



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



# Home Stretch WA Invest in Me Fund

**Guidelines for Home Stretch WA Providers**

**August 2023**

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# 1 Background

These guidelines outline how the Invest in Me portion of the Home Stretch WA funding provided by the Department of Communities (Communities) to Home Stretch WA providers can be used.

This funding is a key component of the service model and has been provided to Home Stretch WA providers so young people are appropriately supported and have quicker access to goods and services as and when required as part of their supports through the Home Stretch WA program.

# 2 Legislation

The *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act) sets out provisions about leaving the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO's) care – Part 4, Division 6.

Under s.96 of the Act, a person qualifies for assistance if:

- they have left the CEO's care,
- they are under 25 years of age,
- at any time after turning 15 years of age, they were:
  - the subject of a protection order (time-limited) or protection order (until 18),
  - the subject of a negotiated placement agreement that was in force for a continuous period of at least six months, or
  - provided with a placement service under s.32(1)(a) of the Act for a continuous period of at least six months.

Under s.98 of the Act, the CEO must ensure that a young person who leaves care is provided with any social services considered appropriate, having regard to the young person's needs.

Under s.99 of the Act, the CEO must ensure that a young person who qualifies for assistance is provided with services to help them to do one or more of the following:

- obtain accommodation,
- undertake education and training,
- obtain employment,
- obtain legal advice,
- access health services,
- access counselling services.

Section 100 of the Act sets out the provisions for financial assistance. If the young person qualifies for assistance, they may be provided with financial assistance in the form of:

- a contribution to expenses incurred in obtaining, furnishing and equipping accommodation, or

- a contribution to expenses incurred by the young person to live near the place where they are or will be:
  - employed or seeking employment, or
  - undertaking education or training, or
  - a grant to enable the young person to meet expenses connected with their education or training.

This assistance can be provided directly by a Home Stretch WA provider from the Invest in Me Fund portion of the funding provided by Communities (under the grant agreement).

The Invest in Me Fund must be utilised in line with these guidelines, the Home Stretch WA Community of Practice Invest in Me Practice Guide, Communities policies, and the reporting requirements specified through the grant agreement.

### **3 The Invest in Me Fund**

The Invest in Me Fund is monies provided to purchase goods and/or services to address each young person's needs. It gives a young person the right to a visible and secure financial safety net for resources to support them towards their aspirations and goals, or for crisis relief.

The use of the Invest in Me Fund is flexible and should be tailored to the individual.

### **4 Access to Communities Leaving Care Fund**

To support its statutory obligations, Communities developed a Leaving Care Fund to support young people as part of their preparation for leaving care and to provide support to young people who have left care and return for post care assistance.

The Invest in Me Fund is provided to Home Stretch WA providers as a primary source of financial support and brokerage for young people who opt-in to the Home Stretch WA program. Due to the limitations of funding available, young people can still be supported to access the Leaving Care Fund through a district office for significant expenses that cannot be reasonably afforded through the available Invest in Me Fund. Some of these high-cost items/services (such as dental work) may have been identified prior to the young person leaving care and should be detailed and approved in their Leaving Care Plan.

### **Supporting the smooth transition of young people to the program**

Home Stretch WA supports young people from the age of 18 until they reach 21. However, to support the smooth transition of young people to the program, a Home Stretch WA Transition Coach will work with them from 17 ½ years of age.

The smooth transition approach is about building trust and engagement with a Transition Coach who works together with the young persons' case manager up until the young person reaches the age of 18. During the smooth transition stage, young people are still in care and must access all financial supports through their child protection case manager and the district office.

As part of an engagement strategy with young people, Transition Coaches require access to small amounts of funding to cover the costs of activities that build trust and create opportunities to spend time in more informal settings and locations for meetings.

District offices are authorised to fund up to \$200 in costs (per young person) incurred by a Home Stretch WA provider working with young people who have consented to opt-in to the program to support the smooth transition phase. Funding is from Communities Leaving Care Fund.

## 5 Principles for use of the Invest in Me Fund

Use of the Invest in Me Fund is guided by the following principles:

- The Invest in Me Fund is to be used where no appropriate alternate funding option is available – for example, Commonwealth payments and allowances, including the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA), or State funded programs and initiatives.
- The Invest in Me Fund must be used in a consistent, transparent and fair manner to ensure equitable access to goods and services for all young people being supported by Home Stretch WA providers.
- Home Stretch WA recognises young people as adults, with access to their own incomes either through either employment or income support payments. The use of the Invest in Me Fund is undertaken with the understanding that young people have capacity and are expected to contribute to their own costs.
- Use of the Invest in Me Fund should be linked to developing financial literacy and achievement of goals identified by young people as part of their support planning through their Home Stretch WA Transition Coach.
- Young people should be involved in any planning or decision making regarding their leaving care needs and the goods/services required to address those needs.
- Home Stretch WA providers should work together with a District Office and young people between 17½ and 18 (smooth transition stage) to ensure the Leaving Care Plan and any commitments made towards financial costs are well planned and appropriately resourced.

- Prior to using the Invest in Me Fund to purchase goods or services, Home Stretch WA providers must support young people to explore alternative sources, particularly ensuring there are no other sources that may be less expensive or free. This will involve effective networking to have a good knowledge of available services and referral mechanisms, and support to young people to assist them to access mainstream services and resources beyond the child protection system.
- Value for money should be considered when planning to use the Invest in Me Fund. Goods and services purchased should be appropriate to young people's needs and of the highest quality possible within the available resources.
- Home Stretch WA providers may use the Invest in Me Fund to purchase food and supplies for young people. However, all other avenues for the provision of free or low-cost food and supplies must be explored beforehand.
- Home Stretch WA providers shall not make a loan from brokerage funding, nor allow young people to be placed under any obligation to repay Invest in Me monies.

