

Progress against past inquiries

This document provides an update on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's responses to our recommendations from *Keep caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care* and the Commission's assessment of progress made in 2022-23.

The Commission will continue to annually assess and report on progress made against these recommendations.

Keep caring

Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care



Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

Rec #	Action	Recommendation	Initial government response	Department status	Department update	Commission assessment	Commission comment
1		<p>That the Victorian Government, in its implementation of the recommendations of the <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, develop and resource a model of care that embeds a young person's life aspirations, talents and goals into everyday case management and their time in placement.</p> <p>This model, founded on a continuum of supports which begins early, should include a focus on supporting young people to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be active participants in future-focused planning and preparing for their own future, with the support of a key worker (this lead worker should play a key role in facilitating leaving care planning and supports in partnership with the young person) • develop their independent living skills according to their developmental needs • remain engaged or re-engage with education or vocational pathways • build or heal positive connections with family and with the wider community • develop enduring connections with the services they may need to address mental health, trauma or substance use. <p>For Aboriginal young people, this new model of care should have a strong focus on supports to build an enduring connection to culture and community during and after care.</p> <p>The Commission notes that the success of this model of care is contingent on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Commission's <i>In our own words</i> inquiry, which called for the out-of-home care system to be redesigned to be safe, stable and caring where young people are empowered to have a voice in decisions about them.</p>	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Complete	<p>\$548.4 million over four years included in the 2023–24 State Budget is dedicated to improving outcomes for children in residential care, of which, \$100.4 million over four years will ensure all children in residential care have access to therapeutic supports by 2025–26 – up from 43 per cent currently.</p> <p>Implementation of the SAFER children framework (SAFER) from 20 November 2021 which provides practitioners with tools and resources to guide effective and evidence informed assessment and management of risk, safety and the needs of children, including placing emphasis on the 'voice of the child'.</p> <p>The Child Protection Manual has been updated to reflect and embed participation by young people in decision-making.</p> <p>The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021 has lapsed. The Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023 has been introduced in Parliament. The Bill includes a strengthened legislative framework around decision-making principles for Aboriginal children and young people and engagement and participation of the child, family and community.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the recent investment and looks forward to seeing improvements in the model of care between now and 2025-26.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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2	1	<p>That the department develop simplified and youth-friendly assessment tools and guidelines for Child Protection and funded agencies, to support recommendation 1 of this inquiry. Implementation of the new guidance should be supported by training of the Child Protection and funded agency workforce.</p> <p>The guidance and training should have a strong focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building the independent living skills of all young people in care in a way that responds to their unique needs and developmental stage • young people's right to participate in leaving • providing young people with information about available leaving care supports • providing young people with clarity about decisions they can and cannot have control over as they mature in care • ensuring young people's aspirations and talents inform leaving care planning (and helping young people in care to form aspirations for their future post-care and an understanding of how to achieve those goals) • supporting Aboriginal young people to develop an enduring connection to community and family while in care as a foundation for life after care • empowering young people with a disability to plan for their future and maximise their independent living skills • best practice for leaving care planning for young people with complex needs <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Complete	In addition to the operational guidelines that were developed to support the new models of care (refer recommendation 1), workforce training, development of new training modules on disability, e-learning modules and new Practice Advice to support the workforce are all progressing well.	Progress made	The Commission regards this recommendation as in progress because it is dependent on the completion of the new model outlined in recommendation 1 and requires guidance and training on the specific issues identified in the recommendation.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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2	1	<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • roles and responsibilities in the care team to plan for young people's transition to independence • collaborative practice between services to develop leaving care plans including with Better Futures and NDIS • ensuring there is a plan and supports to safely re-connect or maintain positive connections with family if the young person wishes to do so • early planning for post-care accommodation to secure an option tailored to the developmental needs and aspirations of the young person • support for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. 					
