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| Home Stretch eligibility, application and approval |
| 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 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.

Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures program and includes 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 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.

# 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.

# Purpose

This practice advice has been developed to support practitioners working with young people in care services who may be eligible for Home Stretch.

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

# Eligibility

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 young people, 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.

Young people who have chosen not to access Home Stretch (whilst in care), or who subsequently disengaged from the program may request support at any time prior to their 21st birthday. Requests to access Home Stretch post order are processed by the Better Futures.

#### Targeted Care Packages (TCP)

Eligible young people who have been approved for a TCP extension post child protection order may apply for Home Stretch, however, if approved, Home Stretch funding and support will not commence until after the TCP funding arrangement has ended.

During this period eligible young people residing in these arrangements can continue to access Better Futures service response.

# Care types

Young people in approved kinship care, foster care, permanent care, residential care and supported independent living arrangements (including lead tenant) are eligible to access Home Stretch.

Young people residing in previously endorsed shared care arrangements (where they reside with more than one assessed and approved carer household and spend agreed periods of time in each household) are eligible for Home Stretch. Respite carers are not eligible for Home Stretch.

Informal care arrangements are not in scope of Home Stretch. Via Home Stretch only pre-existing carers already approved and accredited by Care Services providers (including ACCOs) and Child Protection, or by the Courts (formally granting a permanent care order) will be in scope.

# Planning

Transition planning should commence when a young person in care services turns 15 years of age and a 15+ care and transition plan must be developed. At this point, Home Stretch should be discussed with the young person and carer (if relevant) and tabled for discussion at care team meetings to inform transition planning.

The care team should identify supports the young person is likely to require when child protection involvement ceases. From 2021-22, Home Stretch will be available to eligible young people leaving care from 16 years of age, therefore it is important these conversations occur as early as possible to allow for maximum time to establish appropriate post-care supports.

A young person’s voice should be included in all planning discussions unless there is a compelling reason why this is not possible.

# Application process

The young person and carer (if relevant) must consent to the application.

## In care

Whist a young person is in care, the Home Stretch application is submitted by the child protection case manager, contracted case manager, or the ACAC case manager via the Client Relationship Information System (CRIS). The application should be submitted no later than six months prior to the young person leaving care, although it is acknowledged that this may vary depending on the individual circumstances of the young person (and carer where relevant).

The Better Futures worker should be consulted to support the application. Applications will be delayed if the Better Futures worker or provider has not been involved in the decision to apply for Home Stretch.

Home Stretch applications processed via CRIS are considered and approved by the relevant child protection team manager.

## Post order

When child protection is no longer involved, Better Futures providers are responsible to complete and submit the Home Stretch application and other required documentation (i.e. Home Stretch Independent Accommodation proposal or the Form C: Change of Details for Home Stretch Allowance). This includes young people on permanent care orders.

Young people on permanent care orders are referred to Better Futures by Permanent Carers and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) or by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and if eligible Better Futures completes and submits the offline Home Stretch Application form for departmental approval.

Home Stretch applications completed post order are submitted to the relevant Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer for processing.**[[2]](#footnote-2)**

# Key roles and responsibilities in supporting the application process

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) 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 - 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

* Ensure care team discussions from the age of 15 years include discussion regarding a Home Stretch application in the future
* If agreed, ensure the young person has a 15+ care and transition plan which includes planning for Home Stretch
* Support the young person to participate in transition planning so all decisions consider their views
* Engage appropriate individuals such as carers and significant others in the transition planning process
* Obtain the young person’s (and carer’s where relevant) consent to apply for Home Stretch
* In collaboration with the Better Futures worker, complete the CRIS Home Stretch application six months prior to the young person leaving care
* Record the application outcome on CRIS
* Communicate the decision to the Better Futures worker, the young person and the carer and the placement provider.

### Better Futures providers

#### In care

* Provide secondary consultations to care teams and case managers to support their understanding of Home Stretch program requirements
* Contribute to the development and review of a 15+ care and transition plan which includes Home Stretch Support the case manager to obtain the young person’s (and carer’s where relevant) consent to apply for Home Stretch.
* Support the case manager to submit a Home Stretch application form prior to the young person leaving care (it is recommended applications are submitted six months prior to the young person leaving care).
* Engage individuals such as carers and significant others to support the young person’s transition to Home Stretch
* For an approved Home Stretch Accommodation Allowance (HBC) application, create an accommodation record on CRISSP
* Incorporate Home Stretch specific goals into the young person’s Better Futures Support Plan.

#### Post order

* seek young person’s and carer’s (if relevant) consent to apply for Home Stretch
* complete 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)
* email the department (Better Futures/Home Stretch senior project officer) **[[3]](#footnote-3)** the completed Home Stretch application

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

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

# Legislation

*Children Youth and Families Act 2005* (section 16) **[[4]](#footnote-4)**.

# 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 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.

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 – 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 - 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>

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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. This position exists in each division. The role was created in financial year 2021-22 to provide operational support and coordination of Better Futures and Home Stretch activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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-3)
4. As part of proposed significant amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, Home Stretch is expected to be enshrined in law providing the opportunity for all eligible young people transitioning from care access to a **transition to adulthood allowance** until the age of 21 years [↑](#footnote-ref-4)