



**Growing Financial
Counselling in Australia:**
*An Investment in
Economic Productivity*

*Financial Counselling State and
Territory Peak Associations Federal
Budget Submission 2026-27*



This Federal Budget Submission has been prepared by:

- Financial Counselling Queensland (FCQ)
- Financial Counselling Tasmania (FCAT)
- Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic)
- Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW (FCAN)
- Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia (FCAWA)
- South Australian Financial Counsellors Association (SAFCA) - including Northern Territory



As the members of the national financial counselling peak body, Financial Counselling Australia (FCA), the aforementioned state and territory peak associations support the underlying principles of FCA's Federal Budget Submission 2026-27, and its calls for Federal Government investment to capitalise on the momentum generated by industry funding.

This submission is intended to complement FCA's submission by outlining workforce scale, service capacity and funding infrastructure required to meet community demand. While FCA's submission addresses individual specialist areas requiring an immediate funding injection, this submission focuses on the operational and workforce implications of frontline service delivery. Together, the two submissions highlight the need for investment to meet the national demand for financial counselling.



Summary

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Quadruple investment in frontline service provision financial counselling over the next ten years, with a goal of achieving 300% financial counselling sector growth.

Australia faces a structural cost-of-living crisis. Households are struggling with rising housing costs, increasing utility bills, stagnant wages, and food insecurity. Significant numbers are experiencing economic disadvantage, with financial pressures directly impacting health, wellbeing, and social participation.

Financial counselling support is a proven, early intervention that helps individuals stabilise finances, avoid homelessness, manage debt, and recover from family violence, disasters, and gambling harm. Yet, the sector is underfunded, under-resourced, and unable to meet demand.

Financial counselling delivers significant social and economic returns. For every dollar invested, it generates between \$3.70 and \$5.30 in benefits, while early intervention reduces downstream government costs in housing, health, justice, and child protection. Without scaling up services, the current financial counselling workforce would take between 17 to 70 years (with an average of 33 years across seven states and territories, excluding Australian Capital Territory) to assist all households experiencing hardship.

Incremental increases to sector funding will never meet true community demand. Only a substantial investment, to quadruple the financial counselling workforce over ten years will meet the true scale of community need.

By investing \$3.45 billion over the next 10 years, the Federal Government will unlock between \$12.76 billion to \$18.28 billion in economic and social benefits through avoided costs in health, housing, justice, and lost productivity.

Investment would be delivered through existing Commonwealth funding mechanisms for community services, including grants administered via the Department of Social Services and complementary funding streams linked to workforce development and sector capacity-building. This would enable rapid scale-up using established contracting, reporting and accountability frameworks, while allowing services to be tailored to local service systems.

The National Workforce Strategy 2026-2030 for financial counselling sets out a clear, evidence-based roadmap for building a strong, sustainable and skilled financial counselling workforce that can meet the scale and complexity of community need, applicable and adaptable across the country. It recognises that financial counselling is not a peripheral support, but a critical early intervention that protects homes, prevents harm, strengthens local economies and promotes financial capability across the state.¹

Investing in financial counselling now prevents avoidable crises and strengthens the broader economy by helping Australians remain employed, housed, and fully engaged in society.

¹ Additionally, Financial Counselling Victoria's 'Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: the Next 10 Years' research papers and the resulting recommendations provides a roadmap for how this investment can be structured in Victoria, with applicability in other jurisdictions.

Context

Australia is at a tipping point. The pressures on households are mounting with skyrocketing rents, rising mortgage repayments, escalating food and utility bills, and insecure employment. For more and more Australians, the dream of financial security is slipping away.

ACOSS's *Poverty in Australia 2025* report showed that 3.7 million people (14.2 per cent) in Australia are in poverty, or 1 in 7 people.² These aren't just numbers. They represent young people forced to choose between heating and eating, parents hiding mortgage and rental arrears from their children, and older people skipping meals to afford essential medication.

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis has made these pressures even more acute.

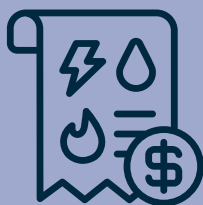
Housing: Only 0.7 per cent of properties on the rental market were affordable for people earning a full-time minimum wage, with even less affordability for those on the Age Pension (0.3 per cent), Disability Support Pension (0.1 per cent) or JobSeeker (0 per cent).³



Housing: Mortgage arrears in Australia have risen again, with non-performing home loans now representing 1.08 per cent of all mortgages in March 2025, an increase from 1.03 per cent in June 2024.⁴



Utilities: Electricity and gas bills increased by nearly 16 per cent over the past two years (excluding government rebates, grants and concessions).⁵



Groceries: While inflation for food prices is consistent at 3 per cent annually, there are significant increases in specific categories including eggs (19.1 per cent increase) and fruit and vegetables (4.6 per cent increase).⁶



2 Accessed 17 December 2025: https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty_in_australia_2025_overview/

3 Anglicare Australia's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2025: <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/2025-rental-affordability-snapshot/>

4 Australian Prudential Regulation Authority Quarterly Authorised Deposit-taking Institution (ADI) Performance to March 2025, accessed 28 August 2025: <https://www.apra.gov.au/quarterly-authorized-deposit-taking-institution-statistics>

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Consumer Price Index, Australia June Quarter 2025

6 Ibid.

This affordability crisis has had a significant mental and physical health toll on the most vulnerable in our community.



Debt assistance: More than 168,000 people reached out for support via the National Debt Helpline during 2024-25, the biggest year since 2018-19.⁷



Suicide risk: 86 per cent of suicide prevention professionals said that the greatest risks to suicide rates over the next 12 months are cost of living and personal debt (86 per cent), and housing access and affordability (83 per cent).⁸



Food insecurity: Almost 3.5 million Australian households experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months, or 1 in 3 households.⁹

7 National Debt Helpline Data Portal: <https://ndh.org.au/ndh-data-portal/>

8 Suicide Prevention Australia: 2024 State of the Nation in Suicide Prevention, accessed 28 August 2025: <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/our-work/state-of-the-nation>

9 Foodbank 2025 Hunger Report, accessed 17 December 2025: <https://reports.foodbank.org.au/foodbank-hunger-report-2025/>

Financial counsellors are reporting record demand, with many people seeking support for the first time in their lives. For many working families and dual-income households, stagnant wages combined with high living costs mean that full-time employment is no longer a guarantee of financial security.

The cumulative impact is devastating. The economic security that Australians once took for granted is eroding. For too many, every week is now a calculation of what bill can be paid, what meal can be skipped, or what risk must be taken to get through to payday.

Australia's cost-of-living crisis is not temporary. It is structural, deepening, and requires a systemic response led by government investment in proven supports. Financial counselling is a highly effective support with a demonstrated economic and social return on investment.

Financial counselling offers a lifeline at the very point when people feel they have no options left. It is free, independent, confidential, non-judgemental and effective; a critical service designed not for profit, but for people.

A financial counsellor can mean the difference between keeping a safe home or facing homelessness; between breaking free from the grip of family violence or remaining trapped by financial abuse; between rebuilding life after fires, floods, or pandemics, or slipping permanently into poverty.

Financial counsellors are trained to negotiate directly with creditors, advocate with utility providers, explain complex rights and responsibilities, and provide trauma-informed support that helps people regain control of their lives. They are not just problem-solvers, they are protectors of dignity, wellbeing, and opportunity.

And yet, despite its proven power in delivering quantifiable economic benefits and social return on investment, there are critical problems for the national financial counselling sector which restrict its ability to fully meet the needs of the community - due primarily to chronic under-funding of this important community service.^{10,11}

Federal and state and territory governments have recognised the importance of investing in financial counselling, though with varying levels of commitment. Now is the time for full Federal Government commitment to growing the financial counselling sector.

