



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**

Home Stretch WA Invest in Me Funding

Guidelines for Home Stretch WA Providers

July 2025



Contents

Document control	3
Review/Amendments.....	3
1 Background.....	4
2 Legislation.....	4
3 Invest in Me Funding administration.....	5
4 Principles	6
5 Access to Communities Leaving Care Fund.....	6
6 References and related documents.....	8

Document control

Publication date	July 2025
Review date	July 2027
Owner	Executive Director, Statewide Services
Custodian	Director, Service Delivery Implementation

Review/Amendments

Version	Date	Author/Reviewer	Description
1	June 2025	Senior Project Officer (Home Stretch WA)	Review of 2023 guidelines - updated version (August)
2	July 2025	Assistant Director and Director	Review and approved
3	July 2025	Executive Director, SWS	Review and approved

1 Background

Invest in Me Funding is one component within the safety net element of the Home Stretch WA service model. Invest in Me Funding is provided by the Department of Communities (Communities) to Home Stretch WA providers to support young people towards achieving their aspirations, to help them in times of crisis, and to grow their skills, knowledge and connections to community and culture.

Home Stretch WA is focussed on preparing young people to transition to interdependence. Supporting young people to develop their capacity to pay for things like education and training costs, car insurance and accommodation costs etc., is done incrementally to ensure young people can budget in the future for such things and can source community resources and support themselves, or with the help of their support circle.

These guidelines outline how the Invest in Me Funding is administered and the practice principles that Home Stretch WA providers must follow to ensure young people are supported with timely access to goods and services according to their needs, while encouraging them to become financially self-reliant.

2 Legislation

Part 4, Division 6 of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (the Act) outlines provisions about leaving the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO's) care.

Section 98 of the Act outlines the provision of social services to a child who leaves the CEO's care. The CEO must ensure that a child who leaves the CEO's care is provided with social services the CEO considers appropriate having regard to the needs of the child. This provision applies to all children who have left the CEO's care, except where a child ceases to be in provisional protection and care¹.

Section 3 of the Act outlines what the term "social services" means, being services to assist children, other individuals, families and communities including, but not limited to, the following:

- preventative services
- protective services
- placement services, information and advisory services
- education and training services
- counselling services
- therapeutic services
- advocacy services
- support services
- mediation services

¹ *Children and Community Services Act 2004*, Section 98(2)

- family violence services
- crisis services
- childcare services.

Under section 99 of the Act, the CEO *must* ensure that a young person who qualifies for assistance under section 96 of the Act, and seeks assistance, is provided with services to assist the person to do any one or more of the following:

- obtain accommodation
- undertake education and training
- obtain employment
- obtain legal advice
- access health services
- access counselling services.

While sections 98 and 99 of the Act obligates the CEO to ensure the provision of social services to eligible children and young people, these provisions do not necessarily extend to funding the applicable services.

Under section 100 of the Act:

1. The CEO *may* provide a person who qualifies for assistance under section 96 of the Act with financial assistance in the form of:
 - a) a contribution to expenses incurred in obtaining, furnishing, and equipping accommodation; or
 - b) a contribution to expenses incurred by the person in living near the place where the person is, or will be –
 - i. employed or seeking employment; or
 - ii. undertaking education or training; or
 - c) a grant to enable the person to meet expenses connected with his or her education or training.
2. Financial assistance may be provided under section 100 of the Act on any terms and conditions the CEO considers appropriate, which may include provisions as to repayment and the recovery of outstanding amounts.

The provision of financial assistance pursuant to section 100 of the Act to a young person who qualifies for assistance is at the discretion of the CEO (or their delegate).

3 Invest in Me Funding administration

Communities provides Home Stretch WA providers with Invest in Me funding, which is a pooled funding amount (based on \$2,500 per funded place per annum) to enable a young person to access more, or less, dependent on their individual needs. Invest in Me funding is used by providers as a pooled resource across each financial year.

Home Stretch WA providers are responsible for Invest in Me funding administration, including payment for goods/services for young people being supported by the service.

Invest in Me funding is designed to improve young people's access to resources, but also provides support to develop their capacity to become financially self-reliant. Young people should be encouraged to contribute towards the payment of expenses they are seeking funding for. Contributions are to be individually negotiated and are not always financial. Young people may contribute by other means consistent with achieving their goals, such as additional assistance to help maintain the household.

