



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 at 18 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 Home Stretch WA program is voluntary, young people must consent to participate.

The Department of Communities is partnering with community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (Home Stretch WA service providers) to deliver the 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 the 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 the young person is 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 a young person 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 – 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 (\$2,500 per young person per annum). Invest in Me funding is provided through the coaching relationship and administered by Home Stretch WA service providers.

Staying On Agreement and Subsidy – A young person can be supported to continue 'staying on' with a foster or family carer to ensure they have a stable living arrangement until the age of 21 years. This includes a continuation of payments and support to the carer 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 are administered by Communities.

Housing Allowance – A young person can be supported to access a Housing Allowance to help them afford a broader range of living arrangements. When accessing this financial support, there is an emphasis on providing the young person with the skills and supports they need to secure and maintain safe and stable housing. These payments are administered by Communities.

Support Circles – A primary focus of support provided to a young person to grow and maintain an enduring network of personal, family and community connections. This support also includes 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?

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

Yorganop will deliver the program to eligible young Aboriginal people in metropolitan Perth.

Wanslea will deliver the program to all eligible young people in the Rockingham and Peel areas, with Salvation Army servicing all other areas of metropolitan Perth.

Mission Australia will deliver the program to eligible young people in the South-West region and has partnered with Albany Youth Support Association to support them in delivering the program in the Great Southern region.

A Registration of Interest process, targeting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), is being used to gauge the level of interest of organisations to deliver Home Stretch WA across the state. The result being a staged interim service provision across regional WA. Commissioning of Home Stretch WA services is underway in the East and West Kimberley and Pilbara regions.

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 a vulnerable young person, this will be developed and agreed through a safety and wellbeing plan.

The young person will also be 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. The young person can contact Crisis Care after hours and identify themselves as a care leaver and part of a Home Stretch WA service program.

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, several eligibility criteria have been established. These include:

- The young person turned 18 years old on or after 1 July 2022.
- The young person is connected to a Department of Communities district office and there is a Home Stretch WA provider available in the area where the young person lives.
- The young person is eligible for leaving care assistance as set out in the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (section 96) –
 - a) the person has left the CEO's care; and
 - b) the person is under 25 years of age; and
 - c) at any time after the person reached 15 years of age they were:
 - I. the subject of a protection order (time limited) or protection order (until 18); or
 - II. the subject of a negotiated placement agreement in force for a continuous period of at least six months; or
 - III. 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 a Special Guardianship Order eligible for Home Stretch WA?

Young people who were placed on a Special Guardianship Order after turning 15 years old are eligible for Home Stretch WA and qualify for leaving care assistance (under s.96 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*), provided the Special Guardianship Order was replacing a protection order (time-limited) or protection order (until 18).

Young people who were placed on a Special Guardianship Order before they turned 15 years old are not eligible for leaving care assistance or the Home Stretch WA program due to not meeting legislation requirements under s.96 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*.

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 November 2022, Home Stretch WA service providers are only available in metropolitan Perth (which includes the Peel region). The program will be available in the South West and Great Southern regions in the coming months. The Department of Communities is working to secure service providers in other 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 a young person living with a disability that limits their capacity to live independently, or where a young person has complex care needs (NAT Level 5), the following eligibility criteria must be met:

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

If a young person meets the 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.

It is important to note that a Staying On Subsidy is not available where the carer is in receipt of, or eligible for, the Centrelink Carer Payment. This is because the Carer Payment rate (and any supplementary payments and allowances where relevant) will be much more than the Staying On Subsidy, which is \$450 per fortnight in the first year. However, the young person and carer would have all other supports available under Home Stretch WA such as one-to-one support from a Transition Coach and the young person would have access to Invest In Me funding as required.

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

It is anticipated 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, a young person cannot access one-on-one support from a Leaving Care Service provider and Home Stretch WA service at the same time. A young person 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 a Home Stretch WA service provider or to remain with the Leaving Care Service.

How much information about a young person's progress is shared with the district office while they are supported by a Home Stretch WA provider?

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

The Transition Coach will negotiate with the young person on 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 21 years, the Home Stretch WA Transition Coach will work with the young person to complete a Handover Summary document. The document will provide information about the young person's current support circle, the supports being provided to the 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 the 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.

A young person 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 when they turn 15 years of age. Referrals cannot be made to Home Stretch WA service providers until the young person reaches 17 years old.

How do young people get referred?