Demand for financial counselling is driven by issues that sit across multiple Commonwealth policy areas, including social security and concessions, family and domestic violence, housing stress and homelessness, disaster recovery, gambling harm, mental health and small business distress. These are all areas where the Commonwealth already invests through different portfolios and programs, including through strategic approaches like the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, the National Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Children, the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, and the National Small Business Strategy - though without inclusion of financial counselling as a critical service.

¹⁰ Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: the Next 10 Years - Volume Two: The Economic and Social Impact of Financial Counselling in Victoria

¹¹ National workforce survey results found that a quarter of financial counsellors working less than full time reported they would like to increase their hours of paid work, indicating an underemployment issue due to funding. Further, approximately 17 per cent of financial counselling agencies reported using unpaid volunteers for financial counselling services. (Reference: <https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/fca-content/uploads/2025/07/NWS-survey-consults-report.pdf>)

Funding financial counselling through a single portfolio does not reflect the cross-sector drivers of demand or the role financial counsellors play in supporting people to navigate and stabilise across these systems.

As financial counselling is funded predominantly through Commonwealth programs and national industry schemes, sustainable expansion of service capacity requires federal leadership and long-term national investment. Reliance on short-term or fragmented program funding cannot deliver the workforce stability or service coverage required to meet demand consistently.

The case for action could not be clearer:

- Every \$1 invested in financial counselling returns a social return on investment between \$3.70 and \$5.30.¹²
- For particularly vulnerable cohorts including family violence, small business owners and people with disability, the return on investment is even higher.

Every day, Australians miss out on a service that could stabilise their lives, prevent lasting harm, and build more resilient communities. By ambitiously investing into this proven highly effective early intervention service, the Federal Government can substantially reduce costs and realise gains across housing, health and workforce productivity.

This submission calls for quadrupling investment in financial counselling over the next ten years, to ensure its availability to all households experiencing cash flow problems and realise the proven gains of the service. Most of the growth should be in generalist financial counselling, with dedicated funding for specialist streams in family violence, small business, disaster recovery, gambling harm, and other specialist contexts according to localised community need.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Quadruple investment in frontline service provision financial counselling over the next ten years, with a goal of achieving 300% financial counselling sector growth.

¹² Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: the Next 10 Years - Volume Two: The Economic and Social Impact of Financial Counselling in Victoria

Leaving money on the table

Every time a financial counsellor prevents a crisis, whether that be diverting away from homelessness, averting a bankruptcy, negotiating utility debt, or helping a victim-survivor escape family violence, **government saves dramatically more than it spends.**

As detailed in *'Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: the Next 10 Years - Volume Two: The Economic and Social Impact of Financial Counselling in Victoria'*, when scaled across the thousands of people who could be supported earlier by a fully funded financial counselling workforce, the missed opportunity is staggering – hundreds of millions in costs avoided each year. By not making the most of this extraordinary service by funding it to meet community need the government is leaving money on the table.

This is not simply a matter of social policy; it is a matter of economic strategy. Financial counselling offers an evidence-based highly effective solution that helps to achieve economic growth by addressing and preventing financial hardship, reducing avoidable demand on crisis systems, and building community resilience.

Properly resourced financial counselling reduces the fiscal burden on government, supports higher labour force participation, and strengthens local economies, particularly in regional areas hit hardest by cost-of-living pressures and natural disasters.

By not scaling up financial counselling to meet community need, the government is effectively walking away from billions of dollars in avoided costs and foregone productivity gains. At a time when government is seeking to do more with less, it should invest in financial counselling as a social service intervention with a demonstrated return on investment.

Financial counselling should be a cornerstone of Australia's productivity and economic resilience strategy.

Opportunity to capitalise on industry funding

The 2019 Sylvan Review of the financial counselling sector identified that a lack of predictable and sustainable funding was the largest impediment to increasing access to financial counselling and recommended that industry contribute additional resources to expand capacity in recognition that their activity contributes to demand for services.¹³

The Financial Counselling Industry Fund (FCIF) was launched in 2024 with Federal Government seed support and voluntary commitments from a range of industry sectors. The Government invested \$1.5 million to support the establishment of FCIF with industry contributing three-year funding commitments. While the impact of the industry funding is not yet measurable, the recently announced \$22.65 million FCIF Expansion Grant Round will soon support expansion of frontline services in high-demand regions.

However, there remains a significant shortfall between the additional \$45 million annual industry funding target recommended by the Sylvan Review (with an initial \$20 million contribution recommended in the first year) and actual contributions received from industry (\$36 million over three years - or around 26 per cent of the original target). Contributing to this shortfall is the fact that not all funding has flowed directly to frontline service delivery, with a portion used for establishing and operating the FCIF and for Innovation Grants. Moreover, the current funding commitments conclude well before the long-term challenges facing the sector have been met.

It is important to emphasise that the Sylvan Review recommended that **government funding be maintained and enhanced**, with industry funding designed to complement, not replace, government funding streams.

Without federal investment, the momentum achieved through FCIF risks plateauing.

With federal investment, the financial counselling sector can meet the original intent of the Sylvan Review, maximise the impact of industry contributions, and ensure that funding beyond 2030 supports sustainable growth in financial counselling capacity and frontline service delivery to meet community need.

The Federal Government has an opportunity now to capitalise on the early investment into the FCIF. Contribution through financial investment, as well as leveraging Government influence on industry, is critical to cementing industry funding for financial counselling as a long-term stable proposition.

¹³ The Countervailing Power: Review of the coordination and funding for financial counselling services across Australia (2019), accessed 16 January 2026: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-10/apo-nid261816.pdf>

A smarter investment into early intervention

Community need for the expert assistance of financial counselling is strong and growing, with more demand than there are resources available.

Financial counselling services report long waiting lists, which result in clients spiralling further into debt while they wait for help. Too often, financial counsellors are forced to triage only the most urgent cases such as families already at the brink of eviction, or individuals already facing bankruptcy, leaving countless others to fend for themselves.

Workforce expansion alone will not guarantee earlier access to support if people are not reaching services until crisis point. Evidence from frontline services indicates that low awareness, stigma and limited referral pathways through other systems can delay help-seeking. Complementary investment in referral pathways and basic community awareness, including links from Services Australia, health services, schools and family violence services, would support earlier engagement and maximise the impact of workforce growth.

The vision is bold but necessary: to grow the size of the national financial counselling sector by 300% within a decade. Under this proposal, community need for financial counselling across is met in the six years between 2034 - 2040.¹⁴ Full funding details are available in the Appendix.^{15,16}

¹⁴ These calculations do not account for any additional people in financial hardship, population growth, generational change, disaster events, global economic downturns, or other major unforeseen events that may threaten the financial wellbeing of Australians. **These timeframes indicate what it would take to respond to current unmet need only.**

¹⁵ Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) 2022, accessed 28 August 2025: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/secure/making-ends-meet>. We have chosen to use this metric as HILDA is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey that tracks the same households and individuals over time, collecting detailed information on income, employment, expenditure, housing, and financial stress indicators. Compared with administrative or one-off survey data, HILDA provides comprehensive coverage, longitudinal insights, consistency and credibility and direct relevance to financial stress indicators.

