

SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS

MEASURES TO PROTECT &
TO PROMOTE POSITIVE
DISCRIMINATION

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Summary

In Australia, young people leaving out-of-home are a key priority group under the current National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2021-31) (Department of social Services, 2021). While recent reforms have extended the support available to care leavers in all Australian jurisdictions, there is recognition that such provisions alone are unlikely to address the significant disadvantage required to sustainably advance outcomes for care leavers.

This exploratory study was commissioned by The Home Stretch to identify and describe Australian or international measures that complement leaving, post-care and extended care policies, with a view to improving the life outcomes of care leavers. This includes special provisions that either provide avenues for 'positive discrimination' towards care leavers or those that promote the elimination of negative discrimination against care leavers. Attention was given to provisions that exist *outside* of leaving care policies and provisions, or universally within a jurisdiction.

A range of policies, initiatives and schemes were identified around Australia and internationally (primarily in the UK and US). While some of these comprised 'whole-of-government' strategies, the vast majority were fragmentary initiatives related to higher education and training, employment, healthcare, housing, and income support. Overall, education, employment and housing measures appear to have been prioritised across jurisdictions, with less attention given to health, mental health and other provisions. Most initiatives were developed in response to existing leaving care and post-care legislation, rather than being underpinned by independent legislation, and many were driven by advocacy from specific individuals (e.g. Terry Galloway in the UK), consortia, or even private companies, rather than forming part of a consolidated government-led strategy to advance the circumstances of care leavers. The result is a somewhat haphazard offering and delivery of schemes, which differ widely across countries, jurisdictions, and even councils of the same country.

A key challenge to ensuring that care leavers receive supports to which they are entitled is service providers being able to identify care leavers and share information with this group. To this end, schemes have been introduced in England and Wales to assist in the identification of care leavers in various areas of government service provision. For example, government employment services, as well as prison and probation services in England in Wales have introduced 'markers' to identify care leavers in their databases with a view to ensuring that they are supported to access available services and schemes (HM Government, 2014).

Despite these shortcomings, a range of very useful strategies for preventing discrimination and advancing the wellbeing and outcomes of care leavers across a range of life domains were identified. Such strategies can usefully form the basis of future coordinated initiatives to advance the overall health, social and economic position of care leavers.

Introduction

It is well-recognised that young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC), encompassing state-ordered placements with kinship (relative), foster (non-relative) and residential (group home) caregivers, disproportionately experience poor outcomes across a range of health, social and economic domains (Mendes, Johnson & Moslehuddin, 2011). While not all care leavers have poor outcomes (Stein, 2008), relative to their peers in the general population, evidence indicates that this cohort experience far greater difficulties across education, employment, income, housing, health and mental health, and criminal justice system involvement (Gypen et al., 2017; Muir et al., 2019). These outcomes are understood to stem from a combination of the pre-existing disadvantage and maltreatment experienced by young people entering OOHC, poor experiences within these systems, and the more compressed, accelerated and unsupported transitions they experience to early adulthood (Mendes et al., 2011). Over recent decades, sustained advocacy from lived experience experts, academics and the sector, has urged policy and practice reforms to improve these outcomes for care leavers. This advocacy has drawn on research evidence alongside equity, human rights, community safety, and economic arguments (Baidawi & Sheehan, 2020; Deloitte Access Economics, 2018; Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019).

In response, several governments in the Global North have implemented policy approaches that aim to address the inequality experienced by care leavers, and to support their transition to early adulthood. Key approaches include the provision of leaving care planning, leaving care and post-care support, and (more recently) policies or legislation which extend the availability of care beyond the age of 18 years (Baidawi et al., 2016; Mann-Feder & Goyette, 2019; Mendes et al., 2011). In Australia, following the sustained national Home Stretch campaign, all states and territories had by November 2022 committed to extending OOHC to age 21 years (CREATE Foundation, 2022). Yet there is recognition that such provisions alone are unlikely to address the significant disadvantage faced by many care leavers, and to sustainably advance their overall health, social and economic position. In the Australian context, this is because, among other factors:

- **Extended care measures are not universally available to care leavers across Australian jurisdictions.** For example, young people leaving residential OOHC are excluded in Tasmania and only supported by a Pilot trial in South Australia (Government of South Australia, 2022; The HomeStretch, 2024); and
- **Extended care support measures largely cease at age 21 years.** This contrasts with evidence that contemporary adolescence (the life phase between childhood and adulthood, involving elements of biological growth and major social role transitions), extends until 24 years, with 'emerging adulthood' understood as occurring from 18-24 years (Sawyer et al., 2018). During this phase of late adolescence and emerging adulthood individuals in high-income countries such as Australia generally continue to rely on their families for longer periods (Sawyer et al. 2018). These favourable circumstances are not mirrored in policies aiming to support to care leavers, many of whom were removed from their families, and rely on the State as their current or former legal guardian.

Purpose

This exploratory study was commissioned by The Home Stretch campaign. It sought to identify and describe measures (e.g. legislation, policies, or strategies), in Australian or international contexts, that complement leaving, post-care and extended care policies, with a view to improving the life outcomes of care leavers. This includes special provisions for care leavers that either:

- **provide avenues for ‘positive discrimination’** towards care leavers, to access equitable opportunities and outcomes as those experienced by other community members (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024); and
- **promote the elimination of negative discrimination** against care leavers.

Particular attention was given to identifying provisions for care leavers that exist *outside* of leaving care policies and provisions (i.e. those which recognise and seek to meet the needs of care leavers as a group across other systems such as health, mental health, housing, education, higher education/training), or universally within a jurisdiction.

Approach

Policy identification. Identification of special provisions for care leavers drew on the expertise of two groups of academics who are active in undertaking leaving care research. In April/May 2024, global members of the International Research Network on transitions to Adulthood from Care (INTRAC) were contacted via email and members of the Australian chapter of INTRAC were consulted via a Zoom meeting. INTRAC members were asked to provide any information regarding special provisions meeting the criteria described above. Due to the approach, the list of policies should not be considered exhaustive; there may be other examples internationally that have not been identified. However, this report is valuable in describing the range of policies aiming to prevent negative discrimination or promote positive discrimination towards care leavers.

