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| Home Stretch fact sheet |
| Updated December 2021 |
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# Support for young people to transition from care

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.

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 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.

The Home Stretch program is based on international evidence that extending the age of support for young people in care contributes to improved life chances and outcomes.

# Home Stretch and Better Futures

Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures program. Better Futures workers proactively engage with young people and support them as they transition from care up to 21 years of age. Better Futures workers will provide flexible, tailored support to young people on the Home Stretch program to support their goals for independence.

# 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.

From 1 July 2021 Home Stretch was extended to young people on permanent care orders, 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-2) and ends when the young person turns 21 years of age.

# Application

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.

An application for Home Stretch 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).

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

## For young people on permanent care orders

Because young people on permanent care orders no longer have child protection involvement, the Permanent Carers and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) has been engaged as the key agency to support permanent care referrals to Better Futures.

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.

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 in consultation with the young person.

# Payment of allowances

The Home Stretch allowance (Home-based care) will be paid to carers through the department’s Care Allowance payment system. The allowance payable to carers is equivalent to Care Allowance 13+ Level 1 and is subject to annual indexation.

Better Futures workers, as part of their case work support role, will monitor living arrangements to determine if care allowance payments are still required.

Better Futures workers will broker the Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation) for young people to support them to access independent or semi-independent community-based housing options, including through the private rental market.

# Case work

Eligible young people who have transitioned to Home Stretch are provided with flexible levels of support depending on their needs, circumstances and existing support systems, which are likely to change over time.

Specially trained Better Futures workers will support young people to prepare for independence, with each young person’s goals based on their individual needs, aspirations and talents.

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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-2)