



Australian Government
Australian Institute of
Family Studies



Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) review: Written submissions

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) is inviting organisations and individuals with expertise in out-of-home care and leaving care to submit a written response to discussion questions about the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).

In particular, we are seeking information and your professional opinions about how to increase the accessibility and use of TILA by young people as they leave care.

The responses to the written submissions will inform recommendations that AIFS makes to the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Safe and Supported governance bodies about how to improve TILA.

The call for written submissions will close **Monday 14 April**.

About the project

The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) has commissioned AIFS to undertake a review of TILA. This project is an activity (5.b) under Action 5 of the *Safe and Supported: First Action Plan 2023-2026*. *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* and the Safe and Supported Action Plans were designed (and are being implemented) through a shared decision-making approach that includes Australian, state and territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders and non-government organisations.

The aim of the TILA Review is to:

- provide information for assessing possible different approaches for TILA funding, including ways to improve accessibility and use
- offer actionable recommendations to Australian governments that can be used to improve access to TILA and its utility in assisting young people to transition from care.

Research and consultation activities

This project includes a range of research and consultation activities. The first stage was a desktop review of existing research and evidence on TILA. This included a review of research and policy literature and analysis of data from DSS and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

This call for written submissions is the first part of our national consultations. Consultations will also be conducted with:

- young people with a care experience
- foster, kinship and permanent carers
- caseworkers
- state and territory governments
- representatives from relevant peak bodies
- leaving care service providers and subject matter experts.



The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

About the written submission process

We are seeking the views of organisations and experts who work with care leavers or have expertise in the leaving care sector. This includes:

- peak bodies
- out-of-home care and leaving care service providers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations
- key expert stakeholders (e.g. researchers working in this field).

You do not need to answer all the discussion questions.

We ask that no personal or identifying information is shared in responses to discussion questions.

You don't have to submit your written submission in one sitting – you can save your progress and return to it later to complete your response. To save your response, click the 'Resume later' button at the top right-hand corner of the screen and follow the prompts.

If you have an experience of being in out-of-home care or are a carer, you are welcome to make a submission but you may prefer to share your views in an online workshop with other people with a care experience or carers. Please contact TILAreview@aifs.gov.au for more information on workshops. If you choose to make a submission, we ask that you do not include any personal information about yourself, your carer or children in your care.

All information you provide will be securely stored, in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1998* and [AIFS Privacy Policy](#). We will retain the data for 7 years in accordance with AIFS Records Authority and, if you agree, we may reuse the information in other projects to do with out-of-home care.

At the end of the form, there are questions about your organisation, privacy and option to leave contact details. Some of these questions are required. They help us better understand your responses to the discussion questions and ensure we maintain your privacy in a way that you choose.

Overview of TILA

TILA is a \$1,500 Australian Government payment to support care leavers aged between 15 and 25 years who are leaving or have already left formal- or court-ordered out-of-home care and are transitioning to independent living. The payment is also available to young people who continue to live with their non-parent carers after their order expires.

TILA is administered by either the state/territory child protection agency or an approved lead non-government organisation in each state and territory. TILA was first established in 2003 and provided \$1,000 for each eligible young person. In 2009, the payment amount was raised to \$1,500. It can be accessed as a one-off lump sum or in up to 6 instalments of \$250.

Care leavers need a current leaving care plan and a caseworker to apply for TILA. TILA applications are made by a caseworker on behalf of the care leaver and there is a requirement to obtain quotes for goods or services to be purchased with TILA funding.

TILA funds can be spent on a range of items and services to assist young people when leaving care across categories such as:

- housing
- essential household items
- employment
- education.

How care leavers are using TILA

Analysis of TILA administrative data and out-of-home care population-based data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that not all eligible care leavers are accessing TILA.

Key points from our analysis include:

- TILA funding is being underutilised by care leavers – for example, only 61% of total TILA funding was used in 2023–24.
- 60% of TILA recipients in 2023–24 were aged under 18 years, with 29% aged 18–21 years and only 11% aged 22+ years.
- Use of TILA varied across states and territories. It was highest in Tasmania, NSW and SA, and lowest in the NT and Victoria.
- Nationally, TILA uptake appeared to be similar between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous care leavers but there were variations between jurisdictions. TILA uptake was higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers in the ACT, WA and NSW, and lower in Victoria and SA.
- TILA recipients in WA, SA and the NT were more likely to be living in capital cities, whereas in NSW and Queensland, recipients were more likely to live outside of the capital cities.
- It was not possible to accurately estimate TILA access among care leavers with a disability due to the unknown disability status of a large proportion of 12–17 year olds in out-of-home care.
- TILA access appeared to be higher among young female care leavers than among male care leavers.