Policy description. Identified policies were categorised by the life domain(s) to which they relate, and described, along with any associated legislation.

Findings

Whole-of-Government Care Leaver Strategies

Whole-of-Government care leaver strategies were identified in specific jurisdictions within Australia (South Australia) and the UK (e.g. England and Scotland), however the nature of these strategies and their associated services and schemes available varied considerably. None of strategies appeared to be underpinned by any further specific legislation. Rather,

these strategies were seen to respond to established relevant legislation that mandates the state, as corporate parent, to support care leavers into early adulthood. Schemes or services provided under these strategies sometimes required relevant legislative or policy amendments (e.g. housing, council tax, or social security) to provide exemptions or special allowances for care leavers.

'Investing in Their Future Initiative' (South Australia)

The *'Investing in Their Future Initiative'*, announced as part of South Australia's 2019 child protection strategy, is a whole-of-government commitment that recognises the responsibility of state government for children and young people who have come into care (Department for Child Protection, 2024). The stated aims of the initiative are **to provide priority access** to a range of health, education and therapeutic supports to young people in and leaving care who meet specific eligibility criteria¹ (Department for Child Protection, 2024). Priority access is stated to potentially refer to a **fee waiver, expanded service, or increased speed or ease of access** (Department for Child Protection, 2024).

While the Initiative is said to apply to both young people in and leaving care, **in practice the majority of initiatives target those in care**, rather than those who are leaving care or who have left care. Aspects of the initiative that target care leavers are primarily those delivered by leaving care and post-care services (e.g. extended care including case management), and those that support the referral of care leavers to existing mainstream supports for individuals receiving social security benefits (e.g. linkage to statewide dental services for individuals on social security benefits) (Department for Child Protection, 2024).

Aspects of the initiative which provide specific services to some care leavers (beyond extended care and post-care services) are described in the relevant sections below (healthcare & higher education). These include:

- **free ambulance cover to age 21 years;**
- **free or discounted dental care from 17 to 25 years; and**
- **fee waiver for SA government-subsidised training courses** (Department for Child Protection, 2024).

Care Leaver Strategy (UK)

First Care Leaver Strategy (2013). In 2012, a coalition of voluntary organisations in the UK published the *Access All Areas* report which called on government departments to make a commitment to care leavers (National Care Advisory Service, The Prince's Trust, The Care Leavers' Foundation & A National Voice, 2012). The report led to the first UK cross-

¹ Children and young people leaving care may be eligible for the *Investing in their future* initiative if they have been placed under one of the following orders and agreements: Custody and guardianship orders pursuant to section 53 of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* (the Act) for a period of 6 months or more; Unaccompanied humanitarian minors under the Guardianship of the Chief Executive; Family Group Conference arrangements initiated prior to the commencement of the Act, and subject to transitional arrangements (Department for Child Protection, 2024).

government strategy for care leavers (HM Government, 2013), which was updated the following year (HM Government, 2014). Initiatives adopted across government to support care leavers are described in the strategy via case examples across education, employment, financial support, health, housing, youth justice, access to advice and support, harnessing social action and data collection.

Examples of the above initiatives are provided in the relevant sections of this report. It should be noted however, that not all of these initiatives are ongoing, with many having been supported by limited term grants. While the National Audit Office's (2015) report on Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood was supportive of the strategy, a lack of effective implementation was highlighted, leading to a revised strategy.

Second Care Leaver Strategy (2016). In 2016, the UK Government published *Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence*, which set out additional commitments to "put care leavers first" (HM Government, 2016). This strategy reaffirmed the requirement of the state, as corporate parent, to support care leavers to meet five key outcomes, including to:

- **Live independently:** e.g. establishing the Care Leaver Covenant (see below), and extending support from Personal Advisors to age 25 years;
- **Access education, employment & training:** e.g. via supported internships, and meeting training costs for care leavers undertaking apprenticeships until age 25 years;
- **Experience stability:** e.g. via 'Staying Put' and 'Staying Close' initiatives, and raising awareness of care leaver entitlements in the adult criminal justice sector;
- **Access to health support:** e.g. developing evidence-informed pathways, quality standards and models of mental health care for care leavers; and
- **Achieve financial stability:** e.g. through care leavers' access to more generous rates of certain benefits, and advance/early access payments of social security benefits.

As with the first strategy, several initiatives were implemented to support each of these outcomes, examples of which are outlined in the relevant sections below.

Care Leaver Covenant (England)

The UK Government's Care Leaver Covenant (CLC), launched in 2018, allows government, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support to care leavers aged 16-25 years in England through the provision of work experience, apprenticeships and free or discounted goods and services (Department for Education, 2018). More than 20 government Ministries and Departments have signed up to the covenant, supported by a cross-government Care Leaver Covenant Board, which meets three times yearly, bringing together leadership from relevant Ministries and Departments to address key barriers facing young care leavers. Most Ministries and Departments have pledged to support employment opportunities for care leavers via the [Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme](#) (See 'Employment Strategies' section) or apprenticeship placements (Department for Education, 2018). Other Ministries and Departments have pledged further commitments to care leavers (highlighted in the relevant sections below), including:

- [Department for Education](#)
- [Department for Health & Social Care](#)
- [Department for Work & Pensions](#)
- [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#)
- [Ministry of Justice](#)

Outside of government, Spectra First was commissioned by the Department for Education to engage private and voluntary sector organisations to join the covenant. At September 2023, the Government indicated that more than 400 businesses had signed up to the Covenant (House of Commons Library, 2023). The UK CLC [website](#) allows care leavers to search opportunities available for free/discounted products (e.g. gym memberships), supported work & jobs, supported apprenticeships, training & experience, education, support & mentoring, and online events (e.g. international e-mentoring programs) (Care Leaver Covenant, 2024).

