



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

Home Stretch WA

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is Home Stretch WA?

Home Stretch WA provides young people leaving Out of Home Care with the option to continue to receive support up until the age of 21 years.

The Home Stretch WA model was co-designed with young people with lived experience of transitioning from care, with a particular focus on the needs of young Aboriginal people and their families.

The Department of Communities is partnering with community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (Home Stretch WA service providers) to deliver the Home Stretch WA program across the State.

What are the key elements of the Home Stretch WA model?

A Smooth Transition - Working together with a young person and their support circle from age of 17.5 years to ensure a smooth transition into the Home Stretch WA program and a seamless continuation of support until the age of 21 years. Ensuring young people are aware of their rights and can independently access support they are entitled to until the age of 25 years.

Transition Coach - A consistent youth worker who works with young people to provide flexible, one to one support focused on coaching towards independence, (with a maximum caseload of 12 young people). The Transition Coach works from a set of practice principles ensuring support provided is focused on building a young person's self reliance, skills, capacity and connection to community, culture and country.

Invest in Me Fund - (\$2,500 per young person per annum) gives young people the 'right' to a visible and secure financial safety net for resources to support them towards their aspirations and goals, or for crisis relief. Invest in Me funding is provided through the coaching relationship and administered by Home Stretch WA service providers.

Staying On Agreement and Subsidy - Young people can be supported to continue 'staying on' with a carer to ensure they have a stable living arrangement until age of 21 years. This includes a continuation of payments and support to foster and family carers with an expectation that a young person will contribute to their living expenses from their independent income. The focus of Staying On agreements is to support the young person's emerging independence. These payments will be administered by Communities.

Housing Allowance - Young people can be supported to access a Home Stretch WA Housing Allowance that can assist them to afford a broader range of living arrangements, and includes an emphasis on providing them the skills and supports they need to secure and maintain safe and stable housing.

Support Circles – A primary focus of support provided to young people is to grow and maintain an enduring network of personal, family and community connections. This support also include the offer of assistance to map out connections to family, community and culture, and to help reconnect with family and historic relationships.

Who will provide Home Stretch WA services?

Communities is delivering an interim service provision model to deliver Home Stretch WA service across the state through to 2024.

Yorganop has been contracted to deliver Home Stretch WA service to young Aboriginal care leavers in metropolitan Perth.

Existing Leaving Care Service Providers in metropolitan Perth will be engaged to further support service delivery in metropolitan areas.

A Registration of Interest process will be facilitated across the state, targeting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) resulting in a staged interim service provision across regional WA.

Do Home Stretch WA service providers offer after hours support?

The Home Stretch WA service provider typically provides support to young people during office hours.

One of the key elements of Home Stretch WA is to build a young person's interdependence on mainstream services and supports. If a young person is struggling with any issues that requires access to supports after hours, their Transition Coach will support them to understand and connect them with appropriate specialist or mainstream supports in the community. For vulnerable young people this will be developed and agreed through a safety and wellbeing plan.

Young people are also supported to understand their rights and to access assistance in an emergency. During office hours this would be provided through the Home Stretch WA service provider. After hours young people can contact Crisis Care and identify themselves as a care leaver and part of a Home Stretch WA service program.

Young people's engagement in Home Stretch WA will be flagged and recorded on ASSIST database so that any after-hours support that is provided can be communicated to the relevant Home Stretch WA service provider.

Eligibility

Who is eligible for Home Stretch WA?

