After Care Allowance Guidelines

These guidelines are for allowances to assist people leaving long term care.

Document approval

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1 Introduction

When a young person leaves care as an independent adult, they often need additional help with housing, employment and other essentials given their disproportionate disconnection from supportive family networks, and universal services that are often not sufficient to meet their needs.

Assistance is provided by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to help these young people transition from care to independence throughout early adulthood. That assistance may include ongoing fortnightly allowances and ad hoc payments for certain expenses.

2 Purpose

These guidelines provide information for DCJ and non-government (NGO) out-of-home care (OOHC) providers, caseworkers, carers and young people about three of the allowances available after a person has left statutory OOHC when they turn 18.

Information about a fourth allowance type, Post Care Education Financial Support (PCEFS), can be found here.

3 Definitions

The table below is a list of terms, keywords and/or abbreviations used throughout this document.

Term	Definition
After Care Allowance	Short term allowance paid to eligible care leavers aged 18 to 24.
Carer	The authorised carer providing a statutory OOHC placement for a young person at the time they turn 18.
ILA	Independent Living Allowance (paid to eligible care leavers aged 18 to 20)
Long term statutory care	Where the Minister holds parental responsibility for residence for a person until their 18th birthday
SOA	Staying on Allowance (paid to eligible carers)

4 Allowances available to assist the transition from care

These guidelines provide information about allowances to assist young people who remain in long term statutory care until age 18. Recipients must be eligible for assistance in accordance with the Guidelines for the provision of assistance after leaving long term statutory out-of-home care.

PCEFS is another allowance available to both statutory and supported carers who continue to support a young person in their home after turning 18. It relates specifically to assisting a young person to complete Year 12 studies, has different eligibility criteria, and is not covered by these guidelines.

4.1 Staying on Allowance

The Staying on Allowance (SOA) is paid to statutory carers who continue to support a young person aged 18 to 20 in their home, with the consent of the young person.

This allowance is available until the young person turns 21 or leaves the home.

To be eligible,

- the carer must continue to look after a young person who was in their care when they turned 18
- the young person in their care was in statutory care for at least 12 months before they turned 18

A carer may not be eligible if:

- they cared for the young person at a time other than when they turned 18
- the young person is already receiving the Independent Living Allowance
- they receive PCEFS. They can access the Staying on Allowance once the PCEFS allowance ends.

If a young person leaves their placement prior to turning 18 due to entering custody, and returns to live with their carer upon release, the Staying On Allowance may be paid from the date of their return.

SOA is paid directly to the carer by DCJ. To receive payment, the carer's bank account and contact details must be provided and DCJ must be advised of any change to either.

The carer is to advise DCJ within 14 days of the young person moving out of their home. An annual check is conducted to confirm, in writing, that the young person is still living in the carer's home.

If a young person leaves the carer's home and begins receiving the Independent Living Allowance, but returns within 30 days of the first payment, the Staying on Allowance may be paid from that date instead of the Independent Living Allowance if the criteria are met and the young person consents.

The carer does not need to remain an authorised carer to receive SOA. This may otherwise be a requirement if there are other children in care in the home.

4.2 Independent Living Allowance

The Independent Living Allowance (ILA) is paid to young people aged 18 to 20 who need ongoing assistance with the cost of accommodation or other essentials. Care leavers of this age are generally considered to meet this criterion unless they own property that could reasonably meet their housing needs or their housing is provided through other government funding.

Living in social housing or with their birth family does not exclude a young care leaver from receiving ILA as they are likely to pay rent or board and contribute to costs.

Young care leavers can still access the ILA even if they have other sources of income, including but not limited to the Commonwealth Transition to Independent Living Allowance and/or the Commonwealth Youth Allowance.

To receive ILA the young person must be eligible for assistance in accordance with the Guidelines for the provision of assistance after leaving long term statutory out-of-home care and reside in Australia.

18-20 year old care leavers are eligible for ILA if they:

- lived in statutory care for at least 12 months before they turned 18
- live independently
- do not own the house they live in
- need support with housing and essential living expenses

A young person may not qualify if they:

- live with a carer who receives the Staying on Allowance
- have left care following an adoption or guardianship order
- were restored to a parent or parents before turning 18
- are accessing supported independent living programs
- have their housing needs met by other government or non-government settings, including youth justice or corrective services.

The ILA is approved as part of the young person's leaving care plan.

ILA is paid directly to the young person by DCJ. To receive payment, the young person's bank account and contact details must be provided and DCJ must be advised of any change to either.

Annual contact will be made with the young person to check on their wellbeing and confirm ongoing eligibility.

4.3 Aftercare Allowance

To receive this allowance the young person must be eligible for assistance in accordance with the Guidelines for the provision of assistance after leaving long term statutory out-of-home care and reside in Australia.

The Aftercare Allowance is paid at the same rate as the ILA but is for older care leavers, has a slightly different purpose and additional eligibility criteria.

This allowance is available to young people aged 18 to 24 who are:

- undertaking full time training or education, and
- would be at risk of homelessness if financial assistance was not provided.

The allowance provides short-term assistance while a long-term housing solution is found. The allowance is therefore provided for a three-month period, reviewable at that time.

Young people cannot access both the ILA and the Aftercare Allowance simultaneously. However, ILA ceases when the young person turns 21. If the young person meets the criteria, they can transition to the Aftercare Allowance when 21.

4.4 Selecting the right allowance

Only one of the following allowances may be paid at a time to help a young person aged 18 and over to transition from care to independence.

- Post Care Education Financial Support (PCEFS)
- Staying on Allowance (SOA)
- Independent Living Allowance (ILA)
- Aftercare Allowance

Carer payments

PCEFS and SOA are payable to the carer. PCEFS is available to both statutory and supported carers and has different criteria to the allowances in this document.

PCEFS is paid at a different rate to SOA and, in some instances, will be a higher amount, particularly for young people aged 19 or 20.

PCEFS is available while a young person is undertaking Year 12 studies. If they complete or cease those studies, PCEFS will end and eligible carers may transition to SOA.

Young person payments

ILA and the Aftercare Allowance are payable to the young person. Both are paid at the same rate.

While some PCEFS and SOA payment rates are higher than ILA, the decision about which is claimed rests with the young person.

If a young person remains in the carer's home after turning 18, the carer may be eligible for SOA. The young person has the right to choose to receive ILA instead. This gives the young person self-determination over their finances and promotes independence.

ILA moves with the young person. A young person may wish to receive this regular allowance irrespective of whether they live between the carer's home and other accommodation.

Payment amounts

For the current allowance rates see DCJ Care Allowance Rates.

5 Applying for an allowance

As part of leaving care planning, discussions should be held with the young person about where they intend to live and which of the allowances they are eligible for and wish to receive.

Include the most suitable allowance chosen in the young person's leaving care plan as per the usual planning process.

Bank and contact details are required to enable payment.

If the young person is aged 18 to 20 and does not have a leaving or after care plan, or if they left care before SOA and ILA were introduced, they are encouraged to contact their OOHC agency, or the Care Leavers Line on 1800 994 686 or email careleavers@dcj.