Corporate Parenting Legislation (Scotland)

[Part 9](#) of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* introduced the concept of ‘Corporate Parenting’ into Scottish Legislation. This part of the Act, which came into force in April 2015, established responsibilities towards young people in and leaving care (up to 26 years of age) on the part of many government bodies who were declared to be Corporate Parents. Bodies designated as Corporate Parents are detailed in [Schedule 4](#) of the Act, and include local authorities, health boards, Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland, The Scottish Social Services Council, The Scottish Police Authority, and The Scottish Housing Regulator, among others. In relation to Scottish care leavers, the six key duties of Corporate Parents are:

- To be alert to matters which might adversely impact their wellbeing;
- To assess the needs of care leavers for services and support provided by the corporate parent;
- To promote their interests;
- To seek to provide those children and young people with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing; and
- To take appropriate action help care leavers in Scotland.

Importantly, the Act requires that corporate parents must prepare a plan as to how they propose to exercise corporate parenting responsibilities, which must be kept under review (Section 59), with reporting on outcomes required at least every three years (Scottish Government, 2015). The Act also specifies that corporate parents must, where possible, collaborate with one another in exercising their corporate parenting responsibilities. Section 60(2) details that this collaboration may include:

- (a) sharing information,*
- (b) providing advice or assistance,*

- (c) co-ordinating activities (and seeking to prevent unnecessary duplication),*
- (d) sharing responsibility for action,*
- (e) funding activities jointly,*
- (f) exercising functions under this Part jointly (for example, by publishing a joint plan or joint report).*

Care Leaver Covenant (Scotland)

A Care Leaver Covenant was also established in Scotland, however unlike the English CLC, the Scottish CLC was driven by a cross-sector alliance of non-government organisations, with a view to closing the gap between policy and practice for care leavers (Scottish Care Leavers Covenant, n.d.). The CLC advocated for specific policy and practice reforms to support care leavers in Scotland (e.g. exemption from council tax), however it is unclear if the Covenant is still active².

Plan 21-24 (Scotland)

Plan 21-24 is the first of three Scottish plans to respond to recommendations of the 2020 Independent Care Review, commissioned by the Scottish government (Scottish Government, 2022). While much of the Plan relates to children in out-of-home care, some strategies focus on connecting care leavers with mainstream supports (e.g. employment supports), while some initiatives within the plan specifically target care leavers, for example:

- An annual £200 Care Experience Grant for 16–25-year-olds with care experience, that aims to reduce some of the financial barriers that young people face in transition to adulthood and more independent living.
- Delivery of the ‘Principles into Practice’ Trial Programme for young people transitioning from care in 10 Local Authority Areas.

Antidiscrimination Provisions

Discrimination and stigma towards care experienced people may be experienced directly by individuals, for example through comments about their perceived attributes and capacities (e.g. in relation to educational ability or parenting capacity), may be present in public narratives (e.g. in the media, schools, and workplaces), or may be indirect in terms of differential treatment that disadvantages or stigmatises care experienced people (Care Leaver Local Offer, 2024; Local Government Association, 2024). In perhaps its worst forms, explicit stigma, and discrimination against care leavers as a group have been seen to explicitly underpin their exclusion from housing and employment opportunities.

As a result, multiple reviews in the UK have recommended the inclusion of ‘care experience’ as a protected characteristic under antidiscrimination law (Galloway, 2023). While these recommendations have yet to lead to legislative reform at a national level, a campaign across

² Scottish CLC website was labelled as no longer active on 17th May 2024 - <https://www.scottishcareleaverscovenant.org/>

England and Wales to amend the Equality Act 2010 to “*Treat Care Experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic*” has gained momentum. As of May 2024, local councils representing 42% of the population of England, Scotland and Wales had joined the campaign, amounting to a total of 92 local councils recognising care experience as a ‘protected characteristic’ (Galloway, 2024a; 2024b). The passing of such motions means that (Care Leaver Local Offer, 2024):

- The council **will treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic**. This means that children and young people residing in these councils who are in care, who are care leavers, or who have had a past experience of care, now have the same protection from discrimination as other characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (UK).
- It requires that **future services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience**, alongside those who formally share a Protected Characteristic; and
- that in the delivery of the **Public Sector Equality Duty** the Council includes care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a Protected Characteristic in services and employment.

Education, Higher Education and Vocational Training Provisions

Higher education and training provisions that specifically target care leavers were identified in Australia (Victoria, New South Wales & South Australia), Canada (British Columbia), the UK (England, Wales & Scotland) and the US (nationally). These provisions are largely underpinned by existing leaving care and post-care legislation, however they are generally uncoordinated at a national level, leading to much variation between jurisdictions. A recent policy submission to Higher Education Australia reviewed provisions for care leavers wanting to access higher education concluded that “*jurisdictions that have implemented targeted supports have seen significant improvements in the proportion of care leavers enrolling in post-secondary education*” (Conley-Wright et al., 2023, p. 3), citing the following findings from UK and US (Glushko, 2017):

- In England, the proportion of care leavers attending university has increased from 1% to 14% since 2013;
- In Illinois, care leavers are twice as likely to attend university as their care-experienced peers in the neighbouring states that do not provide the same level of support;
- In California, almost 50% of all young people in care are now enrolling in university.

Australia

Post Care Education Financial Support (NSW)

The NSW government provides financial support for some care leavers to finish high school until the age of 25 years³. However, this support is only available to young people who aged out of care (i.e. whose OOHC order expired when they were aged 18 years), who are still residing in care placements after this time (foster, kinship or funded service provider placements), and who are completing full-time high school study. While not means tested, the funding is only paid directly to carer or the organisation supporting this group of young people to complete high school (NSW Department of Communities & Justice, 2023). Carers cannot receive this allowance if they are receiving the Staying on Allowance, or if the young person is receiving either the Aftercare Allowance or Independent Living Allowance. Only one of these allowances is payable at a time (NSW Department of Communities & Justice, 2023).

