

|  |
| --- |
| Home Stretch home-based care (kinship and foster care) |
| practice advice updated December 2021 |
| OFFICIAL |

# Introduction

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting young people to successfully transition from care to adulthood and (supported).

Children and young people in care services (formerly known as out-of-home care) are supported through a continuum of care response, that provides ongoing placement support from entry into the child protection system to their formal exit from care. The introduction of Home Stretch has expanded this response. It provides eligible young people with access to continued supports to secure and maintain stable accommodation as they exit care from 16 to 21 years of age.

Through Home Stretch, young people and their kinship, foster carers 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 is delivered via the Better Futures program and includes three service 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 kinship care and foster care. Separate practice advice documents have also been developed for:

* Home Stretch permanent care; and
* Home Stretch independent accommodation.

To access the above practice advice documents and other relevant Home Stretch documentation to go [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, 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 Home Stretch.

# Purpose

This practice advice has been developed to support practitioners working with young people who via Home Stretch, will continue to reside with their kinship or foster carer beyond the point at which they leave care..

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

# Context

Home-based carers play an important role in understanding, exploring and developing a young person’s interests, aspirations and skills to prepare their transition to adulthood.

Through Home Stretch, eligible young people can remain living with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance. This allowance, known as Home Stretch Allowance via Home-based care (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.

Home Stretch carer allowance payments will cease from the date the young person moves out of the approved living arrangement. Home Stretch allowance funding may be redirected to support the new living arrangement; this would be subject to an assessment made by their Better Futures worker and approval via the Home Stretch Change Request process.

# Eligibility

To be eligible for Home Stretch via HBC, a young person must be living within an approved carer and subject to a care by Secretary order, a long-term care order or a family reunification order from their 16th[[1]](#footnote-2) birthday and be referred and linked to Better Futures.

From the 1 July 2021, Home Stretch was extended to young people on permanent care orders, providing access to Home Stretch as soon as they turned 18 years of age.

Both carer and young person must consent to the Home Stretch application via home-based care.

The Home Stretch carer allowance is payable only to a previously assessed and approved home-based carer who a young person was residing with nearing the cessation of the child protection order.

Previously endorsed shared care arrangements (where a young person is placed with more than one assessed and approved carer household and spends agreed periods of time in each household) are eligible for Home Stretch. For these arrangements, the Home Stretch allowance is provided pro-rata, based on the number of days per fortnight the young person spends with each.

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

# Level of allowance

The level of Home Stretch Allowance is equivalent to Care Allowance Level 13+ base rate and is subject to annual indexation.

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

# Key roles and responsibilities for accessing Home Stretch via home-based care

Central office and operational divisions staff, child protection case managers, contacted case managers, Better Futures providers, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) staff all have responsibilities in allowance administration processes.

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.

## Child protection case managers, contracted case managers, and ACAC case managers

Case managers are responsible for:

* advising the young person, carer and the care team about Home Stretch
* confirming the young person’s and carer’s consent to apply for Home Stretch supports
* confirming with Better Futures their support for the Home Stretch application
* completing and submitting the HBC Home Stretch application via the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS) in consultation with Better Futures
* advising the young person, the placement provider, and other relevant stakeholders of the outcome not more than five business days after the decision date
* Recording all Home Stretch actions and documentation in CRIS.

## Placement providers (or child protection area staff where relevant)

If the placement provider created the current placement record on the Client Relationship Information System for Service Providers (CRISSP), they are responsible for submitting Form C *Home Stretch Change of Details* on CRISSP *(*not less than four weeks prior to the young person‘s order ceasing for the final time) to the Carer Allowance Helpdesk. This will initiate the payment of *Home Stretch Allowance – Home Based Care* for approved Home Stretch carers.

If child protection area created the current placement on CRIS, they are responsible for the submission of Form C (including in circumstances where the placement provider now manages the CP case). Only the placement provider or child protection area that created the placement can initiate this payment via a Form C.

Once the form has been submitted for endorsement, the relevant approver will be able to go into CRIS or CRISSP to register their endorsement.

The approvers who can endorse the submitted Form C are the:

* child protection team manager for kinship care; or
* CSO or ACCO/ACAC program manager for foster care.

Placement providers are required to provide a copy of the Form C to Better Futures providers to support their administration of extended are allowance payment arrangements via Home Stretch.

## Better Futures providers

Once the application has been approved and the Form C has been endorsed, Better Futures providers will receive a prompt in CRISSP to create an accommodation record. The provider must create the accommodation record reflecting the Home Stretch commencement date.

Better Futures providers are responsible for all Home Stretch activity when the young person has left care and their child protection case is closed. As part of their case work, Better Futures workers will monitor living arrangements to determine if care allowance payments are still required.

Better Futures workers must submit Form B 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.

In this instance Better Futures workers are required to complete the *Home Stretch Change Request Form* in consultation with young people to support their transition to the new interdependent living arrangement. The form must be submitted to and approved by relevant Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH, ‘department’) staff.

## 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).

## Department - operational divisions

### Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officers

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 will process all post order requests requiring departmental approval and facilitate funding allocations to Better Futures providers in consultation with local Agency Performance and System Support teams.

### Child protection team managers

The team manager’s role is to review and consider all in-care Home Stretch applications submitted for approval in compliance with Home Stretch program requirements.

# Forms

Child Protection practitioners/contracted case managers/Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) case managers are required to complete the Home Stretch Application Form in CRIS for eligible young people in care, in consultation with Better Futures providers.

Better Futures providers are responsible for completing the following offline forms (post order) for eligible young people on permanent care orders or when there are changes to:

* approved Home Stretch living arrangements; or
* changes to the Better Futures provider; or
* changes to carer’s personal details.

**Home Stretch application form**

This form 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*).

The Home Stretch application is accessed via the young person’s CRIS case. The application is only visible whilst the CRIS case is open. 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**

This form 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.

The *Home Stretch Independent Accommodation Proposal Form* is accessed via the young person’s CRIS case. The proposal is only visible after the Home Stretch application has been approved.

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 is transferring 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.

The Form may also be 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.

# Related practice advice

[Home Stretch eligibility, application and approval](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-practice-advice-eligibility-application-and-approval) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-practice-advice-eligibility-application-and-approval>

[Home Stretch - independent accommodation](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-allowance-independent-accommodation-practice-advice) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-allowance-independent-accommodation-practice-advice>

[Home Stretch – permanent care](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-permanent-care-practice-advice-word) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-permanent-care-practice-advice-word>

# Additional information

More information about Home Stretch can be accessed at the DFFH websites

[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>

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Subject** | **Details** |
| Guide author | Transitions from Care Team, Care ServicesChildren, Families, Communities and Disability DivisionDepartment of Families Fairness and Housing |
| Authorised by  | Transitions from Care Team, Care ServicesChildren, Families, Communities and Disability Division |
| Guide created/last reviewed | 6 December 2021 |
| Version number  | V2 |

|  |
| --- |
| To receive this publication in an accessible format email the Children and Families Policy Branch <ChildrenYouthFamilies@dffh.vic.gov.au>Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing December 2021.Available at [providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch> |

1. From 1 July 2021, Home Stretch was made available to eligible young people transitioning from care from 16 years of age (after their child protection order ceases for the final time). *Young people subject to permanent care orders can only access Home Stretch from 18 years of age.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)