



2024 - 2028

STRATEGIC PLAN



Financial Counselling Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.


This land is, was, and always will be traditional First Nations land.





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Strategic Plan 2024-28 marks a new chapter at FCA

Our Strategic Plan 2024-28 *Needed more than ever* marks the next chapter for Financial Counselling Australia.

Building on FCA's strong foundations and positive impact to date, this Plan furthers our efforts to both prevent financial harm and address financial hardship across Australia.

Our 2024-28 Plan is subtitled *Needed more than ever* because:

- the numbers of households facing tough financial circumstances are increasing in these challenging economic times, often with tragic consequences
- the risks of financial harm are escalating with increasing natural disasters and more sophisticated scams
- workforce pressures – both current and imminent – need to be addressed
- there is huge potential to keep building on the demonstrated benefits of a national approach to strengthening sector capacity and capability.

Now more than ever, there is a critical need to focus on preventing avoidable financial harm and mitigating the impacts of financial hardship. Achieving this requires improved industry practices, stronger regulations and safeguards, early identification of emerging challenges, and swift action to address them. Equally important is raising widespread awareness of financial counselling and its potential to help individuals navigate financial difficulties.

Our 2024-28 Plan will advance our four strategic goals:

- Financial counselling services that better meet Australia's needs
- A high quality, stable, diverse and nationally connected workforce
- Fairer markets and fairer treatment
- Financial counselling is valued and trusted

Ensuring an effective and efficient FCA is a major enabler for successful delivery of our Plan. We seek to realise the potential of our federated structure of state and territory financial counselling associations and harness the strength of our national Representative Council to accelerate our collective momentum.

This Plan names the core principles that guide the way FCA works. We are proud that these capture the DNA of our organisation.

The outcomes FCA are aiming for, and how we will measure our progress against them, are made explicit in this plan. They will help to keep us on track.

We thank the FCA staff and Board, together with the state and territory associations, our Representative Council, key partners and stakeholders for sharing input that informed and helped shape this Plan. We were heartened by the positive affirmation of our work and inspired by the opportunities identified to strengthen our impact.

Reflecting on the overwhelming consensus that FCA should essentially keep heading along the same path, *Needed more than ever* is about evolution, rather than revolution. Just as the sector is maturing, so too must FCA as the national peak.

About Financial Counselling Australia

VISION

Our vision is an Australia free from financial hardship.

POSITION

FCA is the trusted national voice for financial counselling.

We work to prevent financial harm and address financial hardship across Australia.

PURPOSE

Improving the availability, accessibility and responsiveness of financial counselling across Australia.

Building and supporting Australia's financial counselling profession.

Tackling systemic and structural drivers of financial hardship.

Strengthening understanding of financial hardship and the role of financial counselling.

Our four strategic goals 2024 - 2028

Financial
Counselling
services that
better meet
Australia's
needs.

A high-quality,
stable, diverse
and nationally
connected
financial
counselling
workforce

Fairer markets
and fairer
treatment

Financial
counselling
is valued
and trusted

Enabled by our foundations

An effective and efficient FCA

A principled approach to our work

Financial counselling services that better meet Australia's needs

Financial Counselling is a vital community service for people experiencing financial difficulty. Yet, there are high levels of financial hardship with significant unmet need and long wait times for support.

Funding growth and certainty for the sector is a must. Also important is the effective targeting of funding, the right service mix and flexible capacity in the sector for rapid and innovative responses to changing circumstances.

Projects delivering sector-wide efficiencies and solutions will continue to be a major focus for FCA.

Ensuring financial counselling is inclusive, accessible and responsive for population groups experiencing structural discrimination, needs attention and sector-wide efforts.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS:

- Implement and maintain a national minimum dataset for financial counselling
- Lead national advocacy for sustainable and effective funding for financial counselling services
- Support sector-wide approaches to increase the accessibility, inclusion and responsiveness of services for communities that are hardly reached or experiencing structural discrimination
- Foster new approaches to support improvements, fill gaps and rapidly respond to changing circumstances.