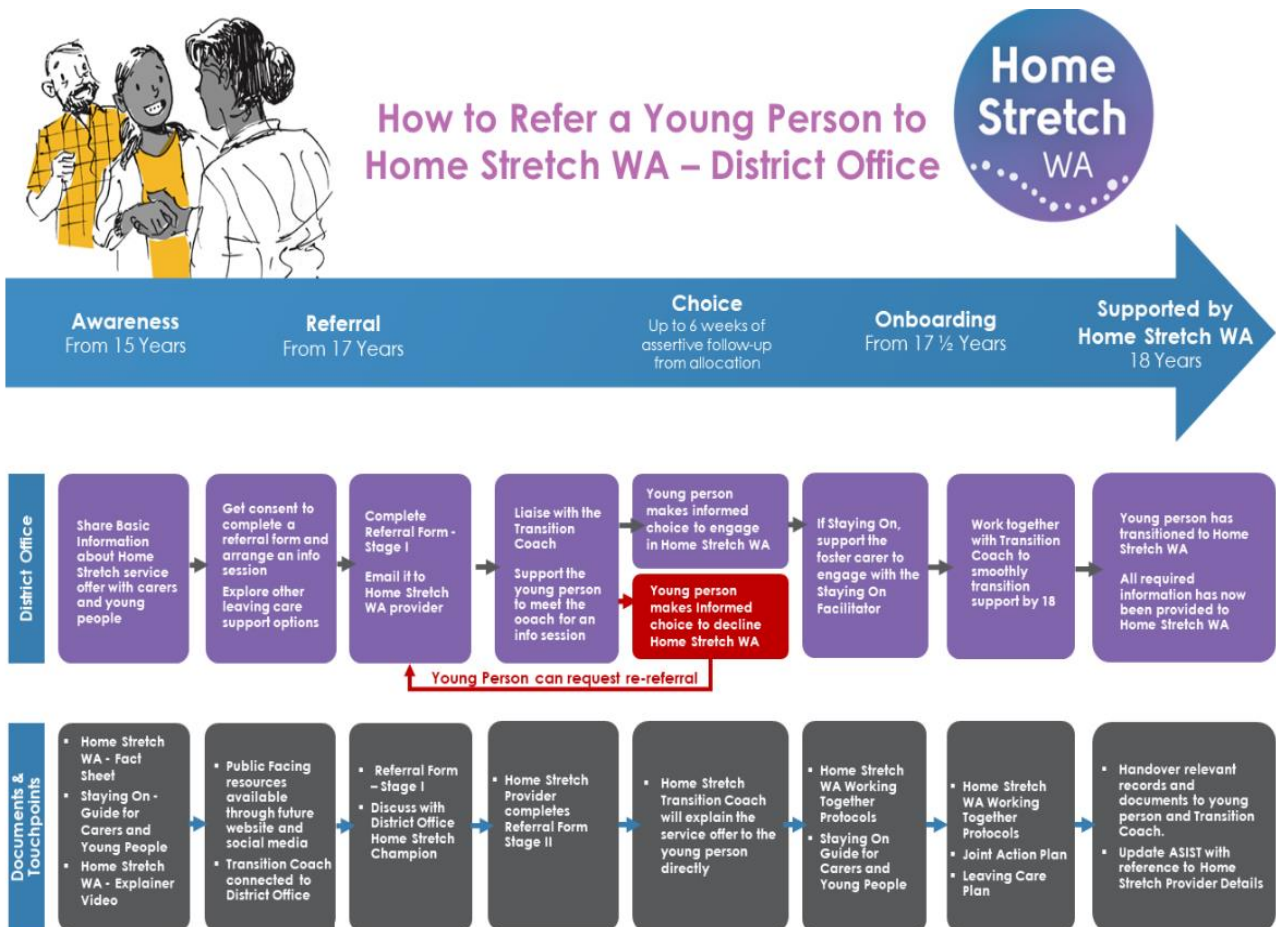
All referrals are to be made by a district office, either by a young person’s case manager or the relevant leaving care team member.

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 form doesn’t require a young person to sign it, they must provide consent to the referral being made.

The completed referral form 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 about Home Stretch WA.

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.



When can young people be referred?

A young person 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 current Leaving Care Service providers or services that are specialist to their current needs (e.g. homelessness service, mental health service). 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 Service 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 are often referred by the district office at 15 years of age to a Leaving Care Service provider, very few engage with the service until they are 17 or 18 when the prospect of leaving the care system is 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 the young person the opportunity to review the Home Stretch WA service offer video and encouraging them to talk through the option with people in their support circle are helpful ways to support them 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 a young person'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 a young person who is ambivalent or unsure of whether Home Stretch WA is for them to meet in a more informal space and find out more about the program.

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

The young person will 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.

It is the responsibility of the Home Stretch WA provider to let them know how to reconnect, and also to let the referrer in the district office know of the same information.

