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| Home Stretch practice advice – Permanent Care |
| December 2021 |

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# Introduction

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring young people who are, or who have been, on a permanent care order are supported to transition to adulthood.

The 2021-22 Victorian State Budget invested $38.9 million over four years and an additional $13.8 million so that young people subject to permanent care orders can also be supported via Better Futures from 15 years and 9 months and Home Stretch from 18 years up until their 21st birthday.

Through Home Stretch, young people and permanent carers have the option of the young person remaining with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance. Young people leaving permanent care from age 18 can also access an allowance to support them with housing costs up to 21 years of age.

Home Stretch includes three components; an allowance, case work and flexible funding to facilitate the young person’s access to housing, education, employment, health and wellbeing support, and community connections.

This advice is specific to Home Stretch arrangements via permanent care. Separate advice has been developed for foster care and kinship care arrangements.

# 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, Permanent Carers and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) Better Futures intake workers, and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) Better Futures intake workers.

# Purpose

This practice advice has been developed to support practitioners working with young people in permanent care arrangements to access Home Stretch.

This document should be read in conjunction with related guidance and practice advice which can be found on the [Home Stretch page on the DFFH providers website](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch>

# Context

Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures service delivery model.

Better Futures providers are funded community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations operating across the state to deliver the following activities:

* case work support
* information and advice
* flexible funding
* community connections, and
* Home Stretch.

Home Stretch has three service components:

* accommodation allowance, either via the following approved accommodation types
* Home-based care; or
* Independent Living
* case work support provided by a Better Futures worker
* access to flexible funding to facilitate the young person’s access to housing, education, employment, health, wellbeing support and community connections.

Through Home Stretch, young people and their permanent carers will have the option of the young person remaining with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance. This allowance, known as Home Stretch Allowance (HBC), contributes to the day-to-day costs incurred caring for a young person until their 21st birthday. The allowance is intended to contribute towards costs incurred by the carer, for example costs of accommodation, utilities, telephone, and internet.

If a young person cannot remain with their permanent carer post 18 or is planning to move out of home, they can access an allowance to support them with housing costs up to 21 years of age.

Once Home Stretch is approved, funding is allocated to the Better Futures provider (each financial year) to deliver a Home Stretch service response. The funding allocation is calculated from the day after the young person’s order expires up until the young person’s 21st birthday.

# Eligibility

From 1 July 2021 all young people on permanent care orders referred and linked to a Better Futures provider are eligible to access Home Stretch from age 18.

Home Stretch commences after the young person’s permanent care order ends and continues until they turn 21 years of age.

If a young person returns to live with their biological parent/s Home Stretch service response will be suspended, however the young person would remain eligible for case work support and flexible funding via Better Futures.

# Referral Pathway

Young people eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch are referred through their child protection case manager. Because young people on permanent care orders no longer have child protection involvement, Permanent Carers and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) has been engaged as the key agency to support the new referral process.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) has been engaged as the key agency to refer Aboriginal young people on permanent care orders into these programs. VACCA will refer young people to an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation for Better Futures and Home Stretch support. The young person can also choose to get support from a mainstream Better Futures provider.

# Application process

Once a young person is referred and linked to a Better Futures provider, the Better Futures worker is responsible to complete and submit the Home Stretch application and other required documentation (e.g., Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal or the Form C: Change of Details for Home Stretch Allowance) for all young people on permanent care orders.

The following steps are undertaken when applying for Home Stretch where child protection is no longer involved.

Better Futures provider:

* seeks consent from young person and carer (if relevant) to apply for Home Stretch
* completes the Home Stretch application with young person outlining the proposed living arrangement to be supported by Home Stretch (e.g., with approved carer or via Independent Living)
* emails the department (Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer[[1]](#footnote-2)) the completed Home Stretch application

The Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer processes the application form (confirming eligibility and follows up details if required). The application outcome is documented in the application form and sent to the Better Futures provider for their records.

Depending on the approved Home Stretch accommodation type, the Better Futures provider either:

* completes the Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal in consultation with the young person (outlining details of the accommodation and contribution arrangements) and submits completed proposal to divisional Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer), OR
* completes the Form C (Change of Details for Home Stretch Allowance) and submits completed form to the Care Allowance Helpdesk (to extend carer payment via Home Stretch)

The Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer processes the Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal and confirms accommodation allowance funding to be allocated to Better Futures.

# Level of allowance

The accommodation allowance funding for all approved Home Stretch living arrangements is capped at equivalent to the Care Allowance Level 13+ base rate and subject to annual indexation.

The most up to date Care Allowance Level 13+ base rate is accessible via the [Support for home-based carers in Victoria website](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria) at: [services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria) <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria>

# Role and Responsibilities for accessing Home Stretch Allowance

Central office and operational divisions staff, Better Futures providers, and ACCO staff all have responsibilities in the allowance administration processes.