Discussion questions

This section summarises information from a review of research and policy literature and asks you to answer some discussion questions. There are 11 questions. You do not need to answer every question. If you would prefer to answer the questions in a different format, please contact the project team via email at TILAreview@aifs.gov.au.

If you are from an organisation representing or working with carers and are in a position to share carers' views on any of the discussion questions, this would be welcome. Please indicate where your response represents the views of carers. Likewise, we are interested in hearing the views of staff that work directly with care leavers. Please indicate if your response represents the views of these staff.

Impacts of accessing TILA

There is a lack of data that can tell us whether (or how) TILA is having a positive impact on care leavers. Some research suggests that TILA can provide some practical support and may meet some care leavers' short-term needs.

Discussion questions

1. **What impacts (positive or negative) has your organisation observed for young people who have accessed TILA?**
2. **What is driving these impacts (or lack of impacts)?**

Accessibility of TILA

A key finding of our literature review was that much is already known about the barriers to care leavers' accessing or using TILA.

We found much less published information identifying what could improve access to TILA. The identified barriers and enablers included:

- **administrative processes.** This was the most often identified barrier. The administrative requirements to obtain the payment – for example, the need for a caseworker to submit the application – were identified as causing a significant burden. For many young people leaving care, this raised the question of whether pursuing TILA was 'worth the effort' given the relatively low payment of \$1,500.
- **awareness of TILA.** The reviewed research suggests that many care leavers have not heard of TILA.
- **having a leaving care plan.** The requirement that care leavers have an approved leaving care plan was identified as a significant barrier to accessing TILA as the evidence shows that not all care leavers have a completed plan.

- **access to a caseworker.** Young people with access to a caseworker and/or transition support are more likely to access TILA. However, not all care leavers have access to a caseworker after leaving care. Although the research evidence was limited, some groups appear to have additional challenges accessing post-care support; for example, care leavers living in remote areas.
- **additional barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people face a number of interconnected barriers to accessing TILA. For example, leaving care and post-care services may not be culturally safe or accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers. Further, the eligibility criteria could exclude some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as those leaving care before the age of 15 years (the minimum age for TILA eligibility).
- **increased flexibility and payment administration.** One of the few identified enablers of access to TILA was increasing flexibility in payment administration. From 2014, care leavers up to 25 were able to access TILA and it also became possible to receive it in instalments. This was reported to have improved access to TILA.

Discussion questions

3. Reflecting on the barriers and enablers above, what do you think are the main factors that influence care leavers' access to and use of TILA?

Where relevant, please include in your response anything relevant to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers
- care leavers living in different geographical areas (e.g. urban, regional, remote)
- culturally and linguistically diverse care leavers
- care leavers with a disability
- young parent care leavers
- care leavers in different states or territories.

- a. How do these factors influence care leavers' access to TILA and are there other barriers and enablers not listed above?
- b. Are there particular ways that these issues intersect to enable or limit access to TILA?

Administrative and application requirements of TILA

Questions in this section seek to gather information on the TILA spending categories and the administrative processes.

Spending categories

There are 8 categories of goods and services that TILA funding can be spent on. These are:

- housing
- essential household items including secondhand furniture and appliances
- life-skills programs
- employment and education support
- one-off transport expenses including purchasing a car/motorbike/bicycle
- public transport
- counselling
- miscellaneous items considered on a case-by-case basis.

Analysis of the TILA data indicates that TILA is most often used for:

- housing expenses (e.g. connecting to utilities, moving costs and rental bonds)
- essential household items (e.g. purchasing furniture and whitegoods).

Discussion questions

4. Do these spending categories meet the needs of care leavers?

- a. Are there other spending categories that should be included?
- b. Are there any other considerations relevant to the spending categories?

Application process

There are a number of requirements and administrative processes involved in applying for TILA. Care leavers must have a leaving care plan to access TILA. An application for TILA is undertaken by a caseworker on behalf of the young person leaving care. The caseworker also manages the payment on the care leaver's behalf.

The main steps in the application process are:

- **pre-assessment check** – The caseworker will assess whether the young person meets the eligibility criteria and if TILA is suitable for their needs.
- **assessment** – The caseworker discusses the young person's leaving care plan with them and agrees what TILA will be used for and if it will be paid in a lump sum or instalments. The caseworker completes the TILA application form, which is signed by both the caseworker and the young person.
- **claim lodgement** – The caseworker will submit the TILA application via the Provider Digital Access (PRODA) portal.
- **payment process** – Once the application has been approved, TILA payments will be electronically transferred to the caseworker's organisation. TILA funds cannot be transferred or paid directly to the young person.
- **purchase process** – The caseworker will purchase the agreed items or services for the young person and monitor the use of TILA funds.
- Our review of the literature identified that the administrative process of applying for TILA is considered burdensome by some stakeholders.