Outcomes FCA is aiming for:	Success indicators
Better understanding of financial counselling needs and experiences	(Forthcoming) The proportion of financial counselling services that adopt the national minimum dataset
Financial counselling services that are more accessible, inclusive and culturally appropriate for communities experiencing structural discrimination	(Forthcoming) National data set indicators related to use and client experiences for particular population groups (such as People with Disability and First Nations)
Increased and sustained funding for the financial counselling sector	Quantum of national funding for sector; length of funding agreements
Sector-wide innovations deliver improvements for financial counsellors and clients	Effectiveness of FCA service improvement projects (measured by evaluation outcomes aggregated across projects)

A high-quality, stable, diverse and nationally connected workforce

The passion and commitment of frontline workers, the community organisations that employ them and the state and territory financial counselling associations, remain a huge strength of our sector.

Understanding and addressing workforce needs and challenges is critical. Ensuring there are enough financial counsellors and capability workers, in the right places with the right skills.

Professionalism, quality and consistency across the sector are improving. Emerging national standards, support for best practice, strong networks and improved processes are an important driver of this.

Significant potential exists to strengthen connections and share development opportunities between financial counselling and the financial capability workforces.

FCA's work to expand the First Nations' workforce and strengthen capability to work with First Nations' communities is a powerful demonstration of this.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS:

- Lead development and steward implementation of a national workforce strategy
- Promote and support best practice and adoption of national standards
- Continue efforts to grow the First Nations' workforce, and strengthen sector capability to work with First Nations' communities
- Strengthen the interface between financial counselling and financial capability supports and clarify the scope of service.

Outcomes FCA is aiming for:	Success indicators
A secure, stable and diverse workforce	(Forthcoming) indicators from the upcoming workforce strategy
Financial counselling services that are of a consistently high standard	The proportion of financial counselling agencies that have adopted the practice guidelines
A strong and connected First Nations' workforce	First Nations' workforce numbers and (forthcoming) capability measure

Fairer markets and fairer treatment

Our community ought to be protected from financial harm and treated fairly when experiencing financial hardship, whether they are represented by a financial counsellor or not. To achieve this, Australia needs fair and responsible industry practices, along with robust policies, regulations, and safeguards to both prevent and effectively address financial hardship.

Financial counsellors and their clients are often the first to detect unfair and exploitative approaches – whether because of new products that are unregulated, or changes in industry or government agency practices that are having adverse consequences. FCA is working closely with those at the frontline to enable patterns of harm to be identified and addressed.

FCA brings different interests together – our sector, industry, governments and regulators - to find common ground and build solutions.

Our national policy and advocacy is focussed on tackling the structural and systemic causes of financial harm and the way financial hardship is responded to. This work is turbo-charged through collaboration with the state and territory associations and partners in the consumer and social justice movements.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS:

- Improved national processes to rapidly act on early signs of unfair practices
- Collating, analysing and sharing evidence (of all types) to inform systems change
- Proactive national analysis, policy development and advocacy, including self-initiated reports and reviews
- Supporting industries and public agencies to improve their hardship policies and practices.

Outcomes FCA is aiming for:	Success indicators
Patterns of harmful or exploitative practices are rapidly brought to light	Use of the Insight Tool by financial counsellors and FCA
Industry policies and practices prevent and address financial hardship	Average improvement in the hardship practices scores of creditors and organisations that contribute to financial hardship. (Outcomes Framework 4.2)
Legislative, regulatory and public policy settings prevent and address financial hardship	The number of areas where FCA and the financial counselling sector contributes to the fairer marketplace (Outcomes Framework 4.1) and case studies of impact

Financial counselling is well known and highly valued

Financial hardship is affecting an increasing number of households across Australia, with changing pressures and new drivers of harm broadening the profile of those experiencing hardship.

