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| Home Stretch |
| Factsheet  April 2019 |

**Support for young people to transition from care**

The Victorian Government is investing $11.6 million to roll out Home Stretch. Starting in the first half of 2019, over the next five years Home Stretch will support approximately 250 young people in care to make a more gradual and supported transition to independent living.

Through the Home Stretch program:

* Young people and their kinship and foster carers will 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 will be eligible for an allowance to support housing costs up to 21 years of age.

In addition to an accommodation allowance, the program includes case work support and brokerage provided by a key worker, to facilitate the young person’s access to education, employment and health and wellbeing supports. The Home Stretch program is based on international and Australian 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 will be available through the Better Futures program. Better Futures workers proactively engage with young people and support them as they transition from out-of-home 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.

Home Stretch will commence in April 2019 in the Better Futures trial sites in southern Victoria, and the Barwon and Goulburn areas. Home Stretch and Better Futures will roll out together across the remainder of the state in the second half of 2019.

To avoid duplication and maximise the number of young people who are supported, Home Stretch will not be implemented in the COMPASS program areas of Western Melbourne, Brimbank Melton, North East Melbourne, and Greater Bendigo in Loddon, given the range of housing options available through COMPASS.

**Eligibility**

To be eligible for Home Stretch, a young person must be nearing their 18th birthday, be in out-of-home care on a Care by Secretary Order, a Long-Term Care Order or a Family Reunification Order and be engaged or demonstrate a willingness to engage with a Better Futures worker and work towards achievement of goals for independence.

**Referral**

A potential referral to Home Stretch will form part of care team discussions when a young person turns 17 years of age.

Young people will be referred to the Home Stretch program by their Case Manager (DHHS Child Protection or contracted) and a Better Futures worker. A young person (and carer where relevant) must consent to the referral.

**Prioritisation**

Young people in kinship care, foster care and residential care are all eligible for support from Home Stretch, with a certain number of places allocated for Aboriginal young people.

Current investment in Home Stretch will afford support to approximately 250 young people over five years. Young people who do not enter the Home Stretch program are still eligible for support through the Better Futures program.

**Payment of allowances**

The Home Stretch accommodation allowance will be paid to carers through the existing Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Care Allowance payment system. The Home Stretch 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 accommodation allowance for young people leaving residential care to support them to access independent or semi-independent community-based housing options, including through the private rental market.

**Case work**

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. Child Protection retains statutory case management responsibility whilst a young person is on a Child Protection order (DHHS, Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care or contracted). Once the young person turns 18, the Better Futures worker will become the key point of contact for them.

**Next steps**

The Home Stretch initiative has been designed in collaboration with key stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders, including young people and carers, will continue to inform the implementation and evaluation of the program, including any adjustments required.

Further communications materials will be distributed throughout 2019.

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