Home Stretch WA is gradually being introduced across WA as part of broader reform work that is improving how support is offered and provided to young people transitioning from out-of-home care. To ensure that the program can be scaled across the state with integrity to the co-designed model of care, a number of eligibility criteria have been established including:

- Turning the age of 18 years on or after 1 July 2022

- Connected to a Department of Communities district office that has a commissioned Home Stretch WA service provider.
- Eligibility for Home Stretch WA is also determined by a young person's eligibility for leaving care support legislation set out in *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (Act no. 2004/034), these criteria include:
 - a) the person has left the CEO's care;
 - b) the person is under 25 years of age; and
 - c) at any time after the person reached 15 years of age they were:
 - the subject of a protection order (time limited) or protection order (until the age of 18 years);
 - was the subject of a negotiated placement agreement in force for a continuous period of at least six months; or
 - was provided with placement services under section 32(1)(a) of the Act for a continuous period of at least six months.

Are young people who were on Special Guardianship Order eligible for Home Stretch WA?

Young people who were placed on a Special Guardianship Order after turning the age of 15 years are eligible for Home Stretch WA and leaving care support.

Young people who are placed on a Special Guardianship Order before they turn age of 15 years will not be eligible for leaving care or Home Stretch WA services due to not meeting legislation requirements under section 96.

Are young people living in a regional area eligible for Home Stretch WA?

Home Stretch WA is being rolled out across the state in stages.

As of August 2022, Home Stretch WA service providers are only available in the Perth metropolitan area. The program will be available in all regional areas in the coming months as Communities secures service providers in regional locations through its staged roll out.

Are young people with disabilities eligible for Home Stretch WA, including those under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)?

Yes, if they meet the eligibility criteria. For young people living with a disability that limits their capacity to live independently, or for young people who have complex care needs (NATS 5), the following eligibility criteria must be met:

- The young person must have the capacity to make an informed choice about engaging with Home Stretch WA service provider.

- NDIS support packages must be in place and appropriately resourced to meet the daily living needs of the young person.
- A funded coordination function must be included in the NDIS package.
- Subsidy payments required to support a young person to Stay On with carers are equal to or less than \$450 per fortnight limit.

For young people living with a disability and meeting eligibility criteria above, referrals made to a Home Stretch WA service provider must not be intended to substitute for, or create a temporary solution in lieu of, an appropriate support package through the NDIS.

Additional co-design work is currently being undertaken to support how the Home Stretch WA model can better meet the needs of young people with disability and their carers.

It is anticipated that this work will inform how Home Stretch WA provides supports in the coming months, and future contracting of Home Stretch WA services from 2024.

Can young people be supported by a Leaving Care Service Provider and Home Stretch WA service at the same time?

No, young people cannot access one-on-one support from both Leaving Care Services and Home Stretch WA at the same time. Young people will be provided with information about their options and the difference in the level of support and resourcing available to them as part of the initial discussions with the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach.

If a young person has already commenced support through a leaving care service then they will be offered the choice of transitioning to the Home Stretch WA service provider or remaining with the leaving care service.

How much information about a young persons progress is shared with the District office while they are supported by Home Stretch WA?

Young people involved in the co-design identified that they would like to have control over what information is shared between the district office and the Home Stretch WA service provider after they turn the age of 18 years.

Transition Coaches will negotiate with young people what information they would like shared with staff in a district office.

When a young person opts out of Home Stretch WA, or if they age out at age of 21 years, the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach will work with the young person to complete a Handover Summary document that provides information about the young person's current support circle, the support's provided to a young person, and a summary of the financial assistance they received. The document will also outline any potential areas of financial support the young person might request from a district office after age of 21 years

Referral

Referral is a Choice!

The referral process to Home Stretch WA has been co-designed with young people, their carers and other support people. It is centred around the idea of providing the young person with an informed choice about whether to engage in extended supports through Home Stretch WA.

Young people should be advised of their choices around leaving care supports early in planning, and in developmentally appropriate ways. This includes providing them with information about their choice to engage in Home Stretch WA from age 18 to 21 years. Referrals cannot be made to Home Stretch WA service providers until the young person reaches age of 17 years.

How to refer?

All referrals are to be made by a district office, either by a young person's case manager or the relevant leaving care team member.