¹⁶ These calculations are based on HILDA data for households experiencing cash flow difficulties, and the average casework hours per client reported in *Volume 2: Economic and Social Impact of Financial Counselling in Victoria* (24.1 hours per client). While *Volume 3: Caseload Guidelines of the Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: The Next 10 Years* report series provides an alternative estimate (34.4 hours per client), the Volume 2 figure of 24.1 hours has been adopted as it:

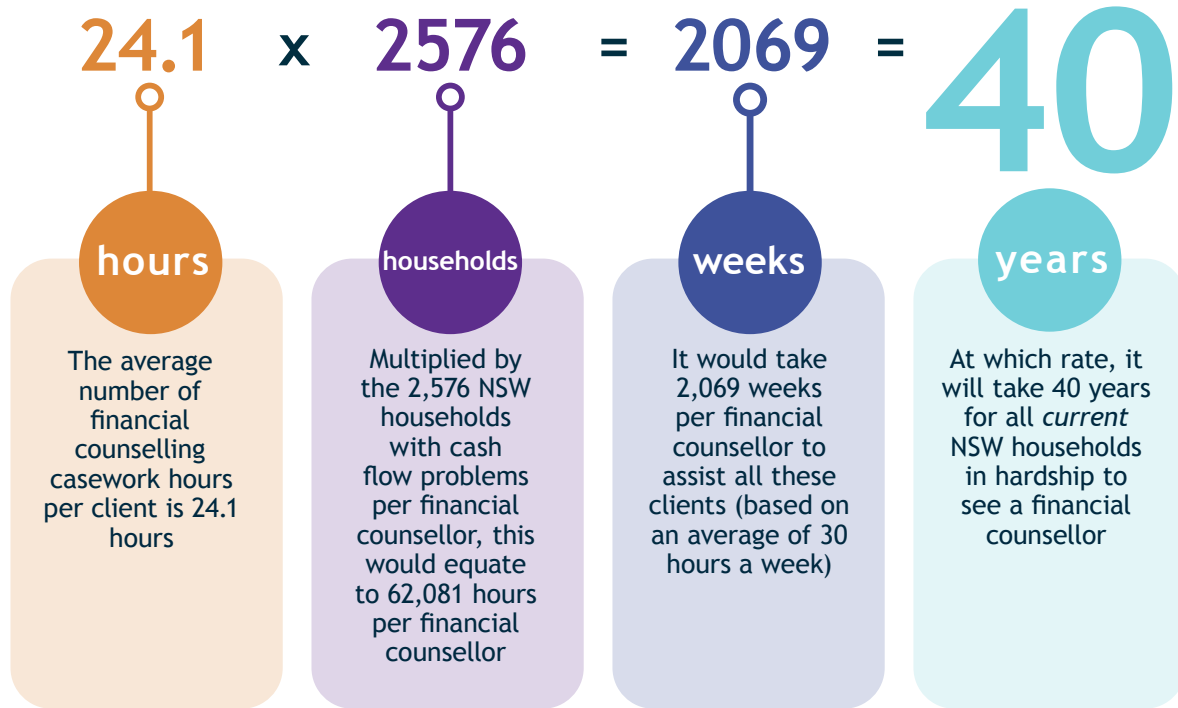
- is derived from a larger dataset (247 responses compared with 128); and
- exhibits less variation (standard deviation of 32 hours compared with 84.09 hours),

and therefore represents a more conservative estimate.

We note that this average casework hours figure has been derived from research conducted in Victoria. For the purposes of modelling, this figure has been applied across all other states and territories as alternative figures are unavailable.

New South Wales

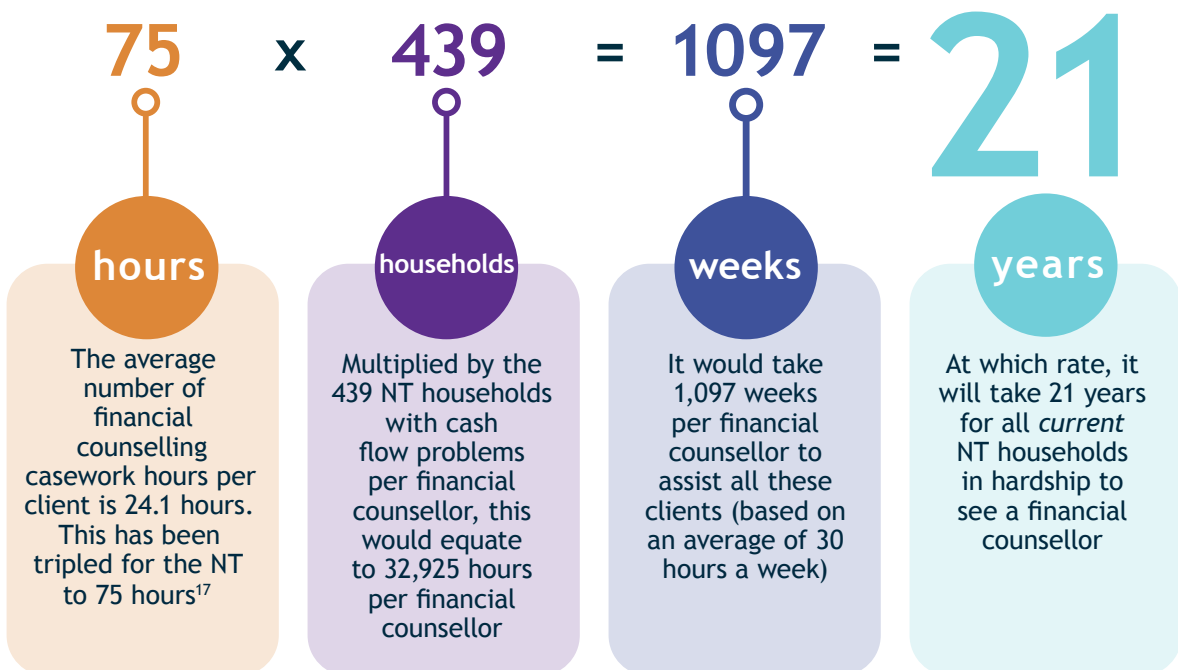
Current demand



Under our funding proposal, NSW would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2040.

Northern Territory

Current demand

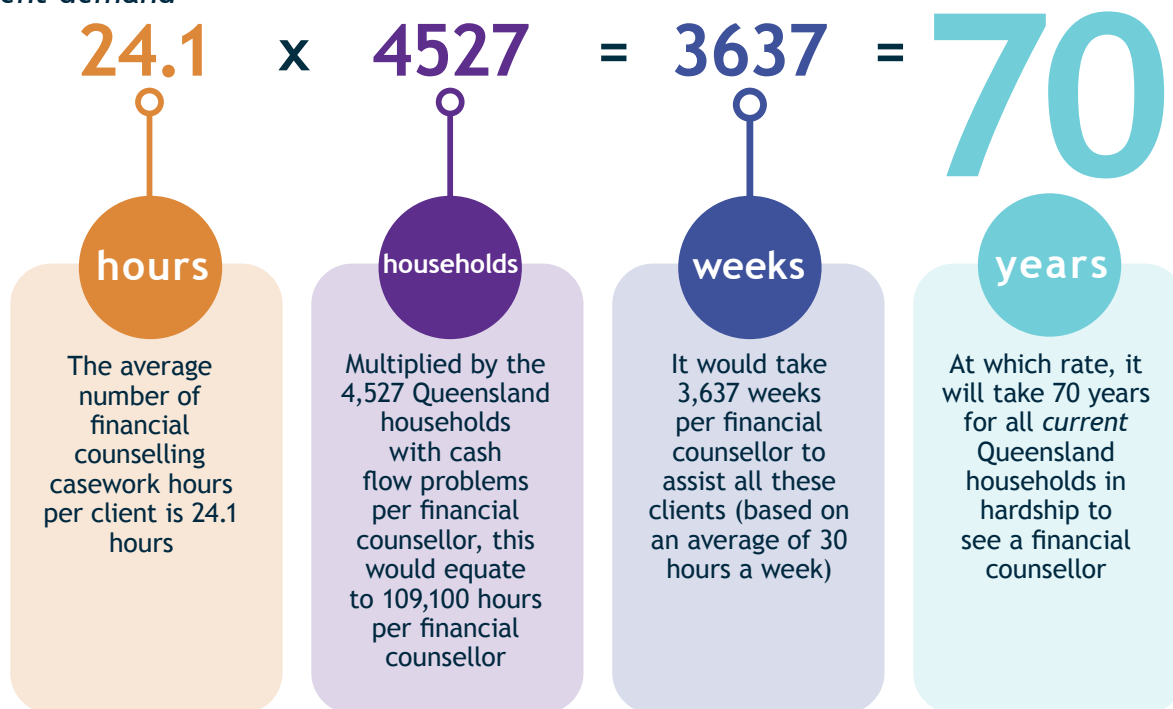


Under our funding proposal, NT would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2040.