Strong community awareness of financial counselling and the practical help it can offer struggling households in tough times is vital.

The financial counselling sector also has a wider role to play in working with government, industry and community services on identifying issues and influencing response to financial hardship.

Increasing the visibility of financial counselling as a trusted service and a valued partner in community are priorities for FCA.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS:

- Promoting financial counselling, the National Debt Helpline and the Small Business Debt Helpline.
- Increasing the visibility of the financial counselling sector as a partner in building community solutions
- Expanding strategic relationships with government, industry and the community sector.

Outcomes FCA is aiming for:	Success indicators
Financial hardship and the role of financial counselling is well understood across Australia	<p>Members of the general public are aware of and value financial counselling</p> <p>The number of times financial counselling is mentioned in public discourse. (Outcomes Framework 4.3)</p>



An effective and efficient FCA

FCA's skilled, coherent and committed team is our best asset. Fit for purpose organisational systems and processes are needed to better equip and enable our Australia-wide team to perform its important role.

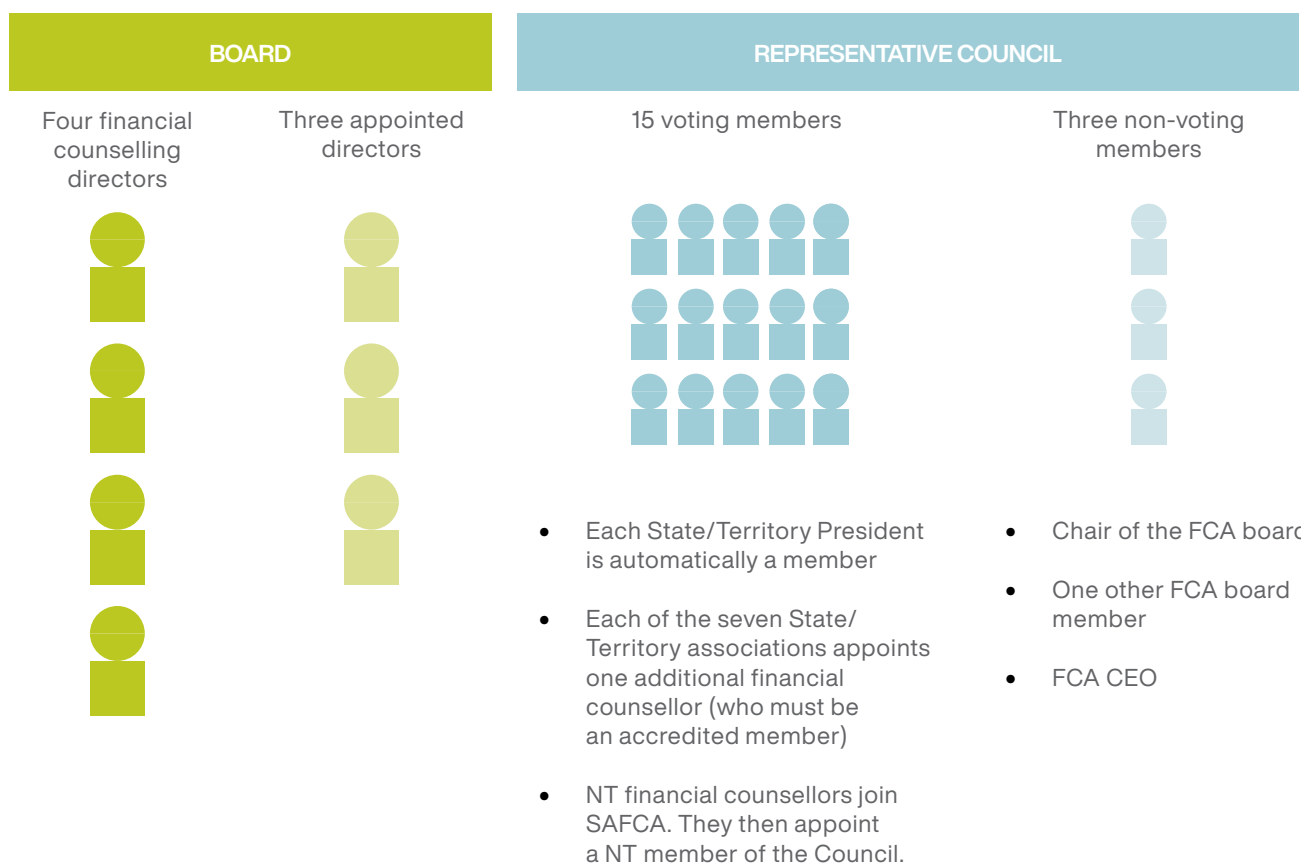
FCA seeks to shift the dial across the four strategic goals in this Plan. Measuring progress against headline change indicators will help keep us focussed and track the relationship between efforts and impact.

