

Dear.....

I am writing to you as my local premier to express my concern about a matter that affects all Victorians - our young people. Young people leaving our state system are facing unacceptable outcomes due to the premature termination of care.

I have witnessed far too many negative consequences for this group of young people, which are also one of the most vulnerable in our society.

Whilst your government funds a range of 'leaving care' or post care support programs, they are broadly considered to be discretionary, insufficient and fail to meet the care needs of the 16 and 17 year olds who are forced to leave state care.

International research has proven that extending care until the age of 21 is not only the right thing to do morally and socially, but it is also economically viable. The latest Australian cost benefit analysis by Deloitte Access Economics shows for every dollar spent on extending support to the age of 21, the return would be between \$1.40 and \$2.69 depending on the state.

As my local Premier, I urge you to take action and provide the option of extended care to 21 years.

Many young people leaving care have to experience poor transitions into adulthood and unsatisfactory life outcomes. One study showed that **half of those who are required to exit their care placement end up homeless, in prison, unemployed or a new parent within the first twelve months** (Raman et al, 2005). A recent Swinburne University national study of 400 homeless young people surveyed found that **63% had recently been exited from care.**

Don't you think the solution is clear?

I am asking for your help to provide these young people with better options. The current policy does not reflect domestic 'leaving home' patterns where young people are remaining at home longer.

58% of males and 47% of females aged eighteen to twenty-four in Australia have never left the family home (ABS, Social trends, 2013). **So why are we kicking out the most vulnerable group of young people as soon as they turn 18?**

Governments internationally who have raised the cut off age have already benefited from a range of direct outcomes when care is extended.

Research outcomes from the United States found when care is extended, the rates of homelessness are halved for care leavers, and the rates of participation in tertiary education are doubled (Courtney et al. 2005).

The United Kingdom, United States, Canada, parts of Europe and most recently New Zealand have all extended care to 21 years.

Why can't we do better for our young people here in Australia?

The Deloitte cost benefit analysis also estimated a number of benefits across other domains: improved mental health and physical health outcomes, reduced intergenerational disadvantage, and an increase in social connectedness.

The latest report from 'Create Foundation' put it succinctly.

"...All governments (state, territory and federal) should collaborate to:

Consider extending out of home care until 21 years, to provide more time over which transition can occur. This would make the process more gradual and less compressed, similar to the experiences of young adults in the general population..."

(McDowall 2016, p.63)

It is time that we provide our young people the option to leave care later. I am looking to my government to make this long overdue change that will benefit young people in care as well as our community. I am looking forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,