¹⁷ We have tripled casework hours per client for the NT because of entrenched systemic socioeconomic disadvantage affecting First Nations communities. We have chosen to triple hours based on statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which note that 30% of First Nations people live in the most disadvantaged decile of areas, compared with 8% of non-Indigenous Australians.

Queensland

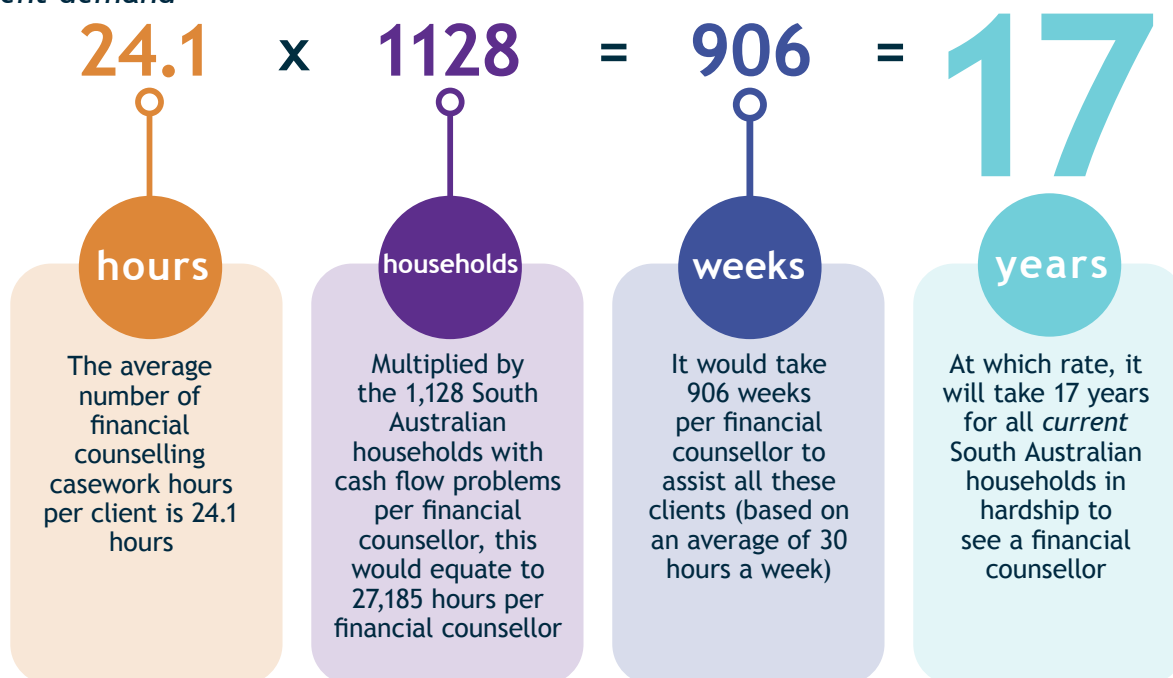
Current demand



Under our funding proposal, Queensland would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2039.

South Australia

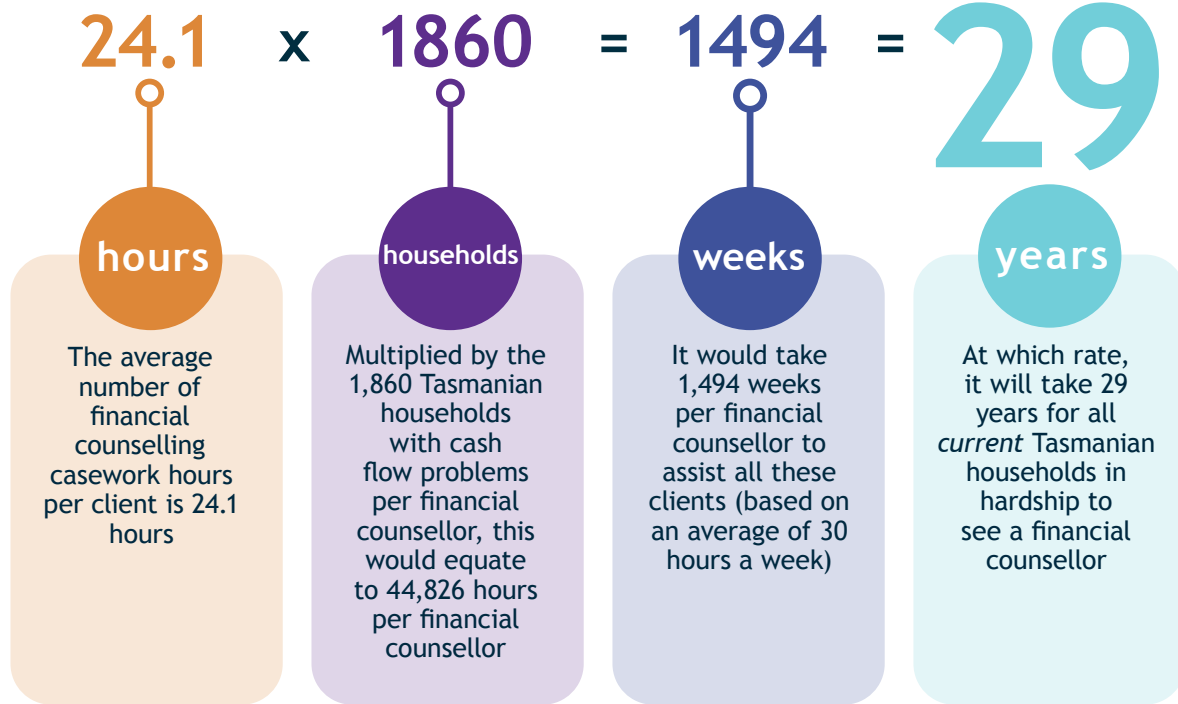
Current demand



Under our funding proposal, South Australia would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2034.

