Better Futures consortium arrangements (this applies to consortium arrangements continuing under the former Springboard program) the lead organisation will ensure consortia members follow this process. The lead organisation is responsible for expenditure acquittal and comply with reporting requirements.

## Better Futures acquittal and reporting process

Better Futures providers are required to report the (monthly) total flexible funding amount expended exclusive of GST on the tenth of each month via Service Delivery Tracking. Better Futures providers are advised to extract the CRISSP Client Expenditure report at the end of each month to ascertain total expenditures. The documented expended flexible funding should inform SDT reporting.

Expended in this instance means the actual amount of funding spent in that reporting period, not the amount approved for expenditure.

Providers must submit a detailed bi-annual flexible funding expenditure report, extracted from CRISSP (Client Expenditure Report - listing the type of expenditure and amount excluding Goods and Services Tax (GST)) to their local APSS adviser. Better Futures providers should claim a GST credit from the Australian Taxation Office for the amount of GST included in the price of goods and services purchased. For more information on GST credits and concessions refer [Australian Tax Office’s website](https://www.ato.gov.au/Non-profit/Your-organisation/GST/).[[3]](#footnote-4)

The department’s Operations Divisions will establish acquittal and reporting processes in circumstances where Placement and Support Planning manages flexible funding for young people in care. This will be done in consultation with local Better Futures providers.

## Unexpended flexible funding

The department’s Operations Divisions will coordinate the flexible funding acquittal process. Unexpended flexible funding reported by funded organisations will be recouped by the department’s Operations Divisions. Recoupment will be based on the total funding allocated each year minus the total expenditures (excluding GST) approved and reported from 1 July to 30 June.

Recoupment is undertaken as a negative prior year adjustment via the Service Agreement Management System (SAMS).

# Additional information

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

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

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

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

[Leaving care providers page](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care) on the providers website <https://providers.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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1. Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures program and as such, the term flexible funding in this instance refers to a flexible allocation of funds to support a young person’s transition from care; this applies to young people in receipt of either Better Futures OR Home Stretch support. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. In some divisions Placement and Support Planning manage flexible funding for young people in care. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Refer to the Australian Tax Office’s [‘When you can claim a GST credit’](https://www.ato.gov.au/business/gst/claiming-gst-credits/when-you-can-claim-a-gst-credit/) web page <https://www.ato.gov.au/business/gst/claiming-gst-credits/when-you-can-claim-a-gst-credit/> or the [‘GST concessions’](https://www.ato.gov.au/non-profit/your-organisation/gst/gst-concessions/) web page https://www.ato.gov.au/non-profit/your-organisation/gst/gst-concessions/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)