The payment of the Home Stretch allowance (HBC) is an administrative action authorised by the *Financial Management Act 1994* (the Act). Payments must be approved in accordance with the financial authorisations stipulated in this Act.

## Better Futures providers

Better Futures providers support all young people approved for Home Stretch; they are also responsible to support changes to approved Home Stretch arrangements (post order) and administer the *Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation)* in compliance with program requirements. This includes supporting processing payment of approved independent accommodation costs and other flexible funding requests.

Via approved Home Stretch home-based care arrangements Better Futures providers are also responsible for the submission of:

* **the *Form C*** *Home Stretch Change of Details* to the Carer Allowance Helpdesk for all young people on permanent care orders. This will initiate the payment of Home Stretch Allowance – Home Based Care for approved Home Stretch carers; and
* the ***Form B*** *Commence or Cease Home Stretch Allowance* to the care allowance helpdesk when a young person leaves the approved Home Stretch (HBC) arrangement, including in circumstances where they are moving to an independent accommodation option supported via Home Stretch.

Any changes to approved Home Stretch independent living arrangements (post order) requires Better Futures providers to complete and submit the Home Stretch Change Request Form for approval (in consultation with the young person).

## Department - operational divisions

Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officers have been appointed in each division to provide operational support and coordination of Better Futures and Home Stretch.

The Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer processes all submitted Home Stretch Application Forms, Home Stretch Independent Accommodation Proposal Forms and Change Request Forms requiring departmental approval and facilitates funding allocations to Better Futures providers via the Individualised Funding Allocations Management System (IFAMS).

## Department - central office

**Care Allowance Helpdesk**

The Care Allowance Helpdesk is responsible for the payment of Home Stretch Allowance (HBC) in accordance with policy and advice from operational divisions and Better Futures providers.

**Children and Families Policy Branch**

The DFFH Children and Families Policy Branch is responsible for developing and updating Home Stretch allowance policy and procedures, including practice advice.

**DFFH Finance**

The DFFH Overpayments Team is responsible for recouping overpayments to recipients of the Home Stretch Allowance (HBC).

## Forms

**Home Stretch application form**

The [Home Stretch application form](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch> is used to apply for Home Stretch via home-based care or independent living (for independent accommodation practitioners are also required to complete the *Home Stretch Independent Accommodation Proposal Form*).

Offline forms are to be used only to process post order applications for example young people on permanent care orders requesting to access Home Stretch.

Post order applications are completed by Better Futures.

**Home Stretch Independent Accommodation Proposal Form**

The [Independent Accommodation Proposal form](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch> is completed after an application for Home Stretch has been approved via independent living. The form captures details of the proposed independent accommodation arrangement. For example, rent and utilities costs.

Post order *Home Stretch Independent Accommodation Proposals* are completed by Better Futures. Offline forms are to be used only to process post order applications for example young people on permanent care orders requesting to access Home Stretch.

**Home Stretch Change Request Form**

This form is to be used when there are changes to approved Home Stretch accommodation arrangements or if a young person has transferred to a new Better Futures provider.

**Form A: Home Stretch Change of Details**

This form is used by the Better Futures provider for a change of details for a carer i.e., change of address or name.

**Form B: Commence or Cease Home Stretch Allowance**

This form is used by Better Futures providers for ceasing Home Stretch Allowance (HBC) payments.

**Form C: Change of Details for Home Stretch Allowance**

This form is used to extend carer payments via Home Stretch:

The placement provider or the child protection program that created the current placement is responsible to submit the Form C to the Care Allowance Helpdesk. This Form must be submitted not less than four weeks prior to the cessation of the young person’s child protection order. This will initiate the payment of Home Stretch Allowance – Home Based Care for approved carers.

Only the placement provider or child protection area that created the current placement can initiate this payment via a Form C.

It is also used by Better Futures provider (post order) to:

* initiate the payment of Home Stretch Allowance via HBC for approved permanent carers. This action is only permitted for permanent carers as the CRIS case is closed.
* capture changes to provider details for example when a carer moves to a new division/area and Home Stretch service response is to be provided by a new Better Futures provider.

**Form D: Authorisation for direct deposit of Home Stretch allowance**

This form is to be used when a carer is changing bank account details. Please note: Home Stretch payments can

not be paid via cheque.

Care Allowance Help Desk form are available from [Funded Agency Channel My Agency](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/my-agency) <https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/my-agency> or email caregivers@health.vic.gov.au

# Related practice advice

* Home Stretch eligibility, application and approval
* Home Stretch – Home-based Care
* Home Stretch - Independent Living

# Additional information

[Providers DFFH Home Stretch](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch)  on the providers website <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch>

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1. The Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officers have been appointed in each division to provide operational support and coordination of Better Futures and Home Stretch. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)