



31 March 2025

Committee Secretary
Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee
By email: RegionalHousing@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Submission to the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee on the Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. Youthlaw is a community legal service which assists young people under the age of 25 with a range of legal issues. Youthlaw's target clients are vulnerable young people who experience issues such as homelessness, family violence, mental health issues and drug and alcohol misuse issues (which are often inter-connected). One of the programs that Youthlaw runs is the 'Legal Pod Program' that pairs young care leavers with a small team of lawyers that assist the young person with various legal issues that can arise when they leave state care.

We also run 'Stand Up for Our Rights', a legal outreach for children and young people in care, or who have left care, in the Ballarat/Central Highlands region. Through the Stand Up for Our Rights Program, Youthlaw has close contact with 'BGT' a Better Futures Service Provider, based in Ballarat, that supports young people who are making the transition from care to adulthood until they reach the age of 21 (**BGT-Better Futures**). We have consulted with BGT-Better Futures in making this submission and have added some of their views and experience in the submission.

Care leavers and homelessness

Some recent key statistics on children transitioning from out of home care and homelessness are set out below:

- The *Keep Caring report* prepared by the Commission for Children and Young People (**Commission**) shows that at least one third of young people experienced homelessness within three years of leaving care.
- For those children who had lived in residential care during their time in the care of the state, half of them experienced homelessness within three years of leaving care.
- In 2024, there were 220 Youthlaw clients located in Central Highlands LGAs. Just over a quarter (28%) were homeless or at risk of homelessness at the time of presenting, up from 19% in 2023 and 24% in 2021.

We consider that the supply of housing in regional Victoria should, in part, be allocated to children who are leaving out of home care. Moreover, that this would be consistent with the Secretary's obligations in the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic),

“to provide or arrange the provision of services to assist in supporting a person under the age of 21 years to gain the capacity to make the transition to independent living where—

(i) the Secretary has had parental responsibility for the person; and

(ii) on the Secretary's parental responsibility ending, the person is of an age, or intends, to live independently.¹”

It would also be consistent with human rights principles, specifically:

- the right of children in out-of-home care to be provided with help in preparing to leave care and support after the child leaves care.
- The right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including housing, under Article 11 the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
- The right of children to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, including housing and for states to take appropriate measures to provide assistance with respect to implementing this right, including by means of material assistance and support where needed (see Article 27 Of the Convention of the Rights of the Child)

Responsibility of the State

Children who enter the state's out of home care system are some of the most vulnerable in our society. There are several issues that occur while children are in out of home care such as multiple placements and lack of stability, lack of therapeutic support and constant changes in workers. Compounding these issues is the fact that once young people leave care, the state provides very limited supports to help them live independently.

Despite a departmental policy that requires children aged 15 to have a leaving care plan, the Commission found that only 43% had one. This is reflected by BGT-Better Futures who have found that the department often fail to secure housing for young people leaving care, which can in turn lead to a young person being placed back in their family of origin. This is often not an appropriate place for the young person to be placed, however is used by the department as a last resort where housing cannot be secured. Living at the family of origin also makes the young person ineligible for Home Stretch funding, reducing their funding capabilities and therefore their options after leaving care.

Issues facing care leavers in finding accommodation

In our practice we notice that one of the trends that leads to homelessness following young people leaving care specifically in regional areas is the lack of appropriate and affordable housing (which also impacts young people with Home Stretch funding).²

¹ Section 16(1)(g) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic)

² [Home Stretch - DFFH Service Providers](#)

One of the things that can be done to address this is to build accommodation that is suitable for young people to live alone.

1. Housing for people leaving out of home care and affordable housing

We would advocate that the government should set aside housing specifically for young people who are leaving out of home care to ensure that they have stable, long-term accommodation after they age out of state care. In our discussions with BGT-Better Futures, the options for them when placing young people transitioning out of care are transitional housing, shared housing and private rentals. The shortcomings of these three options are discussed further below. We consider that public housing, in appropriate stock, location and affordability for these young people, will best help them transition to living independently. Youthlaw and BGT-Better Futures consider that the best model would be for all children leaving out of home care to have guaranteed access to public housing.

a. Shared housing

While some young people who leave out of home care can live in shared housing, many, due to their vulnerabilities, are better served by solo housing, avoiding potential conflict with other housemates. In our discussions with BGT-Better Futures, they also echoed this sentiment, indicating that it is especially true of children whose care experiences involved being placed in residential care units, who have often experienced significant trauma. Many of these children after their residential care experiences prefer to live solo rather than to live in a shared housing situation.

b. Private rentals

Private rentals are often not an option for young people transitioning out of care due to the lack of stock available in the regional areas. In our discussions with BGT-Better Futures, they indicated that young people can apply for upwards of 50 properties and not receive an offer to rent because of the number of people applying and the low vacancy rate of housing in the Central Highlands/Wimmera areas. Landlord bias is also a barrier to this kind of rental, which is discussed in section 4.

c. Location of public housing

Another matter to consider when providing public housing is the location of the housing. Many of the existing public housing locations in the Central Highlands/Wimmera areas are areas of high crime and drug use, which are not appropriate for young people transitioning from care. The government should consider where public housing for young people is located, preferably in safe areas, with access to support organisations, services, public transport, and amongst a broad cross-section of the community.

d. Affordability

When providing this housing, the government should also take into consideration the amount that young people are able to spend on rent. Providing a range of housing options can assist young people transitioning out of care to find an option suitable to their financial needs.