The referral form is a simple process that provides basic information about a young person's circumstances and their potential level of support. While the referral doesn't require a young person to sign the referral form, they must provide consent to the referral.

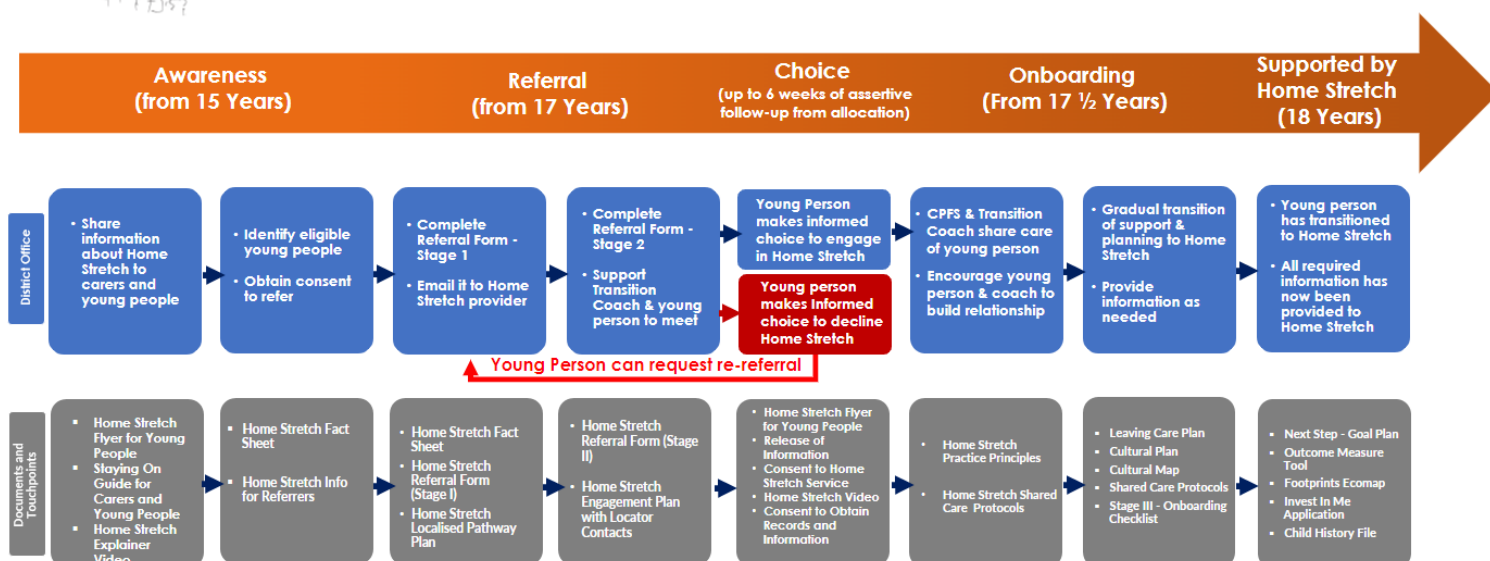
This referral is sent to the relevant Home Stretch WA service provider who will allocate a Transition Coach to follow up the referral and invite a young person to meet for an initial information session.

Any eligible young person, with assistance from their carer or other support people, can request to be referred to a Home Stretch WA service provider at any district office.

A Transition Coach will follow up for a maximum of six weeks to engage the young person. As part of this engagement, the Transition Coach will seek input and guidance from a young person's carer or other support people to inform how best to offer the service to them.



How to Refer a Young Person to Home Stretch



When to refer?

Young people can be referred from any time after they reach the age of 17 years, and up to the time they reach the age of 20 years and 9 months. If a young person is older than 20 years of age, they should be encouraged to explore alternative support services either through the existing Leaving Care Service providers, or services that are specialist to their needs (e.g. Youth Housing Provider). Home Stretch WA is a service offering from ages 18 to 21 years.

Why aren't Home Stretch WA referrals made at the same time as referrals to leaving care providers?

