



A guide for Telcos

Financial counsellors provide vital support for people in financial hardship. Unfortunately, financial counselling resources are extremely limited across the nation. Referrals to financial counsellors should not replace basic customer services that companies are required to provide.

Before you refer

- › Credit collection departments must refer anyone who is having difficulty paying their bill to their internal hardship department.
- › Offer an affordable payment plan that takes into account the person's circumstances that you know about. A sustainable payment plan builds loyalty and ensures more payments are made. People are usually very stressed when their bill is in arrears. They often agree to repayments they think they can afford but in reality cannot.
- › Review the plan the customer is on. Would a pre-paid service be more appropriate?
 - › If the person is using a significant amount of data; is there a more affordable plan? If there is, consider waiving the downgrade fee.
 - › Offer to change the billing cycle from monthly to fortnightly payments to help with bill smoothing.
 - › Check the person is getting all the concessions to which they are entitled.
 - › Discuss whether the person wants to return the mobile phone and be released from the contract.
 - › Discuss restricting the person's access to more costly services (access to emergency services and the service provider's inquiry link can't be restricted). Is there a service that allows people to receive calls but restricts all outgoing calls other than free calls to emergency telephone numbers and Lifeline, and does not charge monthly rental fees?
- › Where a person is responsible for paying for a number of accounts – for family members and relatives, for example - it is possible that family violence/ economic abuse is occurring. Please refer to your internal family violence policies to assist these customers.
- › Consider waiving or part waiving the debt.

Making a referral

When to refer	<p>Where it is clear that a telco debt is just one of many debts a person has, it is appropriate to refer them to financial counsellors. While staff cannot probe too deeply, they can ask a few questions of a general nature, such as "How are you travelling with all your other bills?" or "Are you having difficulty paying other debts?"</p> <p>If the person is, staff can offer to refer them to financial counselling. Financial counselling is a voluntary service so customers should not be told that speaking to a financial counsellor is a condition of getting assistance from the telco.</p>	
Explain what financial counsellors do and why you are referring	<p>What financial counsellors do</p> <p>They provide free, confidential and trusted advice and support to people in financial difficulty. They help people: understand their financial position; understand their rights and responsibilities around credit and debt; and access other services they may need, such as legal and health services.</p>	<p>What financial counsellors don't do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Pay bills for clients; Arrange loans for clients; Recommend a service provider;
Who to refer to	<p>Phone-based financial counselling is available from the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007. Please also refer your customers to the NDH website – ndh.org.au – which has extremely helpful information on what people can do when they are in financial difficulty. People can also find a financial counsellor in their community by searching the "Find a Financial Counsellor" map on the NDH website.</p>	