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MEDIA RELEASE

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Nation's foster and kinship carers urge governments to extend the age of leaving care

Australia's largest ever foster and kinship care conference, with over 700 carers and delegates, will today call on the nation's governments to give young people in state care the option to extend support from 18 to 21.

The national *Shine a Light Conference* in Melbourne will vote on a motion to support the Home Stretch campaign and its call for governments around Australia to change the law and give young people in out-of-home care the option to remain in care until they are 21.

Foster Care Association of Victoria CEO Katie Hooper said foster families were being let down by the current system which cut support when young people turned 18.

"When state support for kids in foster homes is cut on their 18th birthday, many carers face the heart-wrenching decision about how they will support this young person into the future," she said.

"Most foster parents will do as much as they can to keep a young person safe and secure in their home and many will take on the full cost themselves. Meanwhile, their financial support from the government is cut and they lose access to many vital services their families need.

"It's complex out there for young people and all young people, including those with a care experience, require support post 18, if they are looking for a job, continuing study or parenting themselves – let alone trying to find accommodation, they need our support.

"Without the ongoing support of foster parents, this situation would be even worse and governments are taking this for granted."

Foster carer Karen McIntosh is caring for a young person who is approaching 18 and would not dream of asking her to leave.

"She should be able to concentrate on VCE and enjoy life, not be dreading the uncertainty of approaching 18 and the prospect of facing the world on her own," she said. "To not go the extra distance to properly prepare a young person for adulthood would be a waste of all the hard work, sacrifice and achievement to date.

"Governments are turning their backs on foster carers who may have originally only signed up for the short term but find themselves on an unplanned path."

Home Stretch campaign chair Paul McDonald welcomed foster carers' support for the Home Stretch.

"Foster carers and kinship carers are unsung heroes in our community, often keeping young people in their care well past 18 without any support or recognition," he said.

"Giving young people the opportunity to extend state care until they are 21 if they need more support, will keep a roof over their head and help them stay in education or work.

"Recent research from the US showed that every extra month in foster care past 18, the likelihood a young person will complete their education increases by eight per cent.

"Extending state care to 21 for those who need it is the right thing to do and also makes economic sense. Research shows that for every dollar spent on extending state care, governments would save more than double in reduced homelessness, arrests, alcohol and drug dependence and hospitalisations."

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