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| Better Futures and Home Stretch – referral pathway for young people on permanent care orders |
| Frequently asked questions |
| OFFICIAL |

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# Purpose

These frequently asked questions are for stakeholders involved in the expansion of Better Futures and Home Stretch to include young people on permanent care orders. They provide the information you will need about the referral process.

Better Futures and Home Stretch for young people on permanent care orders

The Victorian Government will invest $38.9 million over four years and $13.8 million ongoing to ensure young people on permanent care orders are supported through Better Futures and Home Stretch.

Better Futures can support young on people permanent care orders from 15 years and nine months to age 21. These young people can access Home Stretch when they turn 18 up until their 21st birthday.

Young people on permanent care orders are eligible for these supports from 1 July 2021.

Better Futures and Home Stretch can help young people with everything from connecting them to a mentor, getting their driver’s licence, joining a sports club or other social/ recreational activity to mental health and wellbeing support. It can also provide support with their study and work goals and help prepare them to move out of home.

# Young people

What is Better Futures?

Better Futures is a new way of supporting young people transitioning from care. Better Futures aims to engage earlier with young people, supporting them to have an active voice in their transition planning.

A Better Futures worker provides secondary consultation to care teams, lending expertise to the transition process. Support from the Better Futures worker increases as the young person prepares to transition from care.

Better Futures aims to support young people achieve successful and independent adult lives; helping them to have an active voice in decisions about their future and guiding their transition to adulthood and independent living across a range of life areas, including housing, health and wellbeing, education, employment and community and cultural connections.

Better Futures service response can include:

* case work support to help with a young person’s life goals
* information and advice about other services or moving house
* access to flexible funding
* community and cultural connections, supporting a young person’s participation in their local community
* Home Stretch.

Better Futures offers flexible funding to support a young person’s goals for independence. Support from Better Futures may include:

* Clothes that may be needed for work
* university textbooks
* driving lessons
* household set up
* mental health support
* sporting and community activities

What is Home Stretch?

To be eligible for Home Stretch, you must be on a Victorian permanent care order and approaching 18 years of age.

If you are living away from your carers/guardians, or are planning to move out of home, you can get the Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation). These funds will help with your move, rent and ongoing living expenses. If you stay at home, your carer/guardian can get the Home Stretch Allowance to support you up until you turn 21 years of age.

Through Better Futures and Home Stretch, a key worker can help you with things like staying in school or going to TAFE or university, getting a job, getting your licence, or helping with other things that you might need.

You can get flexible funding (‘brokerage’) through Home Stretch. This will help with expenses for study, work, health care (not covered by Medicare) and activities that help you on your path to independence. You and your guardian/carer can talk to a Better Futures worker about how flexible funding can help you reach your goals for independence.

Am I eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch?

From 1 July 2021 all young people on permanent care orders are eligible for Better Futures from age 15 years and nine months and Home Stretch from age 18.

I turned 18 before 1 July 2021. Am I eligible?

The expansion of Better Futures and Home Stretch to young people on a permanent care order starts from 1 July 2021. If you turned 18 before 1 July 2021, then you are not eligible for Better Futures or Home Stretch. However, you may be eligible for supports such as flexible funding through Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCA Families).

Can I still receive Centrelink payments if I’m getting Home Stretch?

Yes. The Home Stretch allowance is not considered income so it will not affect your ability to get support from Centrelink.

I am 17 but have moved away from home to go to university. Am I still eligible for Home Stretch and Better Futures?

Yes, you are still eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch, even if you have moved away from home.

If you are living away from your carers/guardian, you can get the Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation) when you turn 18. The funds will help you to live independently (for example, if you need to move for work or study).

You can get flexible funding (‘brokerage’) through Better Futures. Flexible funding helps with expenses for study, work, health care (not covered by Medicare) and activities that help you on your path to independence. You and your carer/guardian can talk to a Better Futures worker about getting flexible funding to support your goals for independence.

My carer and I don’t live in Victoria anymore. Will I still be eligible?

As long as your permanent care order was issued in Victoria by the Children’s Court, and you meet the age requirements, you will be eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch. It doesn’t matter which state you live in now.

Do I need to have proof of my permanent care order to access Better Futures and Home Stretch?

You do not need to have proof of your permanent care order to get Better Futures and Home Stretch support. To get Better Futures and Home Stretch, you will need to contact PCA Families and give them your details (name, date of birth and carer/guardian details). You can also ask your carer/guardian to contact PCA Families for you.

If you are an Aboriginal young person, you can contact the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) to discuss a referral. You can also ask your carer/guardian to contact VACCA for you.

In most cases, PCA Families and VACCA will be able to get a copy of your permanent care order to confirm your eligibility. They will then refer you to a Better Futures provider.

Will I have access to Better Futures later if I don’t want to take part now?

Yes. If you meet the eligibility requirements, you can choose to access Better Futures when it suits you (up to your 21st birthday). To confirm you are eligible for Better Futures, please contact PCA Families on 9020 1833. You can also [email PCA Families](mailto:info@pcafamilies.org.au) <info@pcafamilies.org.au> or [visit their website](http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/) <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/> or email VACCA [pcopathways@vacca.org](mailto:pcopathways@vacca.org)

If you decide not to access Better Futures now, a worker from PCA Families or VACCA will contact you from time to time to check if you have changed your mind or now need support. They can also schedule a time in the future to contact you.

Do I need permission from my guardian/carer to access Better Futures and Home Stretch?

No. Although it’s better if both you and your carer agree, you don’t need permission from your carer/guardian to take part in either program. You can give your own consent to access support services if the department is satisfied that you can make an informed choice.