2	2	That the department in consultation with ACCOs create a combined cultural support and leaving care plan for Aboriginal young people to ensure that planning for their transition from care is informed by Aboriginal young people's right to build and maintain a connection to culture, community and culturally safe services.	Accept in principle	In progress	A follow up Cultural Planning workshop is planned for Quarter 3 2023, including a review of all current recommendations relating to Cultural Plans. The Aboriginal Cultural Support and Awareness Advisor roles in each of the department's operational areas, along with one role in the State-wide Services Group have been extended to 30 June 2024.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes to the progress made and looks forward to the outcomes of the Cultural Planning workshop later this year.
2	3	That the department monitor the extent to which leaving care planning is upholding the right of Aboriginal young people in care to continue to build a connection to culture and community.	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	In progress	The Aboriginal Children's Forum continues to monitor Young People exiting care within 30 days with Leaving Care Plans. Scoping of potential future enhancements to CRIS leaving care planning functionality is underway.	Progress made	The Commission notes the role that the Aboriginal Children's Forum plays in monitoring Aboriginal young people leaving care and looks forward to future CRIS upgrades to increase the department's monitoring capacity.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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2	4	That the department develop a disability screening and assessment process for children and young people entering out of home care, where there are indications that a child or young person may have a disability, to ensure early identification and timely provision of supports.	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	In progress	The department has commenced a disability screening pilot in the south in 2023. This will be followed by a review to consider the applicability/useability of the disability screening tool and potential for statewide utilisation.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the Southern Division trial and the plans to roll it out statewide, and looks forward to receiving further updates as this work progresses.
2	5	That the department record transition planning in a way that is accessible to Child Protection practitioners and funded agency staff. This could include incorporating related tasks and goals into the young person's case plan and actions table.	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Planned for implementation	Scoping of potential future enhancements to CRIS leaving care planning functionality is underway	Planned for implementation	The Commission welcomes plans for future CRIS upgrades, noting the importance of monitoring and oversight for leaving care planning.
2	6	That the department, in implementing recommendation 17 of the <i>In our own words</i> inquiry: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor and audit whether transition planning for young people in care is occurring and its quality • monitor the implementation of its own guidance related to how the out of home care system should be cooperating with NDIA with regards to young people transitioning from care • publicly report on its compliance with key leaving care departmental policy and guidance. 	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Planned for implementation	Broader review of the monitoring and oversight of leaving care planning is scheduled for the second half of 2023.	Planned for implementation	The Commission notes plans to progress this recommendation.
3	1	That the Victorian Government resource additional advisers with disability and NDIS subject matter expertise within local Child Protection offices to train, assist and mentor case managers in supporting young people with a disability transitioning from care and navigating the disability service system and NDIS.	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Complete	Staff recruited to the additional disability practice advisor roles have commenced in each of the four operational divisions.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the investment for ongoing and time-limited disability practice advisors and notes the significant need for Child Protection practitioners to access this support. The Commission notes the importance of maintaining the current level of disability practice advisors and further expanding this in the future if needed.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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3	2	That the department require that case managers who are supporting a young person with a disability consult regularly with disability and NDIS subject matter experts, in the years leading up to the young person's transition from care.	Accept	Planned for implementation	The department commits to completing a review of current practice advice for CP practitioners when working with young people with a disability leaving care and making necessary updates by end of December 2023. Updates will recommend rather than require case managers consult with NDIS subject matter experts. Current investment does not enable a consultation by a Disability Practice Advisor for every case manager – making this a requirement is resource dependent.	Planned for implementation	The Commission looks forward to reviewing the new practice advice when available.
4		That the Victorian Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> invest in strengthening existing responses and specialist interventions to support young people to repair connections with their family members prior to leaving care make available brokerage to support young people's priority access to the above responses and interventions when required. 	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	Complete	Through Better Futures and Home Stretch, young people can utilise flexible funding to repair connections with family prior to leaving care. The Housing First for young people leaving residential care initiative will also have a component of flexible funding for young people that can also be utilised to support young people's connection with family as they leave care.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the significant additional investment for Home Stretch and Better Futures.
