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| Better Futures roles and responsibilities |
| Practice advice updated December 2021 |
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Contents

[Purpose 1](#_Toc89734061)

[Audience 1](#_Toc89734062)

[Introduction 1](#_Toc89734063)

[Early referral 2](#_Toc89734064)

[Better Futures role 3](#_Toc89734065)

[Additional information 5](#_Toc89734066)

# 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 roles and responsibilities for Better Futures workers engaging with young people when they are transitioning from care.

# 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, 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.

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

Eligible young people can access Better Futures from 15 years and 9 months until their 21st birthday. The Better Futures service response includes:

* 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.

The [Child Protection Manual](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/) *Leaving Care advice* <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/> describes the shared responsibility care team members have for preparing young people to transition to independence. Young people should be supported to have an active voice in their planning for transition and to articulate their individual support needs, goals and aspirations.

This means ensuring young people leaving care have:

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

The case manager leads development of the young person’s 15+ care and transition plan in consultation with the care team. The Better Futures worker does not assume lead responsibility for case work support whilst the young person is subject to a statutory order.

For more information on case planning for young people aged 15 years plus, refer to *Leaving care* in the [Child Protection Manual](https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/leaving-care) <https://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/out-home-care/leaving-care>

# Early referral

Young people are referred to Better Futures at **15 years and 9 months** by their case managers (child protection practitioner, contracted, or Aboriginal Children Aboriginal Care case manager) via the Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP).

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

Early referrals support Better Futures workers to:

* develop knowledge about, and relationships with, young people
* consult and add value through networks, contacts and expertise to contribute to a strong foundation for young people as they transition from care
* consult and contribute towards the development of 15+ Care and Transition Plans
* facilitate access to flexible funding to support and prepare young people as they transition from care to adulthood.

# Better Futures role

The level of support offered by Better Futures is dependent upon the circumstances of young people, their needs and existing support systems, and is provided in the context of their current care status – that is, whether they are in care OR have left care.

Young people may receive **limited support, active support** or be placed on **active hold**. These levels of support are likely to flex up and down over time changing in line with the young person’s needs. The level of support is determined by the Better Futures worker in consultation with the young person and/or the care team.

Limited support may include:

* assisting a young person with one-off practical support such as access to flexible funding
	+ information, advice and/or assistance with referrals to other support networks.

Active support may include:

* assisting a young person to achieve goals across the key service offers of housing and living skills, education, employment, health and wellbeing and community connections
* supporting an Aboriginal young person with connection to culture and community
	+ supporting independent living skills.

Young people on active hold can expect:

* a quarterly check-in (in person or via telephone) from the Better Futures provider.

## Better Futures for a young person in care

While the young person is in care, they have a case manager and a care team of professionals who are responsible for supporting their transition to independence based on identified goals in their 15+ care and transition plan.

The Looking After Children (LAC) domains align strongly with the Better Futures offers of housing and living skills, education, employment, health and wellbeing, and community connections (see below):

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| LAC Domain | Better Futures Offer |
| HealthEmotional and Behavioural Development  | Health and Wellbeing |
| Education | Education |
| Social Presentation | Employment |
| Family and Social RelationshipsIdentity | Community Connections  |
| Self-Care Skills | Housing and Living Skills |

The Better Futures worker may support care teams, including the young person where appropriate, to identify goals and actions for inclusion in the 15+ care and transition plan.

When the young person is in care and still some time away from transitioning to independence, it is likely the primary role of Better Futures will be to provide secondary consultation to case managers and care teams via the active hold level of support. Resourcing limitations mean that Better Futures workers are not able to attend all care team meetings for all young people.

In limited circumstances, Better Futures workers may provide limited support or active support to a young person in care. This is likely to be in circumstances where a young person requires support to engage or 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 when transitioning from care.

Support from Better Futures gradually increases as young people near leaving care age, usually from about six months prior to the cessation of an order. Some young people may not require this if sustainable support post care has been secured.

## Secondary consultation

A Better Futures worker provides secondary consultation to care teams, lending expertise to the transition planning process. The level of secondary consultation is determined by the Better Futures provider’s capacity and the circumstances of the young person.

Secondary consultation can be offered through varying means including:

* the Better Futures worker attending a care team meeting and identifying opportunities across housing and living skills, education, employment and training, health and wellbeing, and community connections - it is important these discussions occur in accordance with the young person’s 15+ care and transition plan and the young person’s support needs, goals and aspirations
* introducing the **Advantaged Thinking[[1]](#footnote-1)** resources and tools in the care team setting to assist planning and encourage the involvement of the young person in voicing their goals and aspirations
* providing advice about specific opportunities that a young person may be interested in, such as engaging in education, work experience or joining a sporting club
* supporting access to community connections and mentoring
* providing information and advice about Home Stretch (for more information on Home Stretch refer to Home Stretch Practice Advice)
* providing advice about opportunities to connect Aboriginal young people to their culture and community and advocating for cultural plans to be central to transition planning.

# Better Futures for a young person post care

Support from Better Futures gradually increases as young people near leaving care age, usually from about six months prior to the cessation of an order, with support continuing until the young person turns 21 years of age.

This increased involvement may include the Better Futures worker starting to work directly with the young person, encouraging them to identify their goals and how they think they can be achieved. Examples of this include: accompanying young people to appointments; linking them into the community; supporting the development of living skills; and facilitating access to employment and training opportunities.

The Better Futures worker can provide the young person with flexible levels of support, and access to flexible funding (see below).

## Flexible levels of case work support

Young people who have left care are provided with flexible levels of support depending on their needs, circumstances and existing support systems, which often change over time. Young people may receive limited support, or active support, and this may include:

* support to engage in education, training and/or employment
* linkages and referrals to specialist supports if required, such as counselling and drug and alcohol services
* support to identify suitable and safe housing options
* connection to community and building networks of support outside of the care system
	+ support in times of crisis.

A young person who has left care may be placed on active hold, where they will receive a quarterly check-in to see how they are going.

Levels of support - whether limited support, active support or active hold - will be in accordance with the young person’s 15+ care and transition plan, and as the young person transitions from care towards independence, the Better Futures support plan, incorporating regular review and progress points involving the active voice of the young person. For more information on levels of support refer to *Better Futures - Levels of Support Practice Advice.*

# Flexible funding

Young people will have access to Better Futures (and where applicable Home Stretch) flexible funding through their Better Futures worker to support their goals for independence. Better Futures flexible funding is used to support the achievement of goals that directly relate to the young person’s transition from care. These funds do not replace other discretionary funding, such as the Commonwealth Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).

# Additional information

Supporting documentation and publications may be accessed via the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (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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1. Better Futures (Advantaged Thinking) Framework 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)