

Media release
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Don't "terminate" foster care too early: Arnie

Victoria should heed international initiatives to extend support for young people in State care, according to the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. Mirroring similar action in the United Kingdom, Californian Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, recently signed a new bill extending foster care to the age of 21.

The new law recognises the role of a stable foster care placement in a range of education, housing and other socio-economic outcomes. It also acknowledges the economic benefits of supporting young people who might otherwise need a higher level of support in later life.

"California's innovative approach to supporting young people in care well past their 18th birthday makes a strong case for more robust support for young people in care here in Victoria," said the chief executive of the Centre, Dr Lynette Buoy, today.

As part of its 2010 Victorian State election campaign, the Centre is calling for post-18 support not just to the age of 21, but, where possible, to 25 years of age.

Nationally, around a third of young people can expect to experience homelessness in their first year out of the care system. This compares badly with the 85 per cent of young people in Australia who live with one or both parents until age 19, and the 79 per cent who will do so until they are 24.

Poor education outcomes could also be partly addressed by greater stability of housing and support. A recent research report by Wesley Mission Victoria and Anglicare recommends an "education-first" approach to assessment and placement services, and providing "placement and support until young people ... complete Year 12 or an equivalent accredited qualification".

"In Victoria, post-18 support is too often fragmented and inadequate. Young people from a care background typically achieve milestones much later than their peers. This should be reflected in the level of support government provides," Dr Buoy said.

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