

Media Release

The Hon Luke Donnellan MP
Minister for Child Protection
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers



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HOME STRETCH HELPING MORE YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE

The Victorian Government will enshrine extended support for young Victorians leaving state care in legislation, ensuring the landmark Home Stretch program continues to assist vulnerable young people for years to come.

While the Government already funds Home Stretch, it will introduce amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* to require in law that young people leaving care are paid an allowance to assist their transition to adulthood.

In January this year, Victoria was the first jurisdiction to extend Home Stretch to all young people leaving foster, kinship and residential care up to the age of 21, rather than leaving them to forge a life of their own at 18 – with the Government investing \$64.7 million over four years plus ongoing funding at November's state budget.

At least 167 young Victorians leaving state care have been supported through Home Stretch in its first six months.

Through the *Victorian Budget 2021/22*, the program is being expanded even further to include every young adult on permanent care orders – a care arrangement where the carer has been granted custody and guardianship.

The program provides an accommodation allowance to support young people in care and their carers, and it helps young people leaving residential care to transition to alternative living arrangements.

All care leavers will also have access to Better Futures, which provides help to start planning for their transition to independence as well as individualised support and advice across a range of areas including housing, education, employment, and life skills.

Young people leaving care are at much higher risk of homelessness and unemployment, but the assistance provided by these programs enable care leavers to build the skills and confidence they need to thrive as adults.

Expanding Home Stretch and Better Futures will mean around 700 young people leaving care each year will now be eligible.

Home Stretch is supporting care leavers like 19-year-old Alkira, who is now taking her next steps confident in the knowledge she can cover rent. With the support of her Better Futures case worker, Alkira recently enrolled in university, and hopes to become a primary school teacher.

The Budget commits \$39 million over four years and \$13.8 million ongoing to expand Home Stretch and Better Futures, as part of a huge \$1.2 billion investment in the children and family services system.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Child Protection Luke Donnellan

"No young person should miss out on the critical support they need to thrive as they transition into adult life."

"By legislating Home Stretch and expanding it even further, we want to make sure every child who can't stay with their family gets the best shot at a secure and successful future now and into the future."

"This program is already helping dozens of vulnerable young people and their carers get the ongoing support they need as they take the next big step in life – whether that's university, living independently or beginning a career."

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