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| Better Futures factsheet for providers |
| December 2021 |
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# Background

Approximately 600 young people aged between 16 years and 18 years leave care in Victoria each year, and more than 2,000 young people are eligible for transition support at any one time.

The Victorian Government funds a range of supports for care leavers, however the experience of and feedback from young people, carers and stakeholders indicates that these services were often fragmented, difficult to navigate, and had multiple and confusing eligibility criteria. This presented an opportunity to streamline and consolidate various initiatives and programs, so that care leavers receive the flexible and tailored support they need.

Research shows that care leavers are much more likely than their peers to experience unemployment, homelessness, poor physical and mental health, and more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. Care leavers are also more likely to become parents at a young age. Evidence also shows that a more supported, gradual transition from care can help young people to reach their full potential.

# Better Futures

## What is Better Futures?

Better Futures is a new way of supporting care leavers which rolled out across Victoria in late 2019.

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.

All eligible young people are referred to their local Better Futures provider. The level of support offered by Better Futures is dependent upon the circumstances of the young person and the capacity of the provider to meet demand. Support available through the Better Futures program is provided in the context of the young person’s current care status – either when the young person is in care OR when the young person has left care (post-care), as outlined below.

## Better Futures for a young person in care

**Early Referral**

The young person is referred to Better Futures at 15 years and 9 months by their case manager (either in Child Protection, contracted community service organisations or in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) via the Client Relationship Information System/Service Providers (CRIS/SP).

**Better Futures Worker**

A Better Futures worker provides secondary consultation to the care team, lending expertise to the transition planning process. The worker supports the care team, including the young person where appropriate, to identify goals and actions for inclusion in the 15+ Care and Transition Plan based on the Looking After Children (LAC) domains.

**Flexible levels of support**

The young person is provided with a level of support commensurate with their needs, circumstances and existing support systems. Young people may receive high, medium, or low levels of support or be placed on active hold. These levels of support correlate with a notional allocation of hours. Young people on active hold receive, at a minimum, a quarterly “check-in” (in person or via telephone) from the Better Futures provider.

When the young person is in care and still some time away from transitioning to independence, it is likely that the primary role of Better Futures will be to provide secondary consultation to case managers and care teams.

The Better Futures worker does not assume lead responsibility for case work support whilst the young person is subject to a statutory order. Support from the Better Futures worker will gradually increase as the young person prepares to transition from care, usually from about six months prior.

In limited circumstances, the Better Futures worker will provide direct support to a young person in care. This is likely to be in relation to support to engage/re-engage with education, training and/or employment, or to support community connections where assessment shows that a young person is at risk of social isolation upon leaving care.

**Flexible funding**

Through the Better Futures provider, the young person will have access to flexible funding to support their goals for independence. Better Futures flexible funding will only be used to support the achievement of goals that directly relate to transition.

## Better Futures for a young person post-order

**Better Futures Key Worker**

The Key Worker can remain involved with a young person up until their 21st birthday. The Key Worker can provide the young person with:

* direct case work support.
* information and advice; and,
* access to flexible funding.

**Flexible levels of support**

The young person is provided with a level of support commensurate with their needs, circumstances, existing support systems and/or the capacity of the Better Futures provider to meet demand. Young people may receive high, medium, or low levels of support, or be placed on active hold.

**Flexible funding**

Through the Better Futures provider, the young person will have access to flexible funding to support their goals for independence. Better Futures flexible funding will only be used to support the achievement of goals that directly relate to transition from care. These funds do not replace other discretionary funding, such as the Commonwealth Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).

## Advantaged Thinking

Better Futures is supported by the Advantaged Thinking theoretical approach. Advantaged Thinking is based on the work of Colin Falconer from the Foyer Federation in the United Kingdom and is used in a variety of settings across Australia, including Victoria’s Education First Youth Foyers.

The Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH) is working alongside the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) to develop a Better Futures (Advantaged Thinking) Practice Framework, which will guide workers to work in an ‘Advantaged Thinking way’, engaging with young people using a strengths-based approach, recognising and building on their talents and aspirations, as well as assisting them to overcome challenges.

## Home Stretch

Home Stretch is delivered via Better Futures and rolled out across Victoria in late 2019. Home Stretch provides eligible young people with access to supports to secure and maintain stable accommodation as they exit care from 16 to 21 years of age.

In January 2021, Victoria was the first Australian jurisdiction to make extended care universal – meaning all young people leaving foster, kinship and residential care can receive a more gradual and supported transition to adulthood via Home Stretch. Through the Victorian Budget 2021/22, Better Futures and Home Stretch was also expanded to include young people on permanent care orders; providing them access to Better Futures supports from 15 years and 9 months and Home Stretch supports from 18 years of age until their 21st birthday.

This investment means that:

Eligible young people due to leave care will be able to remain with their foster carer, kinship carer or permanent carer supported by an allowance, case work and flexible funding, or for those leaving residential care or approved care arrangements Home Stretch will help them transition to other housing options (e.g., private rental) supported by an allowance, case work and flexible funding.

## More information

Further information about Better Futures may be accessed from the DFFH website:

[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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