Other models, like Uniting's Karrung Foyer, in Ballarat, which is an integrated housing support program, can be useful for young people who need some support with training and education, which is provided alongside long-term (up to two years) housing,³ however this will not suit all care leavers who may not be in a position upon leaving care to engage initially with education and /or employment.

2. Housing specifically for young people with disability

Additionally, there is an overrepresentation of children with disability with out of home care backgrounds. There should be housing built which can accommodate young people with a disability as this cohort face further challenges when searching for housing post-out of home care.

3. Housing list wait times

There are currently extensive wait times facing young people trying to secure stable housing options. This in turn prevents movement out of and into transitional properties. Young people are spending an increasing amount of time in the transitional properties without having access to more stable and safe housing.

4. Landlord bias

In our experience, young people transitioning from out of home care wait longer to secure housing. Given the housing shortage, every rental process is competitive, and landlords tend to avoid renting out their properties to young people, and young people on income support. Young people transitioning from out of home care should continue to have the support of the state by there being specific housing set aside for them so as to avoid landlord bias.

Additionally, as reported recently by the ABC, under current regulations, community housing providers earn around 46% less for housing an 18- to 22-year-old person on the youth allowance payment, than they do for housing a person on the age pension. They earn around 30% less for housing an 18–22-year-old on the youth allowance payment, than they do for housing a person on jobseeker payments. This means that young people are often overlooked, even when it comes to social housing and highlights the need to set aside specific housing for the vulnerable cohort of children leaving care.

We would also encourage the Committee to take a 'Housing First' approach, specifically in the context of young people leaving out of home care. This would mean acknowledging that housing is a human right and providing people experiencing homelessness with immediate, independent, permanent housing, rather than temporary accommodation. It also acknowledges that while housing, with wrap around support service for those who need it, is essential, that engagement with services should not be a pre-condition for housing, especially for this vulnerable cohort.

³ See: [Karrung Foyer - The Foyer Foundation](#)

We understand that there is a Housing First Initiative being carried out across Victoria. However, from our discussions with BGT-Better Futures, we understand that in the Central Highlands/Wimmera areas, the initiative is hindered by the lack of housing stock and the short-term nature of the initiative, and is therefore not currently operating as intended.

Case studies

Recent research by the Commission for Children and Young People has found that young people exiting out of home care experience high levels of homelessness, mental ill health, financial insecurity and engagement with the criminal justice system (CCYP, *Keep Caring*, 2020). In Victoria, of the young people aged between 15-17 transitioning out of care each year, more than a third of this cohort are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Having appropriate housing options specifically designated for care leavers would address a critical access-to-justice gap and create a positive ripple effect, leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. To this end, we would urge the committee to consult with Aboriginal led housing organisations that also support young people from transitioning from care about the kinds of housing that are needed.

Legal Pod Program Case Study

Billie* is a young Aboriginal care leaver who was referred to the Youthlaw Legal Pod Program by their Better Futures worker. Despite receiving Homestretch government funding to assist with rental and living expenses, the lack of available supported accommodation options left Billie at risk of homelessness unless they could secure housing themselves through a private rental.

When their private rental fell through, the Head Renter refused to return Billie's bond, which consisted of most of their savings. This not only heightened their risk of homelessness but also caused significant financial hardship and stress. Youthlaw were able to support the young person with their rental dispute.

However, without adequate housing and appropriate pathways into them, circumstances like Billie's will continue to arise and will continue to disproportionately impact care leavers, particularly those with intersectional vulnerabilities.

*Not real name

Stand Up for Our Rights Case Study

Elli* was in out of home care in a regional Victorian city. Despite being 17, with an infant child, little transitional planning had occurred by child protection, in relation to what housing options would be available to her, once her child protection order finished on her 18th birthday.

As her 18th birthday approached, Elli and her Better Futures worker were increasingly concerned she would be exited into homelessness and sought Youthlaw's assistance.

Luckily, after a united advocacy approach, a Home Stretch application was submitted and approved and ultimately, a property was secured at the last moment (with brokerage money before Home Stretch money was made available) for Elli and her infant son. However, the lack of housing options made this process immensely stressful for Elli and her Better Futures worker who was trying to support her. Having more regional housing options available to young care leavers like Elli, and guaranteed places, would mean that the threat of homelessness upon leaving care would not be hanging over the head of young people and their care team.

*Not real name

For more information, please contact our Acting CEO, Jo Ellis (jo@youthlaw.asn.au) or our Senior Policy Officer, Tammy Kamil (tammy@youthlaw.asn.au).

Yours faithfully,

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