Live, Learn, Grow Program – University of Newcastle (NSW)

The University of Newcastle's Live, Learn, Grow program assists care experienced young people to access higher education, by providing:

- Support to explore and enrol in various study pathways and degrees;
- Assistance with finding and maintaining appropriate accommodation;
- Access to on-campus employment; and
- Academic and social support (University of Newcastle, 2024).

While this program was initially established under a 2015 Commonwealth HEPP grant, it is now fully supported by the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education and the University of Newcastle, Australia (University of Newcastle, 2024).

NSW Department of Communities and Justice Out of Home Care Pathways Scholarship – University of Western Sydney (NSW)

The NSW DCJ provides equity scholarships valued at \$7,500 per year to care experienced students at the University of Western Sydney (NSW). Access to these scholarships is limited to care leavers who are, or were in the past 3 years, in kinship or foster care in NSW, and who are completing any undergraduate degree, or Foundation Studies, Diploma or Associate Degree (University of Western Sydney, 2023).

Raising Expectations (Victoria)

Raising Expectations is a collaboration between the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, and a growing number of Victorian higher education providers (Federation, LaTrobe, Monash, Swinburne, and Victoria Universities), and the Victorian Government who contributed funding from 2019 (Raising Expectations, 2024). The initiative aims to increase the participation and success of care experienced young people in vocational and higher education through:

³ This support is based on existing post-care legislation (S.161(3) of the NSW Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)).

- **Provision of peer mentoring** by care experienced young people.
- **Dedicated care experienced scholarships and bursaries** are offered by some Universities (for example, Monash University⁴, Federation University⁵ and Swinburne University⁶), while other Universities encourage care-experienced students to apply for available access, equity, and disadvantage-based scholarships.
- **Dedicated university websites and/or points of contact** with information about supports to navigate applications, enrolment, and to access other financial allowances and supports (e.g. personal and academic support).
- **Referral to personal and academic support.**

Youth Access Initiative (Victoria)

The Youth Access Initiative provides care leavers aged 24 years and under with access to 700+ tuition-free skills training and TAFE courses in Victoria (Government of Victoria, 2024). For the purposes of this initiative care leavers are considered individuals who are currently on or who have previously been on a Child Protection Order.

Investing in Their Future (South Australia)

Under South Australia's (SA) Investing in Their Future Initiative, care experienced young people are automatically eligible to:

- Have their fees waived for courses funded through the Government of South Australia's Subsidised Training Initiative; and
- Receive individual case management support through the TAFE SA Learning Support Services (TAFE SA, 2024).

For this initiative, care leavers are defined as individuals aged 16 years and older who are or who have been under a Guardianship Order in South Australia (Government of South Australia, 2024).

Canada

Provincial Tuition Waiver Program (British Columbia)

In the Canadian province of British Columbia (BC), the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program waives tuition and eligible fees for current or former care-experienced students **of any age**. Aside from covering tuition fees, the PTWP makes available annual \$3,500 **Learning for**

⁴ Monash University currently offers 5 x [Achieving Potential Care Leaver Scholarships](#) each year, valued at \$6,000 per annum for up to a maximum of four years (up to \$24 000).

⁵ Federation University currently offers 4 x [Care-Experience Scholarships](#) (two for commencing students valued at \$7,000, one for continuing students valued at \$4,000, and one for commencing/continuing TAFE students valued at \$1,000).

⁶ Swinburne University currently offers once-off [Care Leaver Bursaries](#) (valued at \$500) and once-off [Access Scholarships](#) for commencing care-experienced full-time students (partly funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education's Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP), and valued at \$5,000).

Future Grant to cover additional education-related costs (e.g. textbooks, computer) (StudentAid BC, n.d.).

Eligible students must be studying part- or full-time at the undergraduate level⁷ at:

- A British Columbia public post-secondary institution;
- The Native Education College; or
- An approved union-based trades training provider.

The Program commenced formally commenced in 2017, prior to which time a voluntary patchwork of bursaries and grants were available at 11 public post-secondary institutions. In September 2017, these bursaries and grants were expanded to all 25 public post-secondary institutions in BC (Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, 2023). Data published in 2023 indicated that over 800 former youth in care were accessing the program, increased from 189 former youth in care when the program was launched in 2017 (Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, 2023).

Priority Housing Access and other supports (University of British Columbia)

Care experienced students have priority access to housing on UBC campuses, with all direct-entry first year students provided with guaranteed housing (University of British Columbia, n.d.). The Vancouver campus also provides access to child-friendly residences. For care experienced students, UBC also provides a Youth in Care Alumni Program, comprising:

- Care experienced youth orientation;
- Events & social gathering for the care-experienced community every fortnight;
- Dedicated academic and enrolment advisors.

Storwell Self Storage Foster Children Bursary Fund (Ontario)

The Storwell Self Storage Foster Children Bursary Program offers an annual bursary of \$2,000 dollars to care leavers in Ontario who are completing post-secondary education. This family-run storage business runs the bursary of its own accord (Storwell, n.d.). The bursary is available to young people aged 24 years or less who have care experience in either Canada or America and who are enrolled full-time in a post-secondary education institution in either country (StudentAwards, n.d.).

United Kingdom

Higher Education and Care Leavers Apprenticeships Bursaries (England and Wales)

Amendments made in 2008 to the Children's Act (1989) introduced a requirement for Local Authorities to contribute to expenses incurred by care leavers aged up to 25 years resulting from their participation in higher education, including a requirement to:

⁷ The PTWP covers a range of undergraduate study options, but Masters, PhD or post-graduate courses or programs, or any Adult Basic Education programs and/or fees, are not eligible. See <https://studentaidbc.ca/sites/all/files/form-library/Tuition-Waiver-FAQ.pdf> for further information

- contribute to expenses incurred by care leavers living near the place where they are or will be receiving education or training; or
- make a grant available to meet expenses connected with their education and training.

This resulted in the implementation of the Higher Education and Care Leavers Apprenticeships Bursaries throughout England and Wales, whereby local authorities make available a one-off non-repayable payment of £3,000 to care leavers going on to higher education (for example university or apprenticeships) (Department for Education, 2022).