Tasmania

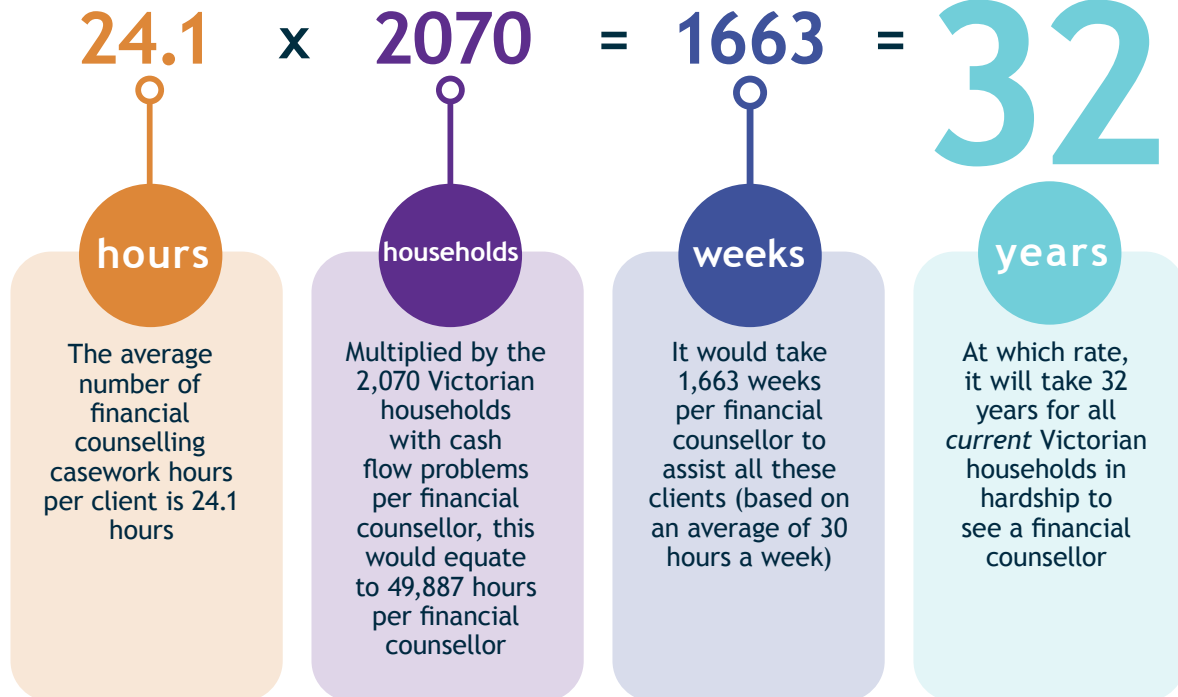
Current demand



Under our funding proposal, Tasmania would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2037.

Victoria

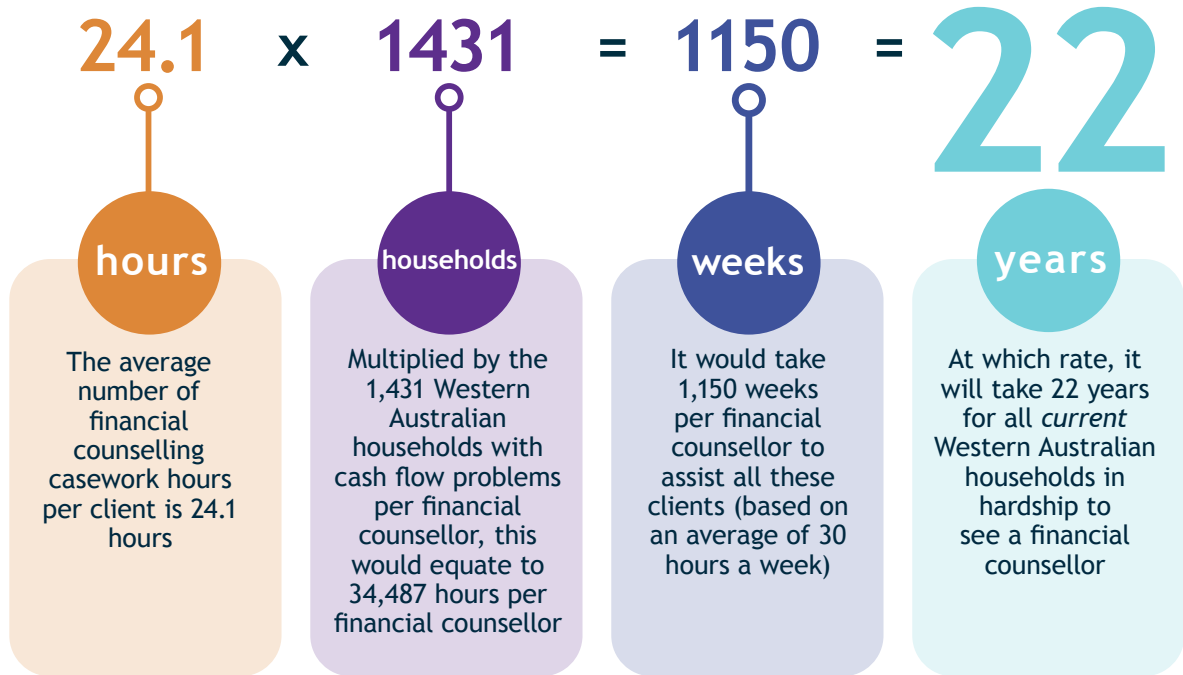
Current demand



Alternatively, under our funding proposal, Victoria would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2038.

Western Australia

Current demand



Under our funding proposal, Western Australia would meet all current community need for financial counselling by 2036.

Growing Financial Counselling: the Next 10 Years

A national workforce of 4,500 financial counsellors by 2035 is not just achievable. It is essential.

Expanding generalist services

The greatest volume of people seeking help generally engage first with generalist financial counselling services embedded within a diverse range of community sector settings. These generalist services are the frontline of Australia's financial counselling system and must therefore receive a proportionate share of new investment to ensure coverage, accessibility, and responsiveness at the local level.

At the same time, we recognise the critical role of specialist financial counselling services for specific cohorts experiencing complex, multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage. A dedicated proportion of the overall funding should therefore be directed to these specialist services to ensure that people facing structural or compounding barriers can access the right support.

The Federal Government should ensure that resources flow to the areas and populations of greatest need, strengthening service capacity across generalist and specialist contexts, and delivering on a coherent, sector-wide vision for equitable financial wellbeing across the country.

Allocation of new funding should be guided by indicators of need, including remoteness, disaster exposure, proportions of First Nations communities, service availability and levels of socioeconomic disadvantage, rather than solely by population share. This will ensure that workforce growth reduces existing access gaps rather than scaling them in parallel.

Strengthening specialist services

Specialist financial counsellors are a growing part of the workforce. They meet the complex needs of vulnerable communities, including those affected by family violence, gambling harm, disaster recovery, and small business crises. These roles require advanced skills and expertise to support clients with highly complex circumstances.

The National Workforce Strategy recognises the importance of defining and supporting these specialist practice areas, noting the strong sector interest in formally credentialling and structuring practice specialities to build capability and impact of these roles.¹⁸ Additionally, the Victorian Workforce Strategy recommends developing a Core Functions Framework, with national application.

While this professionalisation work is underway, dedicating specific funding streams for these specialisations is critical to meet existing community need, while simultaneously building a workforce that has the expertise to contribute to scoping the parameters of these specialist roles.

Financial counselling casework makes it clear that client vulnerabilities rarely occur in isolation. For instance, family violence may intersect with small business issues (e.g. through coerced directorships), or mental health challenges may present following experience of a disaster. Funding programs for the sector should therefore recognise and respond to this interconnected case complexity, rather than treating vulnerabilities as discrete or siloed issues.

¹⁸ National Workforce Strategy 2026-2030, Financial Counselling Australia, accessed 19 December 2025: <https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/fca-content/uploads/2025/12/National-Workforce-Strategy-2026-30-Dec-202536.pdf>

Investing in Safety: The Economic Case for Family Violence Financial Counselling

Family violence remains a pervasive and costly issue, with profound social, economic, and personal consequences. Effective interventions, including family violence financial counselling, not only provide critical support for victim-survivors but also deliver substantial economic benefits. Economic research estimates that financial counselling alone generates between \$30 million and \$39 million in economic benefits annually through reduced costs of family violence.¹⁹

Financial counselling helps victim-survivors navigate the complex financial impacts of abuse, including debt, financial control exerted by perpetrators, and economic instability. By addressing these issues, financial counsellors reduce clients' exposure to ongoing risk and improve their capacity to achieve financial independence.

The economic rationale for increasing funding is clear. The research shows that the social return on investment in financial counselling for victim-survivors of family violence is a significant \$5.90 to \$8.10 for every \$1 invested.²⁰

The same economic research indicates that, for approximately 15 per cent of clients who experience an improvement in reduced risk or exposure to family violence, nearly half of these improvements can be attributed to financial counselling. These improvements translate directly into reductions in the societal costs of family violence, including expenses related to specialist family violence services, justice and child services, lost income, property damage, and broader economic impacts.

