New La Trobe University research calls for a national framework to address alarmingly low rates of university access by young people exiting out of home care.

The study, *Out of care, into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers*, finds three reforms are required to improve the access and achievement of care leavers in higher education:

1. The collection of nationally consistent data on higher education access and outcomes for care leavers.
2. Policy reform within the education and community service sectors including greater recognition of this under-represented student cohort and support for the transition of young people from out-of-home care to adulthood.
3. An over-arching need for cultural change that challenges the often low expectations for care leavers.

Principal investigator La Trobe's Dr Andrew Harvey says around 40,000 children across the country require out-of-home care and their shot at a better life can often hinge on educational opportunities that are disproportionately out of reach.

"Care leavers rarely transition to higher education and are largely excluded from this level of learning that brings the highest wage premiums and lifetime rewards."
"These young people also receive little financial support beyond the age of 18, and universities have few specific policies to recruit or support them,' Dr Harvey said.

The study also looked at the British experience in this area, which revealed that policy reform can lead to rapid increases in care leaver participation.

"The UK has moved from 1% to 7% of care leavers attending university within a decade, simply by identifying them better, assisting them to access university, and providing dedicated resources to support them once enrolled.

"Similar change is possible here if we could resolve some state, federal and health/education divides, and get the issue on university radars," Dr Harvey said.

The study was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and can be accessed here.

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