Support for Care Experienced Students (King's College London)

King's College London (n.d) offers a range of supports for care experienced students, including:

- **Financial support** (e.g. care-experienced bursary of £1000 per academic year, King's Living Bursary of up to £1,600 per academic year for first-degree full-time students (means tested));
- **Accommodation support** (e.g. Guaranteed accommodation with 52-week contracts in a King's residence for all years of undergraduate study, capped at £169 per week via the King's Affordable Accommodation Scheme);
- **Pastoral support** (e.g. designated wellbeing advisor) (King's College, n.d.).

Care leavers can also apply and be prioritised for other scholarships and bursaries including:

- Broadening Horizons Bursary (up to £900) – Care-experienced and care leaver students are prioritised for the Broadening Horizons Bursary, which aims to increase the number of care-experienced and care leaver students who can access global mobility (study abroad) opportunities (King's College, n.d.).

The Unite Scholarship (England & Scotland)

The Unite Scholarships support 95 care leaver students to reside for free in halls of residence at one of the Unite Foundation's partner universities for up to 3 years of study, including the holiday periods (King's College, n.d.). These scholarships are open to care leavers aged under 25 years residing in the UK and who are studying their first undergraduate degree (This is Us, 2024).

Student Awards Agency Scotland (Scotland)

Student Awards Agency is the national higher education in Scotland; they provide access to financial assistance to support care leavers in higher education in Scotland. A **Care Experienced Students Bursary** is available to all Scottish full-time undergraduate students who have ever been looked after under local authority care in the UK (Student Awards Agency Scotland, 2024). The bursary is a non-income assessed non-repayable grant of £9,000. Care experienced higher education students in Scotland are **also entitled to have their tuition fees paid** (Student Awards Agency Scotland, 2024), and have access to a Summer Accommodation Grant for those needing accommodation assistance during summer holidays. The Summer Accommodation grant is valued at £1,330 for those in formal accommodation (e.g. renting a

flat), and £665 for those in informal accommodation (e.g. staying with family/friends) (Student Awards Agency Scotland, 2024).

Higher Education Discretionary Funds (Scotland)

Care experienced students are also an identified priority group for receiving Higher Education Discretionary Funds in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2023). These funds are available to care leavers who are aged 16 years and older, and who are residing in and accessing higher education in Scotland, including both undergraduate and postgraduate training.

USA

Care experienced young people are regarded as financially independent when applying for Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in the US, making them eligible for needs-based financial aid programs. This includes all young people who were in care after age 13 years (SchoolHouse Connection, 2024).

Statewide Tuition Waivers or Scholarships for Care Experienced Students (US – various states)

According to a 2022 report, an estimated 37 states offer tuition waivers and/or scholarships for care experienced students (John Burton Advocates for Youth, Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide & Education Reach for Texans, 2022). Some tuition waiver programs (e.g. Texas, Nevada, Florida), rely on higher education institutions to cover these costs, while others (e.g. California and Minnesota), rely on state funds. While the report noted some promising examples, overall the support for care experienced students to access post-secondary education was considered “disjointed and inconsistent across states” with “federal investment in this area is inadequate to the need” (John Burton Advocates for Youth et al., 2022, p.3). Other examples of support for care experienced students in the US to access higher education are outlined below.

Passport to Careers (Washington State)

The Passport to Careers Program is a legislated program that assists care leavers in Washington who are aged under 21 years to prepare for and succeed in higher education, apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships (Conley-Wright et al., 2023; Washington Student Achievement Council, 2024). The program comprises:

- **Passport to College:** which provides a scholarship and support services; funding can be used for tuition, books, housing, transportation, and some personal expenses for care experienced students working towards a certificate, associate degree or first bachelor’s degree.
- **Passport to Apprenticeship Opportunities:** funding support care leavers in registered apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship programs to cover the cost of tuition/class fees, and occupational costs (e.g. work, tools).

Education and Training Vouchers (Virginia)

The Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) program provides Virginian care leavers aged 16-25 years funding to assist them to access higher education at colleges, universities, and vocational training institutions. ETV support up to \$5,000 per annum can be used for tuition

fees and other education-related expenses (e.g. books, certain living expenses, childcare expenses, transportation etc.) (Foster My Future, 2024).

Next Up (Community Colleges) and Guardian Scholars Program (Universities) (California)

All Californian Community Colleges and California State Universities and Universities of California have some care experienced student support programs.

- **Next Up** provides young people in and leaving care who are attending a Californian Community College with support and resources, including books and supplies, transportation, a dedicated liaison, tutoring, food, and emerging housing (California Community Colleges, 2024).
- **California's Guardian Scholars Program** is an example of a state-funded higher education support scheme for care leavers. The program is offered across many Californian Universities. Though eligibility criteria and supports vary across institutions, the range of supports available may include: priority registration, financial aid, priority housing, academic and personal advisement, academic support, transport support, and employment services (California Evidence Based Clearinghouse, 2024).

Employment Strategies

Employment provisions that specifically target care leavers were identified in the US and UK.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (US)

WIOA is the primary federal workforce policy in the US, and includes funding under the Youth Activities Formula Grant program, which provides federal resources to states to plan and deliver programs targeting disadvantaged youth to enhance their employability and employment (Collins et al., 2021). US data from 2022-23 indicates that young people in and leaving care comprised 3.8% of youth served via this funding (US Department of Labor, 2023). While care leavers form a specific priority group of the WIAO youth program, the degree to which initiatives funded through this grant program specifically target care leavers varies between jurisdictions (Collins et al., 2021). Where specific care leaver initiatives exist, they generally comprise partnerships between child protection/leaving care services and employment services funded under the WIAO (Collins et al., 2021).

