

16 August 2021

The Hon Alister Henskens MP
Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Minister

Continued State Care until 21 Years

I write to request that you raise the current age for state care provision of children and young people to 21 years.

In NSW access to out-of-home care currently ceases at 18 years. Compared to their peers, care leavers experience poor life outcomes, the cost of which is borne by the individual, the community and the government.

According to the HILDA survey, 85 per cent of Australians between 18 and 21 are still living at home with one or both parents. NSW state care leavers are denied this transition period and face an increased risk of homelessness and poor life outcomes. *The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* (2015) report from Swinburne University of Technology found that 63 per cent of homeless young people had a history of out-of-home care.

The current NSW post-care support policy offers a young person a maximum allowance of \$240 a fortnight, information and counselling if they are at risk of homelessness. Despite a legislative requirement for support being available to care leavers until they reach 25 years, there is no guaranteed accommodation to 21 years and no formal allocation of a support worker from 18 years onwards. Accessing help is dependent on the unsupported care leaver navigating recurrent applications at a time when they are most vulnerable.

I recently met with The Home Stretch campaign representatives and heard the strong evidence of benefit for continuing care until 21 years.

The UK, US, Scotland, Canada and New Zealand provide care until 21 years as do all other Australian states and territories, bar Queensland and New South Wales. In the USA, the Fostering Success Act 2008 has seen homelessness halved, a 38 per cent reduction in youth pregnancies, 54 per cent reduction in arrests and engagement in employment and education doubled among care leavers.

The 2018 Deloitte Access economics analysis for *Extending Care to 21 years in NSW* found that the NSW Government would more than triple the return on investment on providing care until 21 years, saving NSW taxpayers \$222 million over the next ten years. Outcomes include a decrease in homelessness, early parenthood, hospitalisation, alcohol and drug dependence and interaction with the criminal justice system. Care leavers benefit from increased educational engagement, employment and mental health.



Beyond the obvious social and economic benefits to extending care until 21, are the ethical responsibilities of the state, which has taken on parental responsibility for these vulnerable children and young people. Severing care at 18 is not appropriate for any young person, but even more harmful for a young person trying to overcome a history of trauma, abuse and family disintegration.

Continued care support until 21 would provide vulnerable young people with accommodation including continued foster or kinship care, a case manager and support for education and employment pathways.

I share community support for increasing the age for state care responsibility for vulnerable young people in order to break the cycle of disadvantage and give them a good start in life. We have a responsibility to help them get on their feet.

Could you please raise the age for state care provision to 21 years and inform me what action you will take?

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AG', written in a cursive style.

Alex Greenwich
Member for Sydney