The young person and Transition Coach will reasonably agree on the purpose and expenditure of the funding. The amount expended on a young person may vary (up or down) depending on their identified needs.

4 Principles

Use of the Invest in Me Funding is guided by the following principles:

- Invest in Me Funding is to be used where no appropriate alternate funding option is available – for example, Commonwealth payments and allowances, including the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA), or State funded programs and initiatives.
- Transition Coaches will support young people to explore what alternative sources of funding is available prior to using Invest in Me Funding. This will involve effective networking to have a good knowledge of available services and referral mechanisms for young people to assist them to access mainstream services and resources beyond the child protection system.
- Invest in Me Funding is to be used in a consistent, transparent and fair manner to ensure equitable access to goods and services for all young people being supported by a Home Stretch WA provider.
- Home Stretch WA recognises young people as adults, with access to their own incomes either through employment or income support payments. The use of Invest in Me Funding is undertaken with the understanding that young people have capacity and are expected to contribute to their own costs.
- Use of Invest in Me Funding should be linked to developing financial literacy and achievement of goals identified by young people as part of their support planning through their Home Stretch WA Transition Coach.
- Young people should be involved in any planning or decision making regarding their needs and the goods/services required to address those needs.
- Invest in Me Funding is not to be used as an income supplement for young people being supported by the program.

5 Access to Communities Leaving Care Fund

To support its statutory obligations, Communities established a Leaving Care Fund to support young people as part of their preparation for leaving care and to provide support to young people who have left care and return for post care assistance.

A young person (aged 18-20 years) who is being supported by a Home Stretch WA provider has access to Invest in Me funding to meet their independence goals, support their skills development and efficiently respond to crisis events. Having the funds easily accessible and direct from the service provider minimises time delays and reduces reliance on seeking financial assistance from Communities.

While Invest in Me funding is the primary source of financial support for a young person engaged in the Home Stretch program, there may be some high-cost items or services, such as dental work or lawyer fees for a Criminal Injuries Compensation Claim (which may or may not have been identified prior to them leaving care), that cannot be paid due to the limited funding available. In these instances, the Transition Coach should support the young person to make a request for financial assistance for the required goods/services through a Communities district office from the Leaving Care Fund.

Supporting the smooth transition of young people to the program

A young person is not eligible for Home Stretch WA financial support until they reach 18 years old. During the smooth transition phase (from age 17.5), the Transition Coach will start supporting a young person who has consented to participate to make plans for their future, including how their aspirations can be funded, and to consider any specific goals related to building their financial stability. If the young person and the Transition Coach require funding to facilitate this planning, small amounts of funding can be requested through the district to pay for goods and services.

Up to \$200 in funding is available during this period to encourage the young person to meet with the Transition Coach, as rapport is being developed. This can cover incidental costs such as occasional meals or payment for specific activities. Facilitating meetings in an informal setting, such as a cafe or a bowling alley, can help reduce anxiety and provides an additional incentive for the young person to engage.

Invoices should be emailed to the caseworker, or another district worker as arranged, for payment to be made directly to the provider. Online purchases can be made with approval of the District Director or Assistant District Director.

If the young person requires additional support to facilitate engagement, such as the use of an interpreter or augmented communication equipment, a clear plan is required to determine:

- how this will be funded during the transition period
- if existing funding plans are sustainable, for example, if the young person's NDIS plan will continue to cover these costs, and
- for new or emerging needs, or if needs are being funded by Communities, how will these be met in the future.

6 References and related documents

Home Stretch WA providers can refer to the following:

- Home Stretch WA Community of Practice Knowledge Hub – Invest In Me Practice Resources (<https://homestretchwa.com/cop/invest-in-me-document-resources/>)
- Department of Communities Child Protection Guide (<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/child-protection-guide>) –
 - A.08 Leaving care and transitioning to adulthood
 - A.08.3 Home Stretch WA.
- Home Stretch WA – WA Gov website (<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/home-stretch-wa>).
- Services Australia, Transition to Independent Living Allowance (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/transition-to-independent-living-allowance>) for information about the allowance, including eligibility and what the payment can be used for.