Employment via Care Leaver Covenant (UK)

The Care Leaver Covenant's UK website lists a range of employment and apprenticeship opportunities provided by CLC signatories (Care Leaver Covenant, 2024). Additionally, organisations that are "[Care Leaver Friendly Employers](#)" are identified, which indicate that the employer has signed the CLC 'Employer Charter', and committed to the CLC's 5 program outcomes to support care leavers to thrive in their workplace. Specifically, the Employer Charter requires organisations to commit to principles around:

- **Recruitment:** promoting appropriate opportunities to care leavers, creating a key point of contact in the organisation for care leavers, offer a guaranteed interview and

constructive feedback to care experienced applicants who meet minimum role requirements;

- **Tracking:** creating mechanisms to track progress of care leaver job applicants; and
- **Development:** assigning workplace buddies for care leaver employees, creating and communicating clear boundaries and high expectations for care leaver employees, and approaching care leaver employees' professional challenges with compassion and empathy.

Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme (UK)

The Civil Service Care Leaver Internship Scheme offers a range of 18-month internships to care leavers in a central government department or agencies who have made commitments via the Care Leaver Covenant (UK) (Civil Service Careers, 2024). These internships are advertised via a government portal at regular intervals, followed by interview and recruitment processes. There is a possibility transitioning to permanent arrangements after 12 months depending on various factors (e.g. performance, headcount and funding).

Internships are open to young people who:

- Are entitled to a leaving care package;
- Are aged 18-30; and
- Satisfy the [Civil Service nationality requirements](#).

There is no requirement for qualifications, but applications are assessed on the criteria set out in advertisements (Civil Service Careers, 2024).

Council-Based Internships (UK)

Some UK councils also offer designated internships for care leavers. For example, in 2023 Camden Council announced that it will offer six 18-month internships paid at London Living Wage (£22,432 per year) for care experienced Camden young people aged 16-24 years (Camden Rise, 2024). Internships are based within the council and aim to support young people's growth and development.

Drive Forward (UK)

Drive Forward is a London-based charity funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and supported by a range of private and philanthropic companies that aims to improve training and employment outcomes for care leavers (Drive Forward, 2024). Services are delivered through intensive one-to-one support, mentoring, counselling, exclusive career opportunities via a network of employers, as well as training & development opportunities (e.g. support to access higher education, interview preparation) (Drive Forward, 2024).

North Yorkshire Corporate Mentoring Scheme (UK)

North Yorkshire Council launched a corporate mentoring scheme for care leavers thinking about going into higher education or who are already at university. The council's chief executive volunteered to be a mentor and has given his full backing to staff who wished to take part by giving them paid time off to act as volunteers. North Yorkshire has twice the

national average of care leavers attending university and the aim of the scheme is to enhance their employment after graduation by helping them to access work experience and internships (HM Government, 2014).

Healthcare Provisions

Healthcare provisions that specifically target care leavers were identified in the US (nationally) and Australia (South Australia).

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (US)

Enacted in 2010 and fully implemented in 2014, the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA)* includes a **requirement to provide health insurance coverage under Medicaid for young people “who were in foster care under the responsibility of a State for more than 6 months (whether or not consecutive) but are no longer in such care ... and who are under 25 years of age”** (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010). The *PPACA* aims to provide uninterrupted health insurance for care leavers during a period when many young people who were not in care continue to have access to such coverage under their parent or guardian’s health plan⁸. This *Act* (2010) requires that full Medicaid benefits are made available to care leavers, including substance abuse and mental health coverage, maternal childhood early home visiting grants, alongside other medical services (Emam & Golden, 2014). For example, it is stated that:

“Youth aging out of foster care are eligible for benefits from the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) provisions of Medicaid until age 21. EPSDT benefits include preventive, dental, mental health, and developmental services for youth, and states are required to provide all Medicaid coverable, appropriate, and medically necessary services needed to these youth to improve their health conditions. After age 21, youth will receive their state’s full Medicaid benefit package for adults.”
(Emam & Golden, p.4)

Investing in their Future Initiative (South Australia)

South Australia’s Investing in their Future Initiative contains two healthcare-related schemes for care leavers covering emergency ambulance cover and dental/orthodontic services as follows:

- **Emergency Ambulance Cover to age 21 years:** Full eligibility requirements for the scheme are outlined⁹, which applies to *“children and young people currently or formerly under the guardianship or custody of the Chief Executive pursuant to section 53 of the CYPs Act or subject to an administrative or judicial transfer of orders and*

⁸In Australia, a 2022 Commonwealth policy revision increased the maximum allowable age of dependents for private health insurance from 24 to 31 years, the age at which when lifetime health cover commences.
<https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/03/private-health-insurance-age-of-dependants-measure-questions-and-answers.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/documents/fact-sheet/ambulance-cover-factsheet.pdf>

proceedings pursuant to Chapter 10 of the CYPs Act” (Government of South Australia, n.d.)

- **Dental and Orthodontic services up to age 25 years:** Free or discounted dental and orthodontic services are conditionally available via the Australian Dental Foundation to care leavers in South Australia who meet the following criteria (Government of South Australia, 2023):
 - in receipt of an eligible Centrelink income support payment;
 - currently, or previously, in care (e.g. a guardianship or custody order); and
 - aged between 17 and 25.

Housing

Specific provisions related to housing and housing support for care leavers were identified in Australia (Queensland), the UK and the US. Provisions for care leavers related to housing presented in this section exclude those that are delivered as part of extended care programs (e.g. Victoria’s Better Futures initiative, UK Staying Put or Staying Close provisions), and those that are linked with education (see earlier Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Training section).

Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (Queensland)

The Youth Housing and Reintegration Services (YHaRS) delivers the following programs throughout Queensland; while these are not all strictly limited to care leavers (with YHaRS support and accommodation programs also targeting young people at risk of homelessness and those exiting youth justice detention), the After Care program specifically targets care leavers:

YHaRS Support: Guaranteed support to care leavers aged 12-21 years (those previously on a child protection order) to:

- apply for and access accommodation
- make contact with your family or carers (if that’s appropriate)
- find education, training, and job opportunities
- develop skills and knowledge to help you stay in a place and to live by yourself
- link with support, specialist services and longer-term accommodation services
- access financial help to pay for goods or services that are related to the above (Queensland Government, 2024a).

