



November 2021

Extended care for all young people leaving care

Background

When a young person in residential care turns 18 years of age, the departmental authority and support payments currently cease. However, the vulnerability of young people in out-of-home care does not end at the age of 18 when formal care is discontinued. Research clearly indicates the likelihood of poorer outcomes for vulnerable young people who are not well-supported into adulthood, including greater instances of youth homelessness, substance use, poor education outcomes, unemployed or a new parent within the first year of leaving care.

Policy Response

While the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* already provides for the Minister to arrange assistance for eligible care leavers,¹ albeit that the offer of some aspects of support is at the Minister's discretion, the proposed policy response calls for more specified financial support and that all forms of support should be available to *all* care leavers, including residential care leavers until they reach 21 years of age. This cut-off age would align with the existing support and eligibility for extended care through the Stability in Family-based Care (SFBC) program, however, it is noted that the age cohort in the Act includes eligible care leavers who are more than 16, but less than 26, years of age.

The importance of extended care has been recognised by the South Australian government, as reflected in two programs: The Stability in Family-based Care (SFBC) program, enabling family-based carers to access fortnightly carer payments of \$756.80 to support the young person until they turn 21; and the *Over 18 Education Initiative*, for young people over 18 who participate in secondary or tertiary study, whose family-based carers may be eligible for an additional education

¹ Relevant provisions in *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*

112—Minister to arrange assistance for eligible care leavers

(1) The Minister must cause such assistance as the Minister thinks appropriate to be offered to each eligible care leaver for the purposes of making their transition from care as easy as is reasonably practicable.

(2) Without limiting the kinds of assistance that may be offered to an eligible care leaver, such assistance may include 1 or more of the following:

- (a) the provision of information about Government and other resources and services available to the eligible care leaver;
- (b) the provision of education and training services;
- (c) assistance in finding accommodation;
- (d) assistance in finding employment;
- (e) assistance in accessing legal advice and health services;
- (f) counselling and support services.

(4) To avoid doubt, assistance may, at the discretion of the Minister, be provided for a specified period or until a person ceases to be an eligible care leaver.

(6) In this section— eligible care leaver—a person is an eligible care leaver if the person—(a) is more than 16, but less than 26, years of age; and (b) was, at any stage, under the guardianship or custody of the Chief Executive or another person pursuant to this Act or the Children's Protection Act 1993 for a period of 6 months or more (or such lesser period as may be allowed by the Minister).

payment. However, similar arrangements are not available to young people leaving residential care once they turn 18. Aligned with the *Home Stretch Campaign*, the call is for the SA Government to support the extension of care to at least 21 years of age.²

As with the SFBC and *Over 18 Education Initiative* leaving-care support, similar eligibility criteria and forms of support for young people should be extended on an ongoing basis to all young people leaving care until they reach the age of 21 years.

Support for young people leaving residential care would include:

- Support from their case manager to think about what they want to do and develop a plan. Such a Leaving Care Plan could set out the equivalent of the family-based carer payment, as well as a range of information services and practical supports including financial assistance and support to assist the young person to find accommodation, appropriate education and training options, health care, employment, financial and legal advice and counselling services. In addition, support would be provided to pay other costs such as rent, utility bills, phone and internet.
- The payment of a leaving-care allowance could be brokered by the care worker e.g. setting up payment plans with utility companies, or have mobile phone bills paid directly, or payments made for education/training materials, uniforms etc.
- The payment would include a flexible funding component for additional expenses.

Scope and eligibility criteria will include the following:

- Young people who have a Youth Justice worker and are living in residential care
- Young people on remand but who would ordinarily be in care
- Aboriginal young people leaving care, the department will continue to work closely with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) both directly and via the DCP to ensure Aboriginal young people are supported
- Young people with disability who are getting some of their supports funded via the NDIS, including supported independent living (SIL) should also be eligible for support.
- Young people who decide to live interstate, for whatever reason, including study or work.

Financial investment

The introduction and ongoing programme integration of an option for all young people, including those in residential care, to retain existing support until they are at least 21 years of age will be a significant financial investment.³ However, the longer-term cost of not providing this support is likely to be higher when noting the poorer outcomes experienced by young people leaving care who are not well-supported. Extending the option of continued support for young people leaving residential care for an additional three years will provide them with a better chance to succeed, thereby contributing to a more productive and equitable society.

SACOSS Proposal

1. Provide the option of extended care from 18 to 21 years for all young people leaving care, including residential care, in line with *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, as provided for through the *Stability in Family-based Care (SFBC)* program and aligned to the national *Home Stretch* Program.

² Home Stretch is a national campaign that calls on government to support the extension of care to at least 21 years for those who wish to stay on in their foster care or kinship care placement and have the agreement from their carer, or are not ready to go and wish to remain in a supported care environment but either cannot remain in the care placement past 18; such as those exiting residential care, or do not wish to remain in foster care.

³ The 2020-21 Victorian Government budget included \$64.7 million to make the *Home Stretch* program universal – extending supports from 18 to 21 years for all care leavers