Access to specialist family violence financial counselling is varied across the country, with some jurisdictions investing proportionately more into this critical specialist service. Expanding investment in family violence financial counselling would enable more comprehensive coverage across the country, improved service responsiveness, and greater prevention of the compounding effects of financial abuse.

By increasing current funding levels by 300% over the next 10 years, in line with increases for generalist financial counselling, the Federal Government can ensure that victim-survivors of family violence, no matter their location, can have timely access to the specialised financial counselling necessary to rebuild their lives.

¹⁹ Growing Financial Counselling in Victoria: the Next 10 Years - Volume Two: The Economic and Social Impact of Financial Counselling in Victoria

²⁰ Ibid.

Restoring Small Business Financial Counselling: An Urgent Economic Imperative

Small business is the backbone of Australia's economy. There are almost 2.6 million small businesses operating across the country, accounting for around 97 per cent of all Australian businesses. They contribute approximately \$590 billion a year to the economy, or about one-third of Australia's gross domestic product, and employ roughly 39 per cent of the private sector workforce.²¹ Small businesses support local jobs, sustain communities in cities and regions alike, and are a major source of innovation, resilience and economic diversity throughout Australia.

Yet when financial hardship strikes, small business owners face uniquely complex challenges: debts tied to personal guarantees, disputes with landlords and creditors, exposure to natural disasters, and mounting tax obligations. Without specialist support, these pressures threaten both businesses and families.

The Small Business Debt Helpline (SBDH) plays a critical role as a national entry point for small businesses in financial distress. As a once-off advice service, it fulfills an important role in meeting the needs of small business owners who are able to self-advocate. However, there is a clear service gap for those vulnerable small business owners who do not have the capacity to self-advocate.

Previous state-based programs providing dedicated small business financial counselling casework have delivered measurable, successful, outcomes in helping owners negotiate with the ATO, manage leases, recover from disasters, and in some cases, close with dignity.

However, the loss of funding for these services has left small business owners across the country without vital, dedicated support. Without intervention, business owners in distress are more likely to default on debts, close prematurely, or experience compounding mental health issues. Families risk losing homes tied to business loans, while communities lose jobs and local activity. These outcomes flow through to the federal budget via higher demand on social services.

Expanding access to small business financial counselling casework services across the country is both a sound economic strategy and a social necessity. This should be done in conjunction with additional funding for the SBDH to meet growing community need, and to explore and evaluate how the re-established casework service is best integrated with SBDH service model.

For an investment of \$9.37 million in the first year, and a commensurate increase to existing SBDH funding, the Federal Government can establish a proven national financial counselling casework service that reduces avoidable costs, protects families, and promotes economic resilience, while strengthening an existing frontline service.

²¹ Australian Small Business and Enterprise Ombudsman, accessed 17 December 2025: <https://www.asbfeo.gov.au/small-business-data-portal/number-small-businesses-australia>

Beyond the Emergency: Permanent Funding for Disaster Recovery Financial Counselling

Natural disasters have profound and lasting financial impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Financial counselling plays a crucial role in helping affected individuals, families and communities navigate these challenges, offering support in areas like insurance claims, debt management, and accessing government assistance. However, current funding models for this specialisation provide only short-term, event-specific support, which do not adequately address the ongoing needs of disaster-affected individuals.

The episodic nature of funding can lead to gaps in service delivery, particularly during periods between disaster events. Financial counselling agencies have to let experienced staff go in funding droughts, and the sector then faces challenges in maintaining knowledge, capacity and readiness to respond promptly when new disasters occur. This reactive approach results in delays in support and increased distress for disaster-impacted communities.

To address these challenges, a permanent, sustainable funding model for disaster recovery financial counselling with specialist coordination through state and territory peak associations, in tandem with the federal disaster recovery coordinator function identified in the FCA submission, should be established with an investment of \$9.37 million in the first year.

Such a model would ensure that disaster recovery and resilience financial counselling services are consistently available, enabling a proactive and continuous response to the financial needs of disaster-affected communities. This approach would not only enhance the resilience of individuals and communities but also contribute to more efficient and effective disaster recovery processes.

This investment should be underpinned by the WA Financial Counsellors Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery Framework (the Framework), which provides guidance not only for the financial counselling sector but also the broader community sector and the public on the role of financial counselling in disaster management.²² This Framework has national applicability, and can be adapted across jurisdictions for an effective and consistent national approach.

By providing consistent support, we can build community resilience and preparation for disaster events, help mitigate the long-term financial impacts of disasters and empower individuals to rebuild their lives with confidence.

Transitioning from a reactive to a proactive funding model for disaster recovery financial counselling is essential. Such a shift would ensure that financial support is available when needed most, facilitating quicker recovery and fostering stronger, more resilient communities.

²² Atkins, M., Bérard, L., & Zou, S. (2025). Financial counselling for disaster resilience: The Western Australian Financial Counselling Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery Framework. The University of Western Australia. <https://doi.org/10.60836/zc6n-y221>

Betting on Recovery: Sustained Support for People Experiencing Gambling Harm

Gambling harm in Australia is a national emergency - we are the biggest gamblers in the world per capita, and the problem is getting worse, recording the largest gambling losses ever in 2024 of \$32 billion.²³

Financial counselling is a crucial intervention, providing individuals with the tools to address their gambling addiction, manage debts, negotiate with creditors, and access support services. Specialist financial counsellors trained in gambling harm are essential in addressing the complex needs of affected individuals.

The current level of funding for gambling harm financial counselling is insufficient to meet the rising demand. The increasing prevalence and severity of gambling-related harm means financial counsellors are stretched, limiting their ability to provide timely and comprehensive support. Increasing funding is essential to ensure these services can adequately respond to the growing needs of Australians affected by gambling harm.

By increasing current funding levels by 300% over the next 10 years, in line with increases for generalist financial counselling, the Federal Government can ensure that people experiencing gambling harm and affected others continue to have timely access to the specialised financial counselling necessary to rebuild their lives.

23 Australian gambling statistics, accessed 17 December 2025: <https://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/statistics/theme/society/gambling/australian-gambling-statistics>

Building a strong foundation

Delivering on the National Workforce Strategy

The financial counselling sector has worked together to identify the priority actions required to deliver the *FCA National Workforce Strategy 2026-30*, a project funded by the Federal Government's Department of Social Services.²⁴

In the next Federal Budget, to establish a strong national foundation for implementation of this Strategy, the financial counselling sector must be funded to deliver on early actions across the following ten priority areas:

1. Addressing the labour market imbalance
2. Fostering and developing new sector entrants
3. Building a disaster-ready workforce
4. Being vigilant about workforce wellbeing
5. Strengthening skills, quality and professionalism
6. Innovating and streamlining for more time with clients
7. Consistently supporting frontline workers, no matter where they are based
8. Strengthening capability to support diverse and marginalised groups
9. Building on First Nations workforce successes
10. Improving the interface of financial counselling and capability work

Combined, these priority actions require targeted Federal Government investment to enable consistent, efficient and coordinated delivery at a national level. Early investment will ensure the sector has the infrastructure and capability needed to support sustainable growth in the financial counselling workforce. In future years, continued investment across the Strategy pillars will be critical to meeting rising demand and supporting a skilled, supported and diverse national workforce capable of delivering high-quality financial counselling services to communities across Australia.

Workforce growth would be staged and supported through expanded training pipelines, supervision capacity and accreditation infrastructure, as set out in the FCA National Workforce Strategy. Investment in frontline positions must therefore be matched by proportional investment in training, professional development and workforce support systems to ensure quality, retention and client safety as services scale. This training, professional development and support systems is best delivered by state and territory peak associations, as detailed overleaf.

