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| Home Stretch independent living |
| practice advice Updated December 2021 |
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# Introduction

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting young people to successfully transition from care to adulthood.

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. This service response is available to eligible young people from 16 to 21 years of age.

From the 1 July 2021, Home Stretch was also extended to young people on permanent care orders, providing access to Home Stretch supports from 18 to 21 years of age.

Through Home Stretch, young people and their approved 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.

# 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 with the support of a Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Living) will move to an independent accommodation arrangement (for example, a head-leased property, private rental, or shared housing) between the age of 16[[1]](#footnote-2) and 21 years.

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

# Context

Young people residing in residential care (including lead tenant), kinship care, foster care or permanent care have the option of moving to an independent accommodation arrangement, supported by an allowance.

The Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Living) is a contribution towards the day-to-day costs of housing, including rent, utilities, telephone and internet; in recognition of the lack of affordable housing options for young people transitioning from care, and their over-representation in the homelessness population.

Other costs that have a direct positive impact on a young person’s ability to maintain stable housing, including costs to support engagement or re-engagement with education, training and employment may also be funded via the allowance, or flexible funding.

Agreed Home Stretch contribution costs must be outlined in the *Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal* or if circumstances change post order captured in the *Home Stretch Change Request Form*.

Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Living) funding will be allocated to Better Futures providers to administer in compliance with Home Stretch program requirements.

# Eligibility

To be eligible for Home Stretch, a young person must be in care services subject to a care by Secretary order, a long-term care order or a family reunification order immediately prior to their 16th[[2]](#footnote-3) 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) [[3]](#footnote-4).

# Independent accommodation

Following approval of a Home Stretch application, the case manager must submit a Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal form via the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS).

A brief description of the proposed accommodation arrangement must be included on the Home Stretch Application submitted via CRIS.

The proposal form must be completed in consultation with the young person and the Better Futures worker, and include a detailed breakdown of the accommodation arrangement, including costs proposed to be covered by the allowance and by the young person (e.g., rent/board, set up costs, removalist fees, utilities etc). It is recommended that a young person’s rental contribution in the first year of Home Stretch reflect (at a minimum) 25 per cent of their current income.

A Better Futures (Home Stretch) support plan developed by the Better Futures worker with the young person will complement both the Home Stretch Application and the Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal *form* and will include actions that support the increasing independence of the young person; inclusive of strategies to increase the young person’s financial contribution to housing associated costs throughout the Home Stretch period of support.

Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Living) funding ceases when a young person turns 21 years of age. To facilitate a smooth transition, Better Futures will work closely with the young person to periodically review current living arrangements and establish a plan for the gradual reduction of Home Stretch contributions. This planned approach ensures a smooth transition post Home Stretch service response.

# Flexibility

A flexible approach to implementing the Home Stretch via independent living is to be applied. More than one application for the allowance may be submitted for a young person during the period of Home Stretch support, to reflect changes in their living situation. For example, a young person may move from an independent living situation supported by the allowance, to living with their family of origin (not supported by the allowance), and then may return to living independently (supported by the allowance).

Young people remaining with their carer and supported by the Home Stretch Home Based Care allowance may transition from this living arrangement to an independent living arrangement and an application to transition to independent accommodation via Home Stretch can be submitted for consideration.

# Level of allowance

The level of Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Living) is capped at equivalent to Care Allowance Level 13+ base rate and subject to annual indexation.

Once Home Stretch is approved, funding is allocated to the Better Futures provider (each financial year) to support the living arrangement and identified costs as outlined in the approved Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal or Home Stretch Change Request form.

Home Stretch funding is calculated from the day after the young person’s order expires (for the final time) and ceases the day after the young person turns 21 years of age.

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 independent living

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH, ‘department’) staff in operational divisions, child protection case managers, contracted case managers, Better Futures providers, and ACCO staff all have important responsibilities in the application and approval processes.

## Department - central office

### 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.

## 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 and independent living proposals submitted for approval in compliance with Home Stretch program requirements

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

Case managers are responsible for:

* consulting with the young person and confirming their consent to apply for Home Stretch supports
* confirming with Better Futures their support for the Home Stretch application
* completing and submitting the Home Stretch Allowance Independent Accommodation application form for approval via CRIS (in consultation with Better Futures)
* submitting the Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal form via CRIS once the Home Stretch application has been approved (in consultation with Better Futures)
* advising the young person and all stakeholders of the outcome of application/proposal not more than five business days after the decision date
* Recording all Home Stretch actions and documentation in CRIS.

## Placement providers

Placement providers responsible for the placement the young person is in immediately prior to leaving care are responsible for working collaboratively with the young person (and carer where relevant), their case manager, the Better Futures provider, and the care team to support a smooth transition to the new living arrangement.

## Better Futures providers

Better Futures providers are responsible for submitting the Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal form in circumstances where the young person has left care, and also for submitting the Home Stretch Change Request form for young people transitioning from living with an approved carer (receiving the Home Stretch Home Based Care allowance) to independent living, or another living situation, up to the age of 21 years.

Better Futures providers supports 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 Living) in compliance with program requirements. This includes supporting processing payment of approved independent accommodation costs and other flexible funding requests.

Better Futures providers must only pay independent accommodation costs on receipt of invoice, and as outlined in the approved Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal form. Invoices must be paid within 30 days of invoice date or as otherwise agreed with vendor.

# 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.

**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 Proposalsare 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.

# 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 – Home-based care](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-allowance-home-based-care-practice-advice) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/home-stretch-allowance-home-based-care-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>
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| **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 |

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| To receive this publication in an accessible format email the Children, Youth 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.ISBN978-1-76096-317-0 (online)Available at [DFFH providers – Leaving care](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/leaving-care> |

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)
2. See previous footnote regarding Home Stretch being available to eligible young people transitioning from care from 16 years of age from 1 July 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Some young people receive extended supports for a limited period via *Targeted Care Packages* post order. In this instance, if an application to access Home Stretch has been approved, Home Stretch service response commences after the TCP funding arrangement has ended. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)