

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 2023–24.

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



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continued

Rec. No.	Recommendation Text	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. 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>	Complete	See response to <i>In our own words</i> – recommendations 1i and 16a.	Significant progress made – ongoing systemic effort required	The Commission considers that while significant progress has been made in this area, and the government is clearly signalling a commitment to ensuring that the Child Protection and funded agency workforce incorporates participation, we also see ongoing evidence in our inquiries that practice has still not changed in too many cases.

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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. 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 care planning • 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 • 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 reconnect or maintain positive connections with family if the young person wishes to do so <p style="text-align: right;"><i>continued next page</i></p>	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>Better Futures Practice Guides and new youth-friendly fact sheets and animations have been developed. In addition, Better Futures Our Way Practice Guide and youth friendly communication materials have been developed specifically for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people. Statewide training, complemented by e-learning modules, has been developed and delivered to support the Better Futures workforce, including the Child Protection workforce.</p>	Completed	The Commission welcomes the finalisation of these resources.

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2.1	<p><i>continued from previous page</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) continues to consider opportunities to improve the cultural planning model. Work commenced on the new model at the 20 February 2024 statewide cultural planning forum.</p> <p>To deliver on the intent of this recommendation, the department will consider opportunities that arise from the ACF's development of the new cultural plan model.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the work that has been done to ensure improvements in cultural planning.
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.	In progress	<p>This recommendation is in progress.</p> <p>To complete this recommendation, work is required to enhance CRIS functionality to improve recording, monitoring and reporting on the development of Cultural Support Plans, planned for late 2024.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the further work that has been done to support Aboriginal children and young people in their leaving care planning and looks forward to seeing the additional measures planned for later in 2024.
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.	In progress	The department notes the work underway to improve the identification and support planning for children and young people in care with a disability. This includes the South Division trial to improve initial disability screening, and opportunities as part of the newly funded Pathways to Good Health program (to be rolled out statewide). The department also notes that full implementation is resource dependent, with investment needed to undertake assessments and implement supports, including functional disability assessments to inform meaningful NDIS plans.	Progress made	The Commission notes the further work that has been completed on this recommendation and that resourcing is needed to ensure all children entering care receive this assessment so that their disability-related needs can be consistently met. This further resourcing and effort is critical.

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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.	Complete	The department considers this recommendation is complete. The department has made improvements to CRIS including new workspace and case overview pages that provide Child Protection and agency staff with visible and accessible leaving care planning processes and recording, including critical leaving care tasks.	Completed	The Commission welcomes the enhancements to CRIS and hopes these will assist practitioners to improve transition planning for young people preparing to leave care.
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. 	Complete	The department considers this recommendation is complete. The department has enhanced the Leaving Care planning monitoring tool, which now provides greater oversight capability regarding Leaving Care activity. The tool provides client level data, refreshed daily, which enables Operations Divisions to closely monitor progress against leaving care planning measures. The department notes that this tool, much like other similar tools, are internal monitoring mechanisms. The department will continue to report through Budget Papers and processes, and through annual reports and processes in relation to public reporting.	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the work that has been done to improve monitoring of transition planning in terms of progress and completion. This Recommendation is also aimed at monitoring improved quality of leaving care planning including in relation to ensuring disability supports are in place. As such work on this recommendation cannot be considered complete.
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.	In progress	This recommendation remains in progress. To complete this recommendation, further work is required to finalise the Practice Advice for child protection practitioners, including collaborating with disability practice advisors and NDIS. Consultation has commenced on this practice advice.	Progress made	The Commission notes the further work planned to acquit this recommendation.

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5	<p>That the Victorian Government:</p> <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. 	In progress	<p>This recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The department has rolled out, statewide, the Better Futures Outcomes Tracking System tool across Better Futures funded providers in late 2023, which has strengthened the department's outcomes monitoring capacity.</p> <p>To complete this recommendation, the department is on track to report (in 2024) on (population level) outcomes data for young people who have left care between the ages of 16 and 18 years.</p>	Progress made	The Commission notes the work that has been done on this recommendation and looks forward to seeing the outcomes report.
6	That the department accurately record where young people are transitioning to, at the point they leave care.	In progress	The department is currently prioritising the delivery of other recommendations and government priorities, and work to further progress delivery of this recommendation is therefore paused at present.	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes that work has not been progressed due to other priorities.