FCA has a federated structure of autonomous state and territory professional associations for financial counsellors. Better leveraging this will increase our collective capabilities, reach and impact.

Our multi-tiered governance includes FCA's Representative Council. This brings together representatives of states and territories and frontline workers to identify sector priorities, inform FCA's decision making and develop national approaches.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS:

- Embed improved systems and processes to support organisational efficiencies and effectiveness
- Measure and track outcomes and impact generated from FCA's efforts across our four strategic goals
- Strengthen governance and decision-making processes with FCA's Representative Council.





Principled approaches that guide our work

Decency, kindness and integrity

FCA seeks to model these qualities in all our dealings and encourage a more compassionate and gracious Australia.

Connect, consensus-build and collaborate

We join with state and territory financial counselling associations, the sector, community partners, industry and governments to find common ground and build national solutions.

Truth, reconciliation and safety

Deeply committed to truth-telling, justice and voice for First Nations' communities, FCA strives to advance reconciliation and cultural safety.

First-Nations' inspired approaches are valued and informing FCA's broader ways of working.

Evidence informed

We learn from and share research, data, evaluation and insights. We listen to and amplify the voices of those at the frontline of financial counselling services.

Innovate, demonstrate

We are curious; always looking for ways to improve. We are not afraid to explore new things.

We develop creative approaches and innovative responses for sector-wide and community benefits.

Independent, determined advocacy

With social justice in our DNA, we are driven to prevent and tackle systems and practices that create and exploit financial hardship.

Independent and uncompromised, we make informed contributions to drive change.

FCA's vision: An Australia free from financial hardship

FCA is the trusted National voice for financial counselling. We unite efforts to prevent financial harm and address financial hardships across Australia.

Our purpose

Improving the availability, accessibility and responsiveness of financial counselling across Australia	Building and supporting Australia's financial counselling profession	Tackling systemic and structural drivers of financial hardship	Building understanding of financial hardship and financial counselling
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Our strategic goals

Financial counselling services that better meet Australia's needs	A high quality, stable, diverse and nationally connected workforce	Fairer markets and fairer treatment	Financial counselling is well known and highly valued
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Priority focus areas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national common data set Sustainable and effective funding for the financial counselling sector Greater equity: accessible, safe and inclusive services New approaches to fill gaps and respond to need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National workforce strategy First Nations workforce and communities Best practice and adoption of national standards Interface of financial counselling and financial capability supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early detection and rapid action on unfair practices Proactive analysis, policy development and advocacy Collating, analysing and sharing evidence to inform change Lifting hardship policies and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Debt Helpline and the Small Business Debt Helpline Financial counselling sector as partners in community solutions Strategic alliances
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Our enablers

<p>An effective and efficient FCA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fit for purpose processes and systems Strong governance with streamlined decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decency, kindness, integrity Truth, reconciliation, safety Innovate, demonstrate Connect, consensus, collaborate Evidence informed Independent, determined advocacy
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Our vision An Australia free from financial hardship.