The Home Stretch WA model was co-designed with young people who strongly advocated for the referral and onboarding process to occur at a developmentally appropriate stage, when they are better prepared to make decisions about their future. Ensuring the referral includes contemporary information and is aligned with a young person's current support needs and goals allows for a smooth transition of support into a Home Stretch WA service.

While young people were often referred at 15 to leaving care services, very few young people engaged with those services until they were age 17 or 18 years and the prospect of leaving care was a reality for them.

What if a young person would benefit from Home Stretch WA but is unwilling to agree to the referral?

It can be frustrating to know that a young person may benefit from supports provided by Home Stretch WA but is unwilling to even consider it as an option. Giving young people the opportunity to review the Home Stretch WA Service offer video and encouraging them to talk through the option with people in their support circles are helpful ways to support young people to make the right choice for them.

It is also important to be clear about the alternative leaving care supports available to the young person after they reach the age of 18 years and encourage them to make an informed choice from all their options. Validating and supporting young people's choice and agency is an important part of building positive help-seeking and self-reliance.

Home Stretch WA service providers will aim to embed Transition Coaches in each district office (for a few hours every fortnight). This provides an opportunity for young people who are ambivalent or unsure of whether Home Stretch WA is for them to meet in a more informal space and find out more about the service.

What if a young person declines the Home Stretch WA but later changes their mind?

Young people have the option to request a referral into Home Stretch WA through any district office up to the time they reach the age of 20 years and 9 months.

If a young person returns to a district office after the age of 18 years to seek assistance, the district duty officer or leaving care team should offer the young person the opportunity to be referred to Home Stretch WA.

Carers

How are foster or family carers supported by Home Stretch WA?

Young people and their carers who choose to be supported to continue a stable living arrangement with their existing foster or family care placement will be supported through a Staying On Agreement (The Agreement). The Agreement is an opportunity to identify and map out the supports and resources needed by the carer and the young person to make the living arrangement successful.

Under a Staying On Agreement, a carer has access to one-to-one support and links to services through the Staying On Facilitator as part of the Home Stretch WA offering. The focus of support of Home Stretch WA is the young person, and while support is provided to the carer it is less intensive than supports typically provided to carers of young people under the age of 18 years. .

What if there are other children living with the same foster or family carer ?

Young people who are supported through a Staying On Agreement in a home that houses other children in care will be assisted to gain a Working with Children Check, as a requirement of all adults staying in a foster home.

Where the carer is supported by other foster care supports through the Department of Communities, or a Community Service Organisation, the Staying On Agreement will include consideration of how those issues and existing supports provided might align with that provided through Home Stretch WA.

Can Home Stretch WA fund an extension of a specialised foster care placement or provide an interim payment for carers transitioning to become Abilities Carers?

The Home Stretch WA Staying On resource is not sufficient to cover the costs of a specialised foster carer arrangement, nor has it been designed to provide a temporary subsidy payment to accommodate any delays in a young person's transition to being supported by the NDIS.

In these situations, district offices must work in partnership with the carers, support agencies and NDIS providers to resolve the gap through an individualised agreement outside of the Home Stretch WA model.

Can a biological parent be paid a Housing Allowance or Staying On subsidy?

Many young people leaving care will choose return to their biological families to explore those relationships and reconnect, some will even choose to live with families they were removed from.

Home Stretch WA service provides structured support to young people to explore and make safe connections with their biological family, but cannot provide any financial payment or support to living arrangements with family members from whom they were removed.

Can a young person return to a historic foster or family care arrangement under Home Stretch WA Staying On?

Young people and their historic foster carers can be supported to establish a Staying On Agreement or Home Stretch WA Housing Allowance, the choice of payment will be dependent on whether the carers are still registered as foster carers.

The Staying On Facilitator can support these arrangements through the Housing Allowance payment, but using the Staying On practice framework.