5		That the Victorian Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a mechanism to track the life outcomes (at a population level) of people who have left care between the ages of 16 to 18 and publish this data every two years advocate to the Commonwealth Government that it provide access to Commonwealth data sets relevant to the life outcomes of care leavers related to education, employment and social security benefits report on these outcomes through the governance mechanism proposed in recommendation 17 of the Commission's <i>In our own words</i> inquiry. 	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	In Progress	Steady progress on capacity to track outcomes and the department continues to work towards publication of data in 2023.	Progress made	The Commission notes the department's update and looks forward to seeing the published outcomes.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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6		That the department accurately record where young people are transitioning to, at the point they leave care.	Accept	Planned for implementation	The department remains committed to reviewing and updating guidance and functionality to support recording of where young people go when they leave care, noting recent enhancements to CRIS and CRISSP have strengthened data capacity regarding information available about the circumstances of young people post-care.	Planned for implementation	The Commission notes that planning for improved record keeping has not been progressed in the last year.
7		That the Victorian Government increase the funding of Better Futures to ensure the program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can adequately meet its current level of demand, as well as the year-on-year increase in young people eligible for this service • can offer intensive supports to care leavers who need it, including to learn independent living skills, re engage with education or vocational pathways and address mental health and or substance abuse issues • has the capacity to offer all young people support via the Better Futures Community Connections service • can directly support and engage with young people from 16 years of age in preparation for leaving care. 	Accept	Complete	As part of the more than \$1 billion Victoria budget 2020/21 investment in children and families, \$10.3 million was invested in the Better Futures program to more adequately meet demand. This investment will ensure more young people in care have access to a range of tailored supports, helping them prepare for life after care, including education and employment advice, and life-skills coaching. The completion of the three phase evaluation of Better Futures and Home Stretch (anticipated in 2024) will help to inform future developments to the Better Futures model. The Better Futures service delivery model is provisioned to provide hours of service to deliver a range of tailored supports to young people in preparation for leaving care.	Significant progress made – ongoing effort required	The Commission has welcomed the substantial investment to strengthen Better Futures and make supports available to more young people leaving care. We look forward to final evaluations of Better Futures and information about what proportion of care leavers are able to access these supports.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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8		<p>That the Victorian Government ensure that all Aboriginal young people have the opportunity to access culturally safe supports based on their level of need as they transition from care, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at a minimum, allocating a proportion of funding to ACCOs to deliver Better Futures proportionate to Aboriginal young people's representation in the leaving care cohort • working with ACCOs and Aboriginal young people with a lived experience of care to design a culturally safe Better Futures model • reporting annually on the proportion of Better Futures funding which is allocated to ACCOs • giving ACCOs direct access to and control over Better Futures flexible funding • funding ACCOs, who are delivering Better Futures, to also deliver the Community Connections service. 	Changed from Accept in principle to Accept	In progress	The department has funded VACCA and the Aboriginal Children's and Young People's Alliance to develop a range of guides, tools and resources to support delivery of a culturally informed Better Futures response. The department is currently providing fixed term funding to eight ACCOs for 17 ACCO Community Connection roles (until 30 June 2024). The department will continue to explore ongoing funding for these roles.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the funding for ACCOs to deliver culturally safe leaving-care supports and looks forward to seeing further progress in the next year.
9		That the department clarify the role and required capabilities of Better Futures to work with young people with a disability.	Accept	Complete	Training has been delivered to workforces responsible for supporting young people with disability transitioning from care. New training modules are being developed for incorporation into Better Futures state-wide training. E-learning modules are in development alongside new Practice Advice to build capacity of support workers.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the progress made to strengthening training and workforce development and looks forward to seeing this work continue in the future.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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10		<p>That the longitudinal evaluation of Better Futures and Home Stretch should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the effectiveness of Better Futures secondary consultation role in the care team prior to a young person's exit from care, including the extent to which it contributes to improved leaving care planning and activity • the extent to which the Better Futures model enables care leavers to develop a positive and productive working relationship with their worker before they leave care • whether young people with complex needs are receiving the level of support they require to engage successfully with education, training and employment and or mental health and drug rehabilitation services after they leave care. 	Accept	Complete	The Stage Two evaluation of Better Futures and Home Stretch has commenced and the extent to which the needs of care teams and young people are being met by the secondary consultation role of Better Futures workers is in scope of this evaluation.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the inclusion of the Better Futures secondary consultation role in the Stage Two evaluation.
11		That the Victorian Government increase investment in the Home Stretch program to ensure that all care leavers have the option of remaining in their kinship or foster care placements, or transitioning to independent living, with support, until 21 years.	Accept	Acquitted		Acquitted	