YHaRS Accommodation: Limited accommodation may be available to care leavers aged 15-21 years who:

- have been assessed as suitable and capable of semi-independent living
- are eligible for or in receipt of an independent income
- are eligible for social housing assistance
- are in the process of applying for / have an approved application on the Housing Register (Queensland Government, 2024a).

After Care: Case work and brokerage guaranteed to care leavers aged 17-21 years, with brokerage able to assist with:

- payment of utility bills or rent arrears
- contribution to bond and or rental agreement
- purchase of material aid such as white goods, furnishings, medication and hygiene consumables
- payment for essential documents
- purchase of specialist services
- enrolment of course fees at an educational or training institute
- payment for the cost of employment related licences (Queensland Government, 2024a).

Youth Housing Essentials (Queensland)

Youth Housing Essentials provides a one-off payment of up to \$5,000 to assist young people with the cost of moving from government services to independent living (Queensland Government, 2024b). Funding can be used to pay for a range of goods and services, including:

- furniture, fridge, washing machine and other essential home items
- education or work necessities, such as school stationery and work clothing
- transport and moving costs, such as vehicle registration, Go Cards, removalists and identification
- mobile phone and prepaid phone credit (Queensland Government 2024b).

Like the YHaRS initiative, the Youth Housing Essentials program does not only target care leavers but is available to other young people transitioning from youth justice, corrections, temporary supported accommodation, and youth foyers (Queensland Government, 2024b).

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government initiatives (UK)

As part of the Care Leavers Covenant, the UK Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government committed to several initiatives regarding housing for care leavers, including:

- Giving homeless **care leavers aged 18-21 years automatic “priority need” for accommodation;**
- Giving **care leavers aged 21 years and older “priority need” for housing where they were vulnerable** because of having been in care; and
- Introducing an **oversight scheme**, to ensure supported housing accommodation for care leavers is of the right quality and delivers value for money (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2018).

Exemptions to Shared Accommodation Rates for Housing Benefits and Universal Credit (UK)

In 2021, the UK Government listed care leavers up to the age of 25 years as a group exempt from the Shared Accommodation rates related to both Housing Benefits and Universal Credit (Centrepont, 2021). Previously this only applied to care leavers up to the age of 22 years.

This means that care leavers up to the age of 25 years are now eligible to claim the higher self-contained one-bed rates of either Housing Benefit or local Housing Allowance within Universal Credit (Centrepont 2021).

Family Reunification Program (FUP) (US)

The Family Reunification Program sets aside federal funding specifically for young people leaving care aged 18 to 24 years (inclusive) who are at risk of homelessness. The program provides Housing Choice Vouchers, which partly subsidise rent via direct payments to landlords, for a period of 3 years (US Department of Housing & Urban Development, n.d.). A 2-year extension available for some care leavers who meet “certain requirements”¹⁰.

Income Support and Tax Provisions

Special income support and tax provisions for care leavers were identified in Australia and the UK (England, Scotland, and Wales).

Savings Accounts for Young People in Care (UK)

UK Governments (England & Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) provide special savings accounts for children who have been in care for 12 months or longer. These provisions are underpinned by two pieces of UK legislation: Section 22 of the Children Act 1989¹¹ (which sets out requirements for the state as corporate parent), and the Child Trust Funds Act 2004¹².

Accounts opened prior to 2011 are known as Child Trust Funds, and those opened from 2011 are known as Junior Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) (Department for Education, 2023a). These accounts are long-term and tax-advantaged. For current Junior ISAs, governments allocate £200 to each account on opening, to which local authorities and other organisations or individuals can add during the young person’s time in care. Young people can access this account once they turn 18 years old (Department for Education, 2023a).

Transition Allowances (Australia, UK)

Multiple jurisdictions have implemented versions of transition allowances, or non-repayable bursaries to care leavers who are transitioning from care to more independent living. For example:

- *Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) (Australia-wide)*: The Australian Government provides access to a once-off payment of \$1,500 for care leavers aged 15-25 years (up to their 26th birthday) to provide a contribution towards the costs involved with transitioning to independent living. This can include costs related to housing (e.g. bond, rent pre-payments), essential household items, life skill programs,

¹⁰ Public information as to what these “certain requirements” entail was unable to be located.

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/22>

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/6/contents>

transport, or counselling (Department of Social Services, 2022). These payments are available to young people who continue to reside in extended care arrangements with caregivers, but must be accessed through a community service organisation, and are available only to young people who have a leaving care plan¹³ (Department of Social Services, 2022). TILA is not means-tested and does not comprise taxable income.

- *Youth Housing Essentials (Queensland)*: provides a one-off payment of up to \$5,000 to assist young people with the cost of moving from government services to independent living (Queensland Government, 2024b). Funding can be used to pay for a range of goods and services, including:
 - furniture, fridge, washing machine and other essential home items;
 - education or work necessities, such as school stationery and work clothing;
 - transport and moving costs, such as vehicle registration, Go Cards, removalists and identification;
 - mobile phone and prepaid phone credit (Queensland Government 2024b).
- *Setting Up Home Allowance/Leaving Care Allowance (England)*: Under the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, the Department for Education stipulated that local authorities in England should provide care leavers with a payment of at least £3,000¹⁴ to support the setting up of a new home (Department for Education, 2022; Department for Education 2023b). This allowance is guaranteed to care leavers aged 18-21 years¹⁵, or 25 years¹⁶ in some local authorities.
- *Care Leaver Payment (Scotland)*: In 2022, The Scottish Government announced a new 10-year annual £200 grant for 16–25-year-olds with care experience (Scottish Government, 2022). The grant aims to reduce some of the financial barriers that young people face in transition to adulthood and more independent living. More recently, the Scottish Government has been engaging in consultation with a view to shifting this newly named Care Leaver Payment into a once off £2000 payment, due to current cost of living challenges (Scottish Government, 2023).