If a young person Stays On with an existing foster/family carer – does this carer need to have insurance?

Staying On isn't a foster placement, it's a choice made by adults to continue a living arrangement. Home Stretch WA provides a subsidy to support the young persons contribution to living costs.

The Home Stretch Transition Coach will discuss health insurance (particularly ambulance cover) with all young people as part of holistic planning across the eight domains, and can also be discussed in the negotiation of a Staying On Agreement.

If there is an identified need for health, home or care insurance, the Home Stretch Transition Coach will work with the young person around planning for that expense and their contribution. This might include using Invest In Me Funding to support or may include chipping in to the family health insurance policy, or supporting the young person to learn how to take out their own ambulance (or health) insurance.

Funding

How much funding do young people have direct access to under Home Stretch WA?

Under Home Stretch WA, each young person is allocated an indicative cap of \$2,500 per annum called an Invest In Me Fund, that is delegated to their Home Stretch WA service provider.

Data on spending from the Home Stretch WA Trial indicated that not all young people will need to access their full Invest In Me funding allocation each year.

The amount available to young people is also calculated pro-rata dependent on when they were onboarded into the program.

Transition Coaches and Home Stretch WA service providers must adhere to the Invest In Me practice guidelines and ensure young people are also accessing mainstream resources and contributing towards their own costs. Ideally a young person's needs around Invest In Me would reduce each year as their financial self-reliance increases.

Some young people may need to access more than \$2,500 in a financial year, and an application for an additional Invest In Me allowance can be made within a Home Stretch WA Program.

Each provider must independently manage their Invest In Me funding pool to accommodate the range of financial supports needed by different young people.

Do young people on Home Stretch WA still have access to leaving care funding?

Yes, if the young person meets leaving care eligibility criteria.

Home Stretch WA service provides access to Invest in Me funding directly through their Transition Coach. The Invest In Me funding approach has been designed to improve young people's access to resources, but also focuses support on developing their capacity to be financially self-reliant.

Should a young person engaged in the Home Stretch WA program also receive financial support through the leaving care fund then a district office should advise the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach. This will enable the Transition Coach to work with the young person ensuring their needs are met whilst also supporting the move to independence and self-management of finances.

If a young person's leaving care plan includes a commitment to pay significant expenses, how will these costs be covered? [incl. flights back to country, Dental Surgery]

If a Leaving Care Plan stipulates the Department of Communities will pay for significant costs, particularly those costs that would exhaust a young person's Invest In Me fund, then payment towards these costs must be covered through the Leaving Care Fund (LCF). Please note, the LCF has its own cost centre within the Department of Communities and is not part of a districts budget.

When a young person is onboarded into Home Stretch WA, their Transition Coach will support the development of the Leaving Care Plan and assist the district office and young person to understand the financial supports available through Home Stretch WA.

Where a young person has already left care, the Transition Coach will obtain a copy of the Leaving Care Plan and support the young person to liaise with the district office where applicable to identify and resolve any issues related to outstanding financial assistance on a case-by-case basis.

More Information

How do young people find out more about the Home Stretch WA program?

The Home Stretch WA Community of Practice has developed a range of communication resources, videos and flyers about the Home Stretch WA service offer. These have been designed to provide young people and their carers with information in bite size chunks to support decision making.

The Home Stretch WA model allows young people from the age of 17 years to be referred to a Home Stretch WA service provider for an information session to find out more about their choice.

The Home Stretch WA program is voluntary. Young people can talk with their Department of Communities caseworker or another worker at a district office about the program. If they wish to take up the offer of support, a referral to a Home Stretch WA service provider can be made by the caseworker or the district office.

To find out more information

To find out more about Home Stretch WA, please visit our website or send an email to the Home Stretch WA project team at Department of Communities.

- **Website:** www.communities.wa.gov.au/homestretchwa
- **Email:** homestretchwa@communities.wa.gov.au