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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12		<p>That the Victorian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase investment in post-care housing options for care leavers to a level sufficient to guarantee a secure, stable and safe home for all young people upon leaving care • ensure housing investment for Aboriginal care leavers is proportionate to their over representation among young people leaving care • report annually through the Aboriginal Children’s Forum on housing investment for Aboriginal care leavers as a proportion of funding allocated to all care leaver • develop and implement an integrated and demand driven suite of housing options, which includes housing stock and support services tailored to the diverse needs of young people leaving care. <p>The suite of options should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and public housing stock • a range of supported and step-down accommodation options for young people up to the age of 21 years, who are not yet ready to live independently • a range of culturally safe housing for Aboriginal young people leaving care, including tailored supports. 	Accept in principle	Complete	The 2023–24 State Budget invests \$32.5 million over 4 years with a further \$7.0 million from 2027–28 to 2029–30 to support young people leaving care through guaranteed access to housing and personalised case work support. The Youth Housing Grant round recently announced includes a number of models that specifically cater for the needs of young people leaving care, including two new Village 21 projects in regional Victoria targeting Aboriginal young people.	Complete	The Commission welcomes the large investment and guaranteed access to housing and personalised case work support for care leavers.

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13		<p>That the Victorian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advocate to the Commonwealth to take measures to ensure that the NDIS market offers a diverse and flexible range of Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) options for all care leavers with a disability who require them • advocate to the Commonwealth that the NDIA adopt processes to ensure a seamless continuity of supports to young people with a disability and their carers so these young people can remain with their carers where appropriate following their exit from care • where a seamless continuity of supports is not achieved make available flexible brokerage, including via the Home Stretch program, to assist carers to continue caring until appropriate NDIS supports are in place • increase the number and range of supported accommodation options with appropriate levels of support (including those funded by the NDIS) for care leavers with a disability. <p>Work to fulfil this recommendation should include working with the NDIA to collect and analyse data on the number of care leavers with disability who are unlikely to be eligible for SDA.</p>	Accept in principle	Propose to retire	<p>The department continues to work closely with the NDIA on matters relating to young people with a disability transitioning from care. The joint VIC/NDIA Executive Steering Committee Work Program includes activity associated with earlier and more comprehensive information sharing between parties to support smooth transitions. The work program also includes plans to trial a response to current service gaps to better support young people transitioning from statutory care to adulthood.</p> <p>The Victorian Government is actively engaged in the Independent Review of the NDIS led by the Commonwealth Government and continues to advocate for improved accommodation options in thin markets including adults and children with complex disability needs.</p> <p>Furthermore, the work currently occurring to implement outcomes tracking in Better Futures and the implementation of the Housing First for young people leaving residential care initiative is likely to provide a source of data regarding accommodation outcomes for young people with a disability leaving care, including those unlikely to be eligible for SDA support.</p>	Significant progress made; ongoing systemic effort required.	The Commission notes the department's work both past and ongoing to advocate for options for care leavers with disability. More work is required to collect and analyse data on the number of care leavers with disability who are unlikely to be eligible for SDA as outlined in the original recommendation.

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14		<p>That the Victorian Government ensure young people who have left care have access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> flexible and assertive mental health outreach and substance use support programs brokerage to support timely access to services to respond to their ongoing and unmet mental health and substance use needs. 	Accept in principle	In progress	<p>Newly established Infant, Child and Youth Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services have continued to expand their services in 2023 to provide age-appropriate treatment, care and support for those infants and children aged 0–11 and young people aged 12–25, as recommended by the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System.</p> <p>To provide care for young Victorians from the very beginning, three new Child and Family Health and Wellbeing Locals have been established – providing a one-stop approach to children’s mental health, health and development, and will be integrated with other services including family services. These Locals are situated in Brimbank, Melton, Southern Melbourne and Bendigo. Services have commenced, with each Local expected to ramp up to full capacity by mid-2023.</p> <p>The Victorian Government supports a range of youth AOD services to help vulnerable young people up to the age of 25 years to address their AOD use issues and build resilience. This is achieved through a family-based approach, where appropriate, that is integrated with a range of other services including mental health, education, health, housing, child protection and family services.</p>	Significant progress made	The Commission welcomes the work done to date on the Infant, Child and Youth Area Mental Health Wellbeing Service expansions arising from the Mental Health Royal Commission and looks forward to seeing this work progress in the future.

Progress against past inquiries: *Keep caring*

continued

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15		<p>That the Victorian Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amend the CYFA 2005 to include an enforceable right for young people who leave care between the age of 16 and 18 to receive services and supports to transition to independence until at least the age of 21 • invest in post care supports in a manner which meets this right and is responsive to current and growing future demand for post-care services and supports. 	Accept	In progress	The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021 (the Child Protection Bill) lapsed at the conclusion of the 59th Parliament. The Government remains committed to the aims of the Child Protection Bill and will seek opportunities to progress further legislative changes during the current term of Parliament.	Progress made	The Commission welcomed the Bill previously before Parliament and eagerly awaits the re-introduction of these amendments in the 60th Parliament.