## 6 Use of the Invest in Me Fund

A range of goods and services can be purchased using the Invest in Me Fund. Table 1 sets out items that under normal circumstances are funded by Communities from its Leaving Care Fund. This should be used as a guide only. Other items may also be purchased using the Invest in Me Fund as per the young person's needs, including those identified in their Leaving Care Plan.

**Table 1 – Invest in Me Fund: Goods and services that may be purchased**

Items	Notes
Obtaining a Motor Driver's Licence (including supervised driver hours)	The Invest in Me Fund can cover all costs associated with obtaining a driver's licence
Funding for educational expenses, for example: textbooks, computers, laptops and other educational equipment	Young people who intend to study with a State Training Provider (formerly known as TAFE) should be assisted to access the fee waiver initiative
Employment related expenses, for example: essential employment equipment including safety gear	Young people should be encouraged to apply for other relevant concessions and alternative sources of funding through employment support providers

Items	Notes
Housing and accommodation establishment costs, for example: bond, utility connection fees, furniture and essential household items	Young people should be assisted to apply for TILA (a one-off payment of up to \$1,500) where this funding has not already been used
Health and dental services including counselling, for example: significant and ongoing health and dental treatment (not met through the public system within a reasonable timeframe), and ambulance cover for the first three years after leaving care	Young people should be encouraged to access the public health system where possible
Legal advice	Where possible, young people should be encouraged to access the Youth Legal Service, Legal Aid WA or Aboriginal Legal Service of WA

## What the Invest in Me Fund cannot be used for

The Invest in Me Fund is not intended for:

- Program funding, asset and/or maintenance costs or staffing costs for the Home Stretch WA provider.
- Payment of a subsidy to a foster or family carer or rental subsidy for independent or supported accommodation.
- An income supplement for a young person involved in the Home Stretch WA program.
- An alternative to free or low-cost goods or services available in the community.
- Health care costs that can be met through the public health system. This includes attending medical clinics that bulk bill or services where costs are partially reimbursed through Medicare, using public dental health clinics and the Closing the Gap – PBS Co-Payment program.
- The purchase of alcohol, cigarettes, or illegal substances.
- Any other items that do not directly support meeting the goals of the young person in the Home Stretch WA program to attain or maintain independence.

## 7 Administration

Home Stretch WA providers must follow these guidelines and the Invest in Me practice tools developed by the Home Stretch WA Community of Practice, ensuring that young people are provided access to the Invest in Me Fund in a timely manner.

The Invest in Me Fund is only accessible by young people once they reach the age of 18 and leave statutory care. Prior to that, the source of funding and financial support is through case support costs or the Leaving Care Fund through a Communities District Office.

The Invest in Me Fund amount will be provided to Home Stretch WA providers as part of the grant funding approved by Communities.

An estimated average annual spending of \$2,500 per young person per financial year was used to calculate the Invest in Me Fund amount provided by Communities to Home Stretch WA providers. In remote regional areas, this may be greater to adjust for high cost of living and transport costs.

This funding is provided as a brokerage tool, and Home Stretch WA providers will be responsible for determining the allocation of funds to each young person, based on their individual needs. The amount expended on a young person may vary (up or down) depending on their identified needs.

Home Stretch WA providers should not aim to exhaust the \$2,500 per young person per year, but rather work with each young person according to their individual needs and capacity to contribute to their own costs.

Home Stretch WA providers must ensure that any use of brokerage above the budgeted \$2,500 per individual per year will not affect the availability of funding required to support other young people in the program during that financial year.

Funding available for young people who access the Home Stretch WA service part way through a financial year should be calculated on a pro-rata basis to ensure there is equity for young people across the length of their engagement with the Home Stretch WA provider.

There will be no additional funds provided over each 12-month period if the Invest in Me Fund is expended earlier.

## **Reporting requirements**

Home Stretch WA providers are required to complete and provide information about the financial assistance provided to young people in the program using an agreed template (Home Stretch WA Service Tracking Tool) developed by the Community of Practice.

Where a provider wishes to track and monitor Invest in Me spending using an alternative database or within a Client Records System, the data collected and recorded must be consistent with identified minimum data set defined in the agreed template. Due dates for reporting will be aligned with other reporting schedules for the grant agreement.



## Summary of Invest in Me Fund expenditure

Tracking of expenditure from the Invest in Me Fund must be maintained by Home Stretch WA providers for each young person.

The tracking of expenditure must record how the Invest in Me Fund was utilised and follow the data definitions developed by the Community of Practice and Independent Evaluation.

At the end of each six-month period, a report must be provided by the Home Stretch WA provider to Communities that outlines the expenditure for each young person supported during the reporting period including:

- the amount and general nature of the assistance provided through the Invest in Me Fund, mapped to the relevant life domain,
- the total amount of financial assistance provided to the young person,
- whether the assistance was a crisis relief payment or an investment towards aspirational outcomes; and
- any relevant qualitative data collected over the reporting period regarding outcomes generated from using the Invest in Me Fund.

# Document control

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## Amendments

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1	September 2022	Senior Project Officer	Draft guidelines
2	January 2022	Senior Project Officer	Review of draft guidelines and additional information added on supporting the smooth transition of young people to the program
3	February 2023	Manager Community of Practice	Review and Endorsement from Community of Practice
4	June 2023	Senior Project Officer	Updated after review by Guiding Panel – Final version
5	July 2023	Principle Project Officer	Final review post Steering Committee input
6	15.9.2023	Executive Director Ben Whitehouse	Approved final versions.

