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| Home Stretch frequently asked questions for carers |
| Updated December 2021 |
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# What is Home Stretch?

Home Stretch is a program to help young people successfully transition from care to adulthood.

Through Home Stretch, young people and their kinship, foster 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 residential care (including lead tenant), kinship care, foster care, permanent care or in some cases leaving another care or living arrangement can 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.

# How is Home Stretch being delivered?

Home Stretch is being delivered via the Better Futures program.

Better Futures workers provide case work support to young people in receipt of Home Stretch, and broker access to flexible funding to support their goals for independence.

Better Futures workers are experienced in working closely with young people and adjusting the supports provided based on their circumstances and needs. Young people have emphasised the importance of having a consistent worker to support them as they plan for their transition to adulthood.

For more information visit the [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Services website](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care)  <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care>

# Who is Home Stretch for?

Home Stretch is for eligible young people who are linked and referred to Better Futures exiting formal care services (formerly known as out-of-home care) arrangements from the age of 16. Young people can receive support from Home Stretch from the cessation of their child protection order until their 21st birthday.

Home Stretch has also been extended to young people on permanent care orders from the 1 July 2021, providing access to Home Stretch supports from 18 years of age up until their 21st birthday.

# How do young people access Home Stretch?

A Home Stretch application should form part of care team discussions when a young person is nearing the age of leaving care, or if the young person is residing in permanent care discussions should occur when they are nearing their 18th birthday.

Carers who believe that a young person in their care would benefit from Home Stretch are encouraged to discuss this with their case manager, or if the young people is subject to a permanent care order contact should be made with the Permanent Carers and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) or the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

# What are the eligibility requirements?

To be eligible for Home Stretch, a young person must be:

* referred and linked to Better Futures,
* in formal care (including kinship, foster and permanent care as well as residential care and lead tenant arrangements); and
* subject to a care by Secretary order, a long-term care order or a family reunification order on or after their 16th birthday.

Home Stretch was extended to young people on permanent care orders from the 1 July 2021, providing access to Home Stretch supports from the cessation of the permanent care order at 18 years of age up until their 21st birthday.

Home Stretch service response commences after a young person’s child protection order ceases for the final time (or in some circumstances after the cessation of other post order funding arrangements) [[1]](#footnote-1) and ends when the young person turns 21 years of age.

# How does a young person apply for Home Stretch?

Applications for Home Stretch can be lodged with the DFFH by the young person’s case manager[[2]](#footnote-2) or if the young person is subject to a permanent care order by the Better Futures worker.

A prospective application should be discussed as part of care team planning from 15 years of age; discussions should include the young person and their carer.

Both the young person (and their carer, if via a HBC arrangement) must consent to the application.

# Are young people in permanent care eligible?

From 1 July 2021 young people on permanent care orders were in scope to apply for Home Stretch.

# Are young people in shared care arrangements eligible?

Yes, if a young person is in a shared care arrangement immediately prior to leaving care, the Home Stretch allowance would be applicable up to the young person’s 21st birthday.

# What are the allowance rates for carers under Home Stretch?

The Home Stretch Allowance (Home Based Care) is a flat rate equivalent to Care Allowance 13+ Level 1, subject to annual indexation.

The Home Stretch Allowance (Home Based Care) for foster and kinship carers is provided in accordance with the department [carer allowance policy](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria) <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-home-based-carers-victoria>

*‘A care allowance is a contribution from the department to the day-to-day costs incurred in the course of providing home-based care as a volunteer carer. It is not a ‘payment’ or salary for being a carer and is not compensation for a carer who is not engaged in paid employment.’*

The Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation) to support young people transitioning to community-based housing options is capped at equivalent to Care Allowance 13+ Level 1 and is subject to annual indexation.

# What is Home Stretch flexible funding?

Flexible funding (also known as brokerage) is available to the young person to assist with expenses for education, employment, health (not covered by Medicare), and activities which assist their transition to independence. Carers and the young person can talk to their Better Futures worker about flexible funding and how it can assist the young person’s goals for independence.

# What are my responsibilities if the young person in my care is allocated a Home Stretch package?

As a carer you will continue to support the young person, as any parent would, but will also have the support of a Better Futures worker when required.

Young people in receipt of Home Stretch support will have a varied range of life experiences and needs. Some young people, and their carers, may require an occasional call or visit while others will need intensive supports if the young person is to achieve their goals for independence including access or maintenance of education, employment and social connections.

It is important the level of support and contact with Better Futures is negotiated and understood by yourself, the young person in your care and the Better Futures provider.

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1. Some young people receive extended funded supports for a limited period via *Targeted Care Packages* post order. In this instance, if an application to access Home Stretch was approved, Home Stretch funding and service response commences at the end of the TCP funding arrangement. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Child Protection practitioner/contracted case manager/Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care case manager [↑](#footnote-ref-2)