²⁴ National Workforce Strategy 2026-2030, Financial Counselling Australia, accessed 19 December 2025: <https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/fca-content/uploads/2025/12/National-Workforce-Strategy-2026-30-Dec-202536.pdf>

Recognising the role of the state and territory peak associations

All financial counsellors in Australia are required by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) to be a member of their state or territory peak association, and to comply with accreditation and professional development requirements delivered by their state or territory peak association.

State and territory peak associations are the ones who register, accredit, train, audit, and support financial counsellors. They provide critical support for financial counsellors, financial counselling agencies, financial capability workers, and other affiliated professions. With appropriate funding, state and territory peak associations can support new sector entrants, increase retention rates, deliver professional development, case work assistance and facilitated peer support, and create a strong foundation of support for the sector.

Any increase in federal funding for financial counselling and financial capability positions directly contributes to resourcing demands on state and territory peak associations to support those financial counsellors pursuant to the ASIC requirements.

The Federal Government should fund their fair share of state and territory peak associations financial counselling member services to ensure that this essential sector support infrastructure is sustainable and effective.

As such, we recommend that the Federal Government provide sufficient funding to state and territory peak associations to meet the professional needs of financial counsellors, relative to the recommended increase in funding for frontline service delivery. The funding amount is likely to differ between jurisdictions depending on the membership and service requirements, but we suggest that a figure of between \$2,500 to \$3,500 per financial counsellor is appropriate.

State peak associations can also play a critical coordination role in program monitoring and evaluation, drawing upon existing economic and social benefits research structures to regularly measure outcomes delivered by investment of federal funds into the financial counselling sector.

Conclusion

Australia stands at a pivotal moment for financial wellbeing. The National Workforce Strategy 2026-2030 sets out a clear, evidence-based roadmap for building a strong, sustainable and skilled financial counselling workforce that can meet the scale and complexity of community need, applicable and adaptable across the country. It recognises that financial counselling is not a peripheral support, but a critical early intervention that protects homes, prevents harm, strengthens local economies and promotes financial capability across the state.

By investing \$144.06 million in FY27, increasing steadily to \$529.99 million by FY36, the Federal Government can extend the reach of financial counselling to a total of 1.8 million vulnerable Australians over the next ten years, unlocking between \$12.76 billion to \$18.28 billion in economic and social benefits through avoided costs in health, housing, justice, and lost productivity.

This is not simply expenditure. It is a strategic investment in Australia's social and economic resilience and productivity.

We are calling for a system that is equitable, sustainable, skilled and connected, supported by a workforce of around 4,500 qualified financial counsellors by 2035, funded through long-term, indexed investment and guided by shared planning and accountability frameworks. Implementing this approach will allow services to address existing unmet need and continue to grow in line with demand, deliver consistent quality across states and regions, and ensure that no Australian is left to face financial distress alone.

The opportunity is clear. The Federal Government can create a professionalised, enduring system that delivers measurable returns for individuals, communities and the state economy.

The evidence, the roadmap, and the sector are ready.

What is needed now is a shared commitment to act, to implement the Strategy in full, in partnership with state and territory financial counselling peak associations, and to ensure that every Australian has access to the financial counselling support they need to recover, rebuild and thrive.

Appendix

Table 1: New South Wales

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)			
	FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
	Yr 1	2027	\$40,392,000	\$149,450,400	\$214,077,600	330	264	21,450	21,450	2.78%	21,450	21,450	2.78%
	Yr 2	2028	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	47,450	6.14%	22,094	43,544	5.63%
	Yr 3	2029	\$61,200,000	\$226,440,000	\$324,360,000	500	400	32,500	79,950	10.35%	22,756	66,300	8.58%
	Yr 4	2030	\$73,440,000	\$271,728,000	\$389,232,000	600	480	39,000	118,950	15.39%	23,439	89,739	11.61%
	Yr 5	2031	\$85,680,000	\$317,016,000	\$454,104,000	700	560	45,500	164,450	21.28%	24,142	113,881	14.74%
	Yr 6	2032	\$97,920,000	\$362,304,000	\$518,976,000	800	640	52,000	216,450	28.01%	24,866	138,747	17.95%
	Yr 7	2033	\$110,160,000	\$407,592,000	\$583,848,000	900	720	58,500	274,950	35.58%	25,612	164,360	21.27%
	Yr 8	2034	\$122,400,000	\$452,880,000	\$648,720,000	1,000	800	65,000	339,950	43.99%	26,381	190,741	24.68%
	Yr 9	2035	\$134,640,000	\$498,168,000	\$713,592,000	1,100	880	71,500	411,450	53.24%	27,172	217,913	28.20%
	Yr 10	2036	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	489,450	63.33%	27,987	245,900	31.82%
	Yr 11	2037	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	567,450	73.43%	28,827	274,727	35.55%
	Yr 12	2038	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	645,450	83.52%	29,692	304,419	39.39%
	Yr 13	2039	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	723,450	93.61%	30,583	335,002	43.35%
	Yr 14	2040	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	801,450	103.71%	31,500	366,502	47.43%

Note: The 'current funding' figures provided for each state and territory in this Appendix assume that all current Associate and Accredited members of associations are currently practicing, in paid employment, funded to an average 0.8FTE. However, there is evidence in the National Workforce Strategy survey results that this is not the case.

Table 2: Northern Territory

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
	FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need
Yr 1	2027	\$4,528,800	\$16,756,560	\$24,002,640	37	30	770	770	4.74%	770	770	4.74%
Yr 2	2028	\$4,896,000	\$18,115,200	\$25,948,800	40	32	832	1,602	9.85%	793	1,562	9.61%
Yr 3	2029	\$5,508,000	\$20,379,600	\$29,192,400	45	36	936	2,538	15.61%	816	2,379	14.64%
Yr 4	2030	\$6,120,000	\$22,644,000	\$32,436,000	50	40	1,040	3,578	22.01%	841	3,220	19.81%
Yr 5	2031	\$6,732,000	\$24,908,400	\$35,679,600	55	44	1,144	4,722	29.05%	866	4,086	25.14%
Yr 6	2032	\$7,344,000	\$27,172,800	\$38,923,200	60	48	1,248	5,970	36.73%	892	4,978	30.63%
Yr 7	2033	\$7,956,000	\$29,437,200	\$42,166,800	65	52	1,352	7,322	45.05%	919	5,897	36.28%
Yr 8	2034	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	8,778	54.01%	947	6,844	42.11%
Yr 9	2035	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	10,234	62.97%	975	7,818	48.11%
Yr 10	2036	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	11,690	71.93%	1,004	8,823	54.29%
Yr 11	2037	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	13,146	80.89%	1,034	9,857	60.65%
Yr 12	2038	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	14,602	89.84%	1,065	10,922	67.21%
Yr 13	2039	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	16,058	98.80%	1,097	12,019	73.96%
Yr 14	2040	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	1,456	17,514	107.76%	1,130	13,150	80.91%

