



CREATE Position Paper

Topic #16: Priority Access to Housing

Background

Safe, secure, and affordable housing is crucial for a successful transition out of care and into independent living. It is linked to better health and well-being outcomes and provides a secure base for social and economic participation. Young people with a care experience, however, are vulnerable to homelessness once they exit state care. This is due to ineffective care planning, limited supply and diversity of appropriate housing, long waiting lists for social housing, and a lack of financial, material, and emotional resources.

CREATE's Position

CREATE strongly believes that young people with a care experience deserve the same life opportunities to thrive as their peers. Exits into homelessness and inappropriate housing are unacceptable. To provide a stable accommodation base from which young people can begin a gradual transition, CREATE calls on all states and territories to provide young people with the option to remain with a carer until 21, regardless of placement type. We also urge all state and territory governments to monitor the implementation of their agreed strategies under the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* to ensure care leavers have a safe and secure place to live.

Evidence

- Standard 13 of the *National Standards for out of home care* (FaHCSIA, 2011) highlights the need for young people to have safe and appropriate housing arranged before leaving care as detailed in their transition plan.
- Recent research in Australia has shown that 36% of young people preparing to transition did not know where they would be living after leaving care, 49% left their care accommodation on turning 18, and 30% of young people experienced homelessness within the first year of leaving care (McDowall, 2019).
- In 2018-19, 53% of Indigenous Specialist Homelessness Services clients were under the age of 25, compared to 41% of non-Indigenous clients (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).
- In the UK, an evaluation of the “Staying Put” extended care program found that young people who remained with their carers past 18 years experienced greater housing stability, engagement in education, training, and employment. Young people who did not “stay put” were more likely to experience housing instability after they left care (Munro et al., 2012).
- Complicated application processes, long waiting lists for public housing, and subsequent removal due to high mobility prevent young people from accessing and maintaining stable housing (Johnson et al., 2010). This is further complicated by a decrease in available public housing stock, relative to population size, and an increased demand for social housing (Productivity Commission, 2019).
- Care leavers also identified relationship breakdowns, emotional and mental health challenges, and a lack of financial, social, and emotional supports as barriers to maintaining stable housing (Muir et al., 2019).
- The *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* is a multilateral commitment by the Australian government and states and territories to improve access to secure and affordable housing by addressing priority areas, e.g., increasing the supply of social housing, affordable housing and community housing, tenancy reform, and providing ongoing funding of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). It identifies young people leaving the care system, particularly those identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, as priority homelessness cohorts (Council of Federal Financial Relations, 2018).

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Actions

CREATE calls for state and territory governments to take all actions possible to ensure young people leaving care do not exit into homelessness and have viable pathways to stable housing.

CREATE specifically advocates for the following:

1. “Staying Put” arrangements, for both home-based and residential care, give young people the option to remain in, or return to, their placement up until 21 years. While formal care orders will cease, financial support must still be given to the carer and can be reduced over time as the young person achieves greater financial independence. This arrangement provides a housing solution similar to other young Australians and supports young people to study, work, or engage in further training. It also maintains a sense of stability and connection to support networks, and empowers young people to decide the timing of their transition to independence.
2. All governments must honour their commitment to the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* by actively implementing the Housing and Homelessness strategies they have articulated. This will ensure:
 - greater supply and range of available housing stock to meet current waiting list demands;
 - safe and affordable housing options for Indigenous young people, particularly for those living in regional and remote areas, are available;
 - increased supported accommodation options for young people who are unable to remain in their current placement or prefer to live independently but still require support;
 - increased accessibility for financial assistance, rental subsidies, and other tenancy arrangements that provide affordable and secure accommodation for young people;
 - access to specialist homelessness services for emergency and transitional accommodation support.
3. One feature of beginning leaving-care planning at 15 years is that caseworkers can enrol young people on the housing registers, if required, before they leave care to minimise waiting periods and prevent exits into homelessness. Care leavers must have priority access to housing assistance and post-care support until the age of 25 years.
4. Streamline processes regarding assessment of need, and allocation of housing by:
 - providing culturally safe and age-appropriate administrative support to young people for navigating housing services, to assist with understanding and completion of application forms, and retrieving supporting documentation;
 - ensuring that social housing application forms provide the opportunity for identifying applicants with a previous care experience;
 - providing extra support including monitoring of outcomes for young people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, living with a disability, mental health, or emotional difficulties, young parents, those who enter the youth justice system, or leave care early;
 - investing further in social housing or supported accommodation specifically for care leavers.

References

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