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7	<p>That the Victorian Government increase the funding of Better Futures to ensure the program:</p> <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. 	Complete	<p>The department considers that this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has significantly increased funding for Better Futures and Home Stretch.</p> <p>The 2020–21 State Budget invested an additional \$10.3 million over four years and \$2.7 million ongoing for the Better Futures program. Also included was \$64.7 million over four years and \$43.1 million ongoing to expand the Home Stretch program for all eligible young people. The 2021–22 State Budget invested a further \$39 million over four years and \$13.8 million ongoing so that young people subject to permanent care orders can be supported via Better Futures and Home Stretch.</p> <p>The 2023–24 State Budget invested \$32.5 million over four years for the Housing First for Young People Leaving Residential Care initiative. Housing First will provide guaranteed housing for a minimum of two years, along with case work support and assertive outreach for 225 young people leaving residential care and other settings.</p> <p>Any program expansion would require additional investment and is therefore subject to Victorian Government decisions as part of future budget processes.</p>	Significant progress made – systemic effort required	The Commission welcomes the ongoing significant investment into supports for young people leaving care. We look forward to the stage two Better Futures-Home Stretch evaluation report.

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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. 	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The department has funded ACCOs to deliver Better Futures, including flexible funding and Community Connections. The department reports on this through ACF. The department has also funded VACCA and the Aboriginal Children's and Young People's Alliance, who have developed a range of guides, tools and resources to support delivery of a culturally informed Better Futures response, including youth friendly fact sheets and animations. The Better Futures Our Way resources were launched in early 2024.</p>	Completed	The Commission welcomes the funding to ACCOs for Better Futures and oversight via the Aboriginal Children's Forum.
9	That the department clarify the role and required capabilities of Better Futures to work with young people with a disability.	In progress	<p>The recommendation remains in progress.</p> <p>The department has funded the development and delivery of statewide disability training and resources to support the Better Futures workforce and other partner workforces (occurring through April and May). E-learning modules have been developed to complement the statewide disability training packages and are available online via the canvas platform.</p> <p>To complete this recommendation, further work is required to finalise the Better Futures Disability Guide. The guide will provide Better Futures practitioners with guidance and knowledge to support young people with disability, as well as to understand the resources, services and supports available.</p>	Progress made	The Commission welcomes the work that has been done on the development of guidance material.

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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 for young people with a disability 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>	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>The department is a member of the joint VIC/NDIA Executive Steering Committee Work Program, advocating for care leavers with a disability and progressing joint workplans.</p> <p>The department has also ensured the flexible brokerage continues to be available via both the Better Futures and the Home Stretch program in circumstances where a seamless continuity of support (through NIDS) is not forthcoming.</p> <p>The department proposes that the final element of this recommendation (relating to data collection relating to SDAs) be considered as part of its response to recommendation 5.</p>	Completed	<p>The Commission welcomes the ongoing work occurring to advocate for care leavers with a disability and to ensure flexible brokerage and will look forward to receiving data in relation to SDAs as part of the department's reporting on SDAs.</p>
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. 	Complete	<p>The department considers this recommendation is complete.</p> <p>Flexible brokerage is currently available via the Better Futures and Home Stretch programs to support young people transitioning from care who require timely access to services to respond to their ongoing and unmet mental health and substance use needs. In addition, in the 2021–22 State Budget the government invested significantly in expanding the capacity of Infant, Child and Youth Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services.</p>	Completed	<p>The Commission is pleased to see the supports that have been put in place to support young people transitioning from care who need ongoing access to services for mental health and substances use needs.</p>

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15	That the Victorian Government 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 AND 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.	In progress	Completion of this recommendation is subject to Victorian Government decisions and Parliamentary processes. The department notes that young people continue to receive support via Better Futures and Home Stretch without the need for legislative change.	Not progressed in current reporting year	The Commission notes that this has not progressed since the last update provided and urges the government to re-introduce these important amendments for the protection of young care leavers.