Table 3: Queensland

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
Yr 1	2027	\$15,300,000	\$56,610,000	\$81,090,000	125	100	8,125	8,125	1.89%	8,125	8,125	1.89%
Yr 2	2028	\$21,420,000	\$79,254,000	\$113,526,000	175	140	11,375	19,500	4.53%	8,369	16,494	3.83%
Yr 3	2029	\$30,600,000	\$113,220,000	\$162,180,000	250	200	16,250	35,750	8.31%	8,620	25,114	5.84%
Yr 4	2030	\$42,840,000	\$158,508,000	\$227,052,000	350	280	22,750	58,500	13.60%	8,878	33,992	7.90%
Yr 5	2031	\$55,080,000	\$203,796,000	\$291,924,000	450	360	29,250	87,750	20.40%	9,145	43,137	10.03%
Yr 6	2032	\$67,320,000	\$249,084,000	\$356,796,000	550	440	35,750	123,500	28.71%	9,419	52,556	12.22%
Yr 7	2033	\$79,560,000	\$294,372,000	\$421,668,000	650	520	42,250	165,750	38.54%	9,702	62,258	14.48%
Yr 8	2034	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	214,500	49.87%	9,993	72,250	16.80%
Yr 9	2035	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	263,250	61.21%	10,293	82,543	19.19%
Yr 10	2036	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	312,000	72.54%	10,601	93,144	21.66%
Yr 11	2037	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	360,750	83.88%	10,919	104,063	24.20%
Yr 12	2038	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	409,500	95.21%	11,247	115,310	26.81%
Yr 13	2039	\$91,800,000	\$339,660,000	\$486,540,000	750	600	48,750	458,250	106.54%	11,584	126,895	29.50%

Table 4: South Australia

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
Yr 1	2027	\$18,360,000	\$67,932,000	\$97,308,000	150	120	9,750	9,750	6.13%	9,750	9,750	6.13%
Yr 2	2028	\$24,480,000	\$90,576,000	\$129,744,000	200	160	13,000	22,750	14.31%	10,043	19,793	12.45%
Yr 3	2029	\$30,600,000	\$113,220,000	\$162,180,000	250	200	16,250	39,000	24.53%	10,344	30,136	18.95%
Yr 4	2030	\$36,720,000	\$135,864,000	\$194,616,000	300	240	19,500	58,500	36.79%	10,654	40,790	25.65%
Yr 5	2031	\$42,840,000	\$158,508,000	\$227,052,000	350	280	22,750	81,250	51.10%	10,974	51,764	32.56%
Yr 6	2032	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	107,250	67.45%	11,303	63,067	39.66%
Yr 7	2033	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	133,250	83.80%	11,642	74,709	46.99%
Yr 8	2034	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	159,250	100.16%	11,991	86,700	54.53%
Yr 9	2035	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	185,250	116.51%	12,351	99,051	62.30%
Yr 10	2036	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	211,250	132.86%	12,722	111,773	70.30%

Table 5: Tasmania

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
Yr 1	2027	\$3,672,000	\$13,586,400	\$19,461,600	30	24	1,950	1,950	3.88%	1,950	1,950	3.88%
Yr 2	2028	\$4,896,000	\$18,115,200	\$25,948,800	40	32	2,600	4,550	9.06%	2,009	3,959	7.88%
Yr 3	2029	\$6,120,000	\$22,644,000	\$32,436,000	50	40	3,250	7,800	15.53%	2,069	6,027	12.00%
Yr 4	2030	\$7,344,000	\$27,172,800	\$38,923,200	60	48	3,900	11,700	23.29%	2,131	8,158	16.24%
Yr 5	2031	\$8,568,000	\$31,701,600	\$45,410,400	70	56	4,550	16,250	32.35%	2,195	10,353	20.61%
Yr 6	2032	\$9,792,000	\$36,230,400	\$51,897,600	80	64	5,200	21,450	42.70%	2,261	12,613	25.11%
Yr 7	2033	\$11,016,000	\$40,759,200	\$58,384,800	90	72	5,850	27,300	54.35%	2,328	14,942	29.75%
Yr 8	2034	\$12,240,000	\$45,288,000	\$64,872,000	100	80	6,500	33,800	67.29%	2,398	17,340	34.52%
Yr 9	2035	\$13,464,000	\$49,816,800	\$71,359,200	110	88	7,150	40,950	81.52%	2,470	19,810	39.44%
Yr 10	2036	\$13,464,000	\$49,816,800	\$71,359,200	110	88	7,150	48,100	95.76%	2,544	22,355	44.50%
Yr 11	2037	\$13,464,000	\$49,816,800	\$71,359,200	110	88	7,150	55,250	109.99%	2,621	24,975	49.72%

Table 6: Victoria

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
Yr 1	2027	\$40,392,000	\$149,450,400	\$214,077,600	330	264	21,450	21,450	3.45%	21,450	21,450	3.45%
Yr 2	2028	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	47,450	7.64%	22,094	43,544	7.01%
Yr 3	2029	\$61,200,000	\$226,440,000	\$324,360,000	500	400	32,500	79,950	12.87%	22,756	66,300	10.68%
Yr 4	2030	\$73,440,000	\$271,728,000	\$389,232,000	600	480	39,000	118,950	19.15%	23,439	89,739	14.45%
Yr 5	2031	\$85,680,000	\$317,016,000	\$454,104,000	700	560	45,500	164,450	26.48%	24,142	113,881	18.34%
Yr 6	2032	\$97,920,000	\$362,304,000	\$518,976,000	800	640	52,000	216,450	34.86%	24,866	138,747	22.34%
Yr 7	2033	\$110,160,000	\$407,592,000	\$583,848,000	900	720	58,500	274,950	44.28%	25,612	164,360	26.47%
Yr 8	2034	\$122,400,000	\$452,880,000	\$648,720,000	1,000	800	65,000	339,950	54.74%	26,381	190,741	30.72%
Yr 9	2035	\$134,640,000	\$498,168,000	\$713,592,000	1,100	880	71,500	411,450	66.26%	27,172	217,913	35.09%
Yr 10	2036	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	489,450	78.82%	27,987	245,900	39.60%
Yr 11	2037	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	567,450	91.38%	28,827	274,727	44.24%
Yr 12	2038	\$146,880,000	\$543,456,000	\$778,464,000	1,200	960	78,000	645,450	103.94%	29,692	304,419	49.02%

Table 7: Western Australia

		Proposed investment								If funding continues as is (conservative estimate of 3% growth each year)		
FY	Amount of investment	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (low end - \$3.70 per \$1 invested)	Estimated economic and social long-term return government investment (high end - \$5.30 per \$1 invested)	Number of Financial Counsellors	Equivalent FTE (assuming 0.8FTE average)	Clients assisted per year	Total number of clients assisted (cumulative)	Percentage of current unmet need	Clients assisted per year	Cumulative clients assisted	Percentage of current unmet need	
Yr 1	2027	\$21,420,000	\$79,254,000	\$113,526,000	175	140	11,375	11,375	5.13%	11,375	11,375	5.13%
Yr 2	2028	\$24,480,000	\$90,576,000	\$129,744,000	200	160	13,000	24,375	10.99%	11,716	23,091	10.41%
Yr 3	2029	\$30,600,000	\$113,220,000	\$162,180,000	250	200	16,250	40,625	18.31%	12,068	35,159	15.85%
Yr 4	2030	\$36,720,000	\$135,864,000	\$194,616,000	300	240	19,500	60,125	27.10%	12,430	47,589	21.45%
Yr 5	2031	\$42,840,000	\$158,508,000	\$227,052,000	350	280	22,750	82,875	37.35%	12,803	60,391	27.22%
Yr 6	2032	\$48,960,000	\$181,152,000	\$259,488,000	400	320	26,000	108,875	49.07%	13,187	73,578	33.16%
Yr 7	2033	\$55,080,000	\$203,796,000	\$291,924,000	450	360	29,250	138,125	62.25%	13,582	87,161	39.28%
Yr 8	2034	\$61,200,000	\$226,440,000	\$324,360,000	500	400	32,500	170,625	76.90%	13,990	101,150	45.59%
Yr 9	2035	\$67,320,000	\$249,084,000	\$356,796,000	550	440	35,750	206,375	93.01%	14,410	115,560	52.08%
Yr 10	2036	\$73,440,000	\$271,728,000	\$389,232,000	600	480	39,000	245,375	110.59%	14,842	130,402	58.77%

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