Council Tax Exemptions (England & Scotland)

Around two-thirds of local authorities in England have exempted or discounted council taxes for care leavers, while all Councils in Scotland have exempted care leavers aged 18-25 years from paying council tax (Children’s Society, 2023; Scottish Care Leavers Covenant, n.d.). While the English reforms have been adopted by individual local authorities (sometimes following campaigning), the Scottish reforms (which entail 100% exemption from council tax

¹³ Further eligibility criteria, and examples of appropriate and inappropriate use of TILA, are outlined in the TILA Operational guidelines: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2022/tila-operational-guidelines-21-february-2022_0.pdf

¹⁴ This rate was increased in April 2023 from the previous amount of a minimum of £2,000

¹⁵ E.g. Hammersmith & Fulham - <https://www.lbhf.gov.uk/children-and-young-people/children-and-family-care/looked-after-children/care-leavers-local-offer/financial-support-we-offer-care-leavers>

¹⁶ E.g. London Borough of Merton - <https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms1/media/13010/merton-corporate-parenting-financial-provision-2023-003.pdf>

for care leavers) were underpinned by the Council Tax (Discounts) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2018 (SSI, 2018 No. 39)¹⁷.

Basic Income for Care Leavers Scheme (Wales)

In July 2022, a Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot was launched. The pilot was underpinned by certain principles, including: a lack of conditionality on income received, universality (the same payment for all care leavers), and no intention of affecting eligibility for another care leaver usual services (Welsh Government, 2024). The following care leavers were eligible for the pilot:

- Those looked after by one of the 22 local authorities in Wales for a period of at least 13 weeks, beginning after their 14th birthday and ending after they reached the age of 16 years.
- Either a resident in Wales or being supported as a care leaver by a Welsh local authority's social services department and living elsewhere (including anywhere in the world).

Those who enrolled in the pilot received a (post-tax) net amount of £1,280 per month for 24 months (paid monthly or fortnightly), with the Welsh Government publishing the first of a series of planned evaluation reports of the pilot in February 2024 (Welsh Government, 2024). This first report provides a description of the young people receiving the basic income, the first stage of theory work that underpins the scheme and outlines the views of professionals involved with the scheme (Welsh Government, 2024).

Other Provisions

Other provisions supporting care leavers were identified in Australia (NSW) and the UK.

Driving Support (NSW & UK)

In NSW, the Roads and Maritime Services Safer Driver Course is freely available to young people in and leaving care up to the age of 25 years who have completed at least 50 hours of log book driving time. The course, which is usually valued at \$140, includes the opportunity for learner drivers to earn 20 bonus hours of logbook credit (NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2024). Some UK councils also offer support towards driving lessons. For example, Swindon Borough Council (2024) provides driving lessons for care leavers aged 18-21 years up to the value of £500.

Camden Council Free Wifi for care leavers (UK)

In the UK, the Camden Council has made free wi-fi available to all Camden care leavers until the age of 25 years (Ham & High, 2024).

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2018/39/contents/made>

Birthday and Holiday Allowances (Various councils, UK)

Some Councils across the UK provide allowances for care leavers on special occasions such as their 18th birthday, birthdays from age 18-25 years, and Christmas/festival days. The amount of these allowances varies across councils. For example, 18th birthday allowances were identified ranging from £50¹⁸, to £60¹⁹ to £100²⁰. Christmas/festival allowances identified were around £100²¹ per year.

Summary and Conclusions

Young people leaving out-of-home are identified as a key priority group under the current National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2021-31) (Department of social Services, 2021). While recent some reforms have extended the support available to care leavers in all Australian jurisdictions, there is recognition that such provisions alone are unlikely to address the significant disadvantage required to sustainably advance outcomes for care leavers.

This exploratory study was commissioned by The Home Stretch campaign to identify and describe Australian or international measures that complement leaving, post-care and extended care policies, with a view to improving the life outcomes of care leavers. This includes special provisions that either provide avenues for 'positive discrimination' towards care leavers or those that promote the elimination of negative discrimination against care leavers. Attention was given to provisions that exist *outside* of leaving care policies and provisions, or universally within a jurisdiction.

A range of policies initiatives and schemes were identified around Australia and internationally (primarily in the UK and US). While some of these comprised 'whole-of-government' strategies, the vast majority were fragmentary initiatives related to higher education and training, employment, healthcare, housing, and income support. Overall, education, employment and housing measures appear to have been prioritised across various jurisdictions, with less attention given to health, mental health and other provisions. Most initiatives were developed in response to existing leaving care and post-care legislation, rather than being underpinned by independent legislation, and many were driven by advocacy from specific individuals (e.g. Terry Galloway in the UK), consortia or even private companies, rather than forming part of a consolidated government-led strategy to advance the circumstances of care leavers. The result is a somewhat haphazard offering and delivery of schemes, which differ widely across countries, jurisdictions, and even councils of the same country.

¹⁸ Wiltshire Council: https://wiltshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_care_leavers_fin_supp.html.

¹⁹ Kent City Council: https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/117761/Local-offer-to-young-people-who-are-care-leavers.pdf

²⁰ Birmingham Children's Trust: https://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/info/16/care_leavers/309/your_help_and_support_offer/10

²¹ Swindon Borough Council: https://www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20239/your_financial_rights/1606/financial_support_for_care_experienced_young_people_aged_18-25

A key challenge of ensuring that care leavers receive supports to which they are entitled is service providers being able to identify care leavers and share information with this group. To this end, various schemes have been introduced in England and Wales to assist in the identification of care leavers in various areas of government service provision. For example, government employment services, as well as prison and probation services in England in Wales have introduced 'markers' to identify care leavers in their databases with a view to ensuring that they are then supported to access available services and schemes (HM Government, 2014).

Despite these shortcomings, a range of very useful strategies for preventing discrimination and advancing the wellbeing and outcomes of care leavers across a range of life domains were identified. Such strategies can usefully form the basis of future coordinated initiatives to advance the overall health, social and economic position of care leavers.

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