Discussion questions

5. How is the TILA application process working for care leavers?

We are particularly interested in the views of staff who work directly with care leavers on how administrative processes could be improved.

- a. What (if any) changes to the application process would improve or increase the use of TILA by care leavers?

How to improve the accessibility and use of TILA – suggested solutions

A key focus of the TILA Review is to provide actionable recommendations to improve the accessibility and use of TILA by care leavers. We are particularly interested in hearing about examples of good practice in providing financial support to care leavers, either from Australia or overseas.

In the literature we reviewed, the following actions were identified for improving the accessibility and use of TILA:

- increasing the amount of TILA and distributing it over several years
- simplifying the administrative process
- paying TILA directly to care leavers
- expanding or simplifying the eligibility criteria
- increasing awareness of TILA
- improving accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care leavers
- improving accessibility for other groups of care leavers, such as culturally and linguistically diverse care leavers, care leavers with a disability and care leavers residing in different geographical areas (e.g. regional or remote)

Discussion questions

6. Reflecting on the above list of potential actions to improve TILA, what do you think are the highest priority actions?

Please feel free to include additional actions not listed above.

- a. Are there actions listed above that you think would not be effective? If so, why?
- b. Could the priority actions you have identified be undertaken in isolation or would multiple actions need to be undertaken together for them to be effective? Please describe.

If you indicated in your above response that changing the TILA payment amount is a high priority, please address the following sub-questions.

- a. If the TILA payment amount should be changed, what amount would adequately meet young peoples' needs as they transition from out-of-home care? Please indicate how you have identified the recommended payment amount.
 - b. How should TILA be paid? For example, in a lump sum or in instalments, and over what period of time?
7. **We are interested in exploring how suggested actions to improve TILA could be implemented. How would the priority actions you have identified above be implemented?**
- For example, what would a simplified administrative process look like or how would care leavers' awareness of TILA be increased?*
- a. Is there anything else that should be considered when implementing changes to TILA?
8. **Are there particular policy or service contexts that are influencing (or have previously influenced) TILA access or its usefulness?**
- We are particularly interested in hearing about policy and service contexts from state and territory governments and TILA administering organisations.*
9. **Can you share examples of policies, practices or procedures that are currently influencing (or have previously influenced) TILA access or its usefulness?**
10. **Can you share any examples of effective policy or practice in providing payments to young people in Australia or overseas?**
- We are interested in effective practice in payments to young people in general – not just transition from care payments.*

Final thoughts

11. **Is there anything else – not addressed by the previous questions – that you think might be relevant for our review of TILA?**

About your organisation

These questions ask some information about your organisation and where you work. This will help us to better understand your responses to the discussion questions.

- Your name/your organisation's name
Please note: We will not include your name or your organisation's name in any reporting unless you select this option below.
- My organisation/I can be identified in reports and presentations about this topic*
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 If yes, how would you/your organisation like to be identified?
- What state or territory do you mostly work in? [check all that apply]*
 - ☐ National
 - ☐ Australian Capital Territory
 - ☐ New South Wales
 - ☐ Northern Territory
 - ☐ Queensland
 - ☐ South Australia
 - ☐ Tasmania
 - ☐ Victoria
 - ☐ Western Australia

- What does your organisation do?*
 - ☐ Carer peak body
 - ☐ Other peak body
 - ☐ Out-of-home care service provider
 - ☐ Government agency
 - ☐ Commissioner or guardian
 - ☐ University
 - ☐ Other, please describe
-
- Are you submitting on behalf of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation?*
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
 - [filtered: If an ACCO/OOHC or leaving care service provider] Which areas do you deliver services in? [check all that apply]
 - ☐ Urban
 - ☐ Regional
 - ☐ Rural
 - ☐ Remote
 - [filtered: If an ACCO/OOHC or leaving care service provider, peak body] Who does your organisation support? [check all that apply]
 - ☐ Carers
 - ☐ Children in out-of-home care
 - ☐ Care leavers
 - ☐ Other, please describe
-

* questions are compulsory

Before final submission

- This submission does not include any personal or identifying information in the responses to discussion questions*
- Please ensure that you have removed any personal or identifying information from responses to the discussion questions.*
- You must click "Agree" to complete this submission.*
- ☐ Must tick to submit]
- AIFS can use the information in this submission in other projects to do with out-of-home care and carer supports within the next 7 years.*
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- My organisation/I can be contacted for follow-up questions or further consultation.
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- Please provide contact information if yes [name, organisation, role, email, phone number]
- I would like to receive a summary of the report findings. (Please note this will be after the conclusion of the project.)
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- If yes, please provide your email address.
- *questions are compulsory