If you and your carer have any questions about what it means to get support from Better Futures and Home Stretch, you can talk to the staff at PCA Families or VACCA.

How do I provide my consent to access Better Futures and Home Stretch?

To give informed consent, the department or PCA Families and VACCA must give you and your carer enough information about the programs for you to decide if they are right for you. When you have had the chance to consider this information, you will be asked if you want to take up the referral to Better Futures and Home Stretch.

I don’t live with my carer/guardian anymore. Can I still get Better Futures and Home Stretch?

If you are over 15 years and nine months and no longer live with your carer, you will still be able to access Better Futures. Depending on your situation you may also be able to get the Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation). This program will help you access independent or semi-independent community-based housing, including through the private rental market.

All young people on permanent care orders can get Home Stretch once they turn 18.

You can speak to your Better Futures worker, PCA Families or VACCA about your individual support needs.

Can I choose which Better Futures provider I get referred to?

No. Better Futures providers operate across Victoria. Once your eligibility has been confirmed, you will be referred to the Better Futures provider in your area.

If you plan to move (including moving for work or study), you may be referred to a Better Futures provider close to your new house.

I identify as Aboriginal. How will I be referred?

VACCA takes referrals for Aboriginal young people on permanent care orders.

VACCA will refer you to an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation for Better Futures and Home Stretch support. Or you can choose to get support from a mainstream Better Futures provider.

# Carers and guardians

My child has moved out of home. Can they still get Better Futures and Home Stretch?

Yes. Young people on permanent care orders can get Better Futures and Home Stretch regardless of whether or not they still live at home with you.

If the young person has moved out and is over 18, they will be eligible to receive the Home Stretch Allowance (Independent Accommodation) until their 21st birthday (if they turned 18 after 1 July 2021).

I don’t have a copy of the permanent care order. How can I get one?

You don’t need a copy of the young person’s permanent care order to access Better Futures and Home Stretch. In many cases PCA Families or VACCA will be able to confirm the young person’s eligibility. But in some cases, you may need to provide a copy (for example, if the permanent care order is not recorded in the system).

If you need a copy of the permanent care order, please contact PCA Families or VACCA who can assist with this.

My child has been in the youth justice system. Can they still get Better Futures?

Young people on a youth justice order or a youth residential centre order can still get support through Better Futures while in custody. On their release, they can get Home Stretch from age 18 until their 21st birthday.

Young people who turned 18 before 1 July 2021 are not eligible for Better Futures or Home Stretch.

We don’t live in Victoria anymore. Can we still get Home Stretch?

As long as the permanent care order was issued in Victoria, and the young person meets the other eligibility requirements (age), the young person will be eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch. They don’t have to live in Victoria anymore.

Can we get Home Stretch support if my child doesn’t want to take part in Better Futures?

To get Home Stretch, the young person needs to have been referred to a Better Futures provider. The Better Futures provider will make the referral to Home Stretch. If the young person does not want to get Better Futures support, they can be placed on ‘active hold’ which means that the Better Futures provider will have them registered, but not undertaking any active involvement with the young person. It is still possible for the young person to access Home Stretch if they are on ‘active hold’.

My child has been referred to a Better Futures provider, but no one has contacted us. Who do we call to follow up?

Sometimes it can take a few weeks for a Better Futures organisation to get in touch with you and the young person. If no one has been in touch after four weeks, please contact PCA Families or VACCA. You can call on 9020 1833 or [visit the PCA Families website](http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/) <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/> or email VACCA [pcopathways@vacca.org](mailto:pcopathways@vacca.org)

My child turned 18 in June 2021. Are we eligible to receive Home Stretch funding?

If your child turned 18 before 1 July 2021, they are not eligible for Home Stretch.

I receive a carer allowance from the department. Will the Home Stretch Accommodation Allowance affect my payments?

If your permanent care arrangement continues once the young person turns 18, then you will receive the Home Stretch Accommodation Allowance. This will replace the department-funded care allowance.

What supports are available to ensure young people with a disability can access Better Futures and Home Stretch?

Better Futures and Home Stretch have been designed to support all young people. If you or the young person you care for has accessibility needs, then you can contact PCA Families or VACCA directly. You may also nominate someone to contact PCA Families or VACCA on your behalf – for example, an NDIS support coordinator (if you or the young person is an NDIS participant).

Can I access PCA Families flexible funding as well as Better Futures flexible funding?

Young people on permanent care orders will have access to flexible funding through Better Futures and Home Stretch. In some circumstances the young person may have additional support needs.

PCA Families Flexible funding is available to meet the extraordinary needs of young people on permanent care orders to help with costs not covered by Better Futures flexible funding. More information on the types of PCA Families flexible funding available to permanent carers is available from [the department’s website](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/flexible-funding-permanent-care-information-carers-word) <<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/flexible-funding-permanent-care-information-carers-word>>.

Can I, as a carer, get Home Stretch payments for two children at the same time (both children are on permanent care orders)?

Yes. Home Stretch funding is available for every young person on a permanent care order.

# Schools and community service organisations

Where can we get more information about Better Futures and Home Stretch?

Details about the program including factsheets and frequently asked questions are available from [the department’s website](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/better-futures>. You can also [email PCA Families](mailto:info@pcafamilies.org.au) <info@pcafamilies.org.au> or call 9020 1833 or VACCA [pcopathways@vacca.org](mailto:pcopathways@vacca.org)

A young person I support may be eligible. How can I refer them to the program?

If you think a young person on a permanent care order may be eligible for Better Futures and Home Stretch, please direct them and their guardian/carer to contact PCA Families or for an Aboriginal young person, VACCA.

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