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 and Staying On

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

A young person who chooses to take up the Home Stretch WA offer and wishes to continue in a stable living arrangement with their foster or family carer (where the carer agrees) 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 young person to make the living arrangement successful.

While the focus of Home Stretch WA support is around the young person and their needs, under the 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. However, this support is less intensive than the supports typically provided to a foster carer of a young person in care (i.e. under the age of 18 years).

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

A young person who is 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 a carer under the NDIS?

The Home Stretch WA Staying On Subsidy is not sufficient to cover the costs of a specialised foster care 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. It also cannot be used as an additional or supplementary payment to another carer payment.

In these situations, the district office may choose to work in partnership with the carer, support agencies and NDIS provider to resolve the gap through an individualised agreement outside of the Home Stretch WA supports.

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

A young person and their previous foster carers can be supported to establish a Staying On Agreement or Housing Allowance, the choice of payment will be dependent on whether the carers are still approved foster carers.

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

If a young person stays on with a foster or 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 person's contribution to living costs.

The Home Stretch WA Transition Coach will discuss health insurance (particularly ambulance cover) with the young person as part of holistic planning across the eight domains. This 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 Transition Coach will work with the young person around planning for that expense and their contribution. This might include using the Invest In Me Fund (refer below) and may include the young person 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.

Housing Allowance

What is the Housing Allowance payment?

A young person who is not living with a carer under a Staying On Agreement can be supported by their Home Stretch WA provider to access a Housing Allowance payment that will assist them to afford a broader range of living arrangements. To create equity with those under a Staying On Agreement, the maximum rate of Housing Allowance payment per fortnight is the same as for the Staying On Subsidy.

The Housing Allowance can be used to support a young person to live in shared housing, or to setup boarding or lodging living arrangements with a relative, friend or in a host home. The fortnightly Housing Allowance amount is individually negotiated with each young person and paid directly to their landlord.

How is the Housing Allowance different to a Staying On Subsidy?

A living arrangement funded under a Housing Allowance may offer a young person the same level of support as under a Staying On Agreement, for example, where a young person is living with a relative or extended family member. Therefore, the maximum rate of payment is the same as a Staying On subsidy. Other living arrangements supported under the Housing Allowance may not provide any level of support and the allowance will only provide a rental subsidy.

Staying On Subsidy payments are not treated as taxable income, and do not typically impact income support payments paid to the carer by Centrelink or to a young person.

Housing Allowance payments are treated as taxable income and must be reported by the individual or organisation receiving the payments as part of their income. Housing Allowance payments do not impact a young person's income support payments through Centrelink but are deemed reportable income for the recipient.

Can a biological parent be paid a Housing Allowance?

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

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

What kind of living arrangements are ineligible for the Housing Allowance?

There are a few living arrangements that have been deemed ineligible for a Housing Allowance because of existing policy or the perceived risks posed to a young person. Living arrangements that are ineligible include:

- Housing options identified as unsafe during the application process based on the discretion of the Home Stretch WA provider. Where possible attempts should be made to support a young person to make the living arrangement safe and stable through providing support and structure.
- Emergency or short-term options that are less than three months in duration.
- Housing that is already subsidised, including funded National Housing and Homelessness Agreement housing and homelessness services, Public Housing and Community Housing, or other specialist youth housing and homelessness programs.
- Arrangements that require payment to a family member who has been an open case with the Department of Communities.

Funding

How much funding do young people have direct access to 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. This funding can be used for a variety of purposes and is designed to be accessible and flexible.

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

Data on spending from the Home Stretch WA Trial indicated that when the practice guidelines are followed, not all young people will need to access their full Invest In Me Fund allocation each year.

In some instances, a young person may need to access more than \$2,500 in a financial year. Each Home Stretch WA service provider must independently manage their Invest In Me funding pool to accommodate the range of financial supports that may be needed by young people they are supporting.

Do young people taking part in Home Stretch WA still have access to the Leaving Care Fund?

Yes, if the young person meets leaving care assistance eligibility criteria (section 96 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004*).

The Home Stretch WA program provides a young person with access to the Invest in Me Fund directly through their Transition Coach. The Invest In Me Fund has been designed to improve a young person'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 to ensure their needs are met while 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?

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

When a young person is onboarded into Home Stretch WA program, 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 the program.

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 program. These have been designed to provide young people and their carers with information in bite size chunks to support decision making.

These resources are available through District Offices and will also be made available online through the Home Stretch WA website and other social media sites and platforms.

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. Information sessions for foster and family carers will also be delivered by Home Stretch WA providers.

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 district office.

How do I find more information on Home Stretch WA?

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

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