

# Dealing with financial matters after an emergency

This fact sheet provides advice for anyone who may experience financial difficulties due to the damage or loss of their property caused by an emergency, such as a fire or flood. This document also outlines some of the support services available and identifies important considerations that may be helpful when trying to manage finances following an emergency.

## Financial matters

### Accountant/Financial Planner

One of the first steps you should consider when managing your finances after an emergency is to seek professional trusted advice from your accountant or financial planner. Apart from providing personal financial advice, they can help identify appropriate strategies and options available to you. To find out more about financial planners, visit the website of the Financial Planning Association of Australia (the nation's peak professional body for financial planners) at [www.fpa.asn.au](http://www.fpa.asn.au)

### Financial Counselling Service

The pressures of financial hardship – especially in the wake of an emergency – can cause stress and uncertainty. To help during this difficult time, the Victorian Government funds a number of financial counselling services across Victoria. For a referral to a financial counsellor, contact Consumer Affairs Victoria on 1300 55 8181.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service may be particularly useful to primary producers, fishers and small rural businesses that are suffering financial hardship. For more information about this service contact the RFCS on 1800 686 175.

Financial counsellors can:

- help you identify financial and business options, and negotiate with your financial lenders
- give you information about government and other assistance schemes
- refer you to accountants, agricultural advisers and educational services

- and refer you to Centrelink and other appropriate advisers for succession planning, family mediation and personal counselling, and emotional and social counselling.

### Centrelink

Centrelink provides financial advice and financial counselling for anyone experiencing financial difficulties. You can access these services through Centrelink's Social Worker Network. For more information, contact Centrelink on 131 021.

### Insurance

If you have been affected by an emergency – and you are insured – you should contact your insurance company as soon as possible. You will need to register your intention to claim, and seek advice about the claim process. You should certainly contact your insurer before authorising any major repairs. Insurance policies can vary, so check with your insurer to see what options are available.

## Direct financial assistance

### Victorian Government

The Department of Human Services administers the Personal Hardship Assistance Program which provides financial assistance to help ease the personal hardship and distress resulting from an emergency – such as a flood or fire. This assistance is not intended to replace insurance or other compensation for loss or damage.

There are two categories of assistance available to people in need following an emergency:

- **Emergency Relief Assistance** – covers a range of expenses, such as food, clothing, medications, short-term accommodation and one-off transport costs.
- **Emergency Re-establishment Assistance** – helps to re-establish people in their own homes as quickly as possible by providing income-tested financial assistance for alternative accommodation,

repairs, rebuilding, and replacement of essential household contents.

For further information about this program, please contact your nearest Department of Human Services office, listed below.

Other Victorian Government Assistant Schemes can also help in times of financial hardship. For example, Rural Finance is responsible for administering Natural Disaster Relief Schemes such as Exceptional Circumstances Interest Subsidies and FarmBis – on behalf of the Australian and Victorian Governments. Rural Finance also offers finance to the rural sector for a range of purposes including mortgage repayments, refinancing, land purchase, housing, property and development. For more information visit [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au)

For information on the Insurance Council of Australia (the nation's peak insurance industry body) visit [www.insurancecouncil.com.au](http://www.insurancecouncil.com.au)

## Australian Government

Centrelink provides a range of support services to people in crisis or those affected by an emergency. These services include:

- Crisis Payment: for people in severe hardship who are forced to leave their home.
- Special Benefit: for people in severe financial need due to circumstances beyond their control.
- Disaster Relief Payment: for people needing short-term relief after an officially declared disaster.
- Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment: for farmers having problems with living expenses in an exceptional circumstances area.
- Bereavement Payment: assistance for a surviving partner, carer or parent of a young child to help adjust to their changed financial circumstances.

For further information contact Centrelink on 136 150 or visit: [www.centrelink.gov.au](http://www.centrelink.gov.au)

## Local government

You may also be able to access emergency financial services offered through your local council, so contact your local council for information and advice. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) lists details of all local councils at [www.mav.asn.au](http://www.mav.asn.au) or phone (03) 9667 5555.

## Tax matters

If you have been affected by a crisis such as a bushfire, the Australian Tax Office may be able to help you meet any upcoming financial obligations. For more information, contact 13 11 42.

The Australian Tax Office can help by:

- fast-tracking tax refunds for anyone impacted by an emergency
- giving you extra time to pay any tax debts – without charging interest
- and helping you reconstruct your tax records if your documents have been destroyed.

## Banking matters

Financial institutions can also provide support services for regional and rural communities in times of hardship. Contact your local bank to find out what services and support are available.

## Income

Depending on the nature of the emergency, your work commitments may change – and this can impact your income flow. So consider how these changes could impact your household, and talk to your employer about any arrangements that may help you during this difficult period, such as leave entitlements or flexitime options.

## Other support

### Emergency Relief

Several welfare organisations provide emergency relief in the form of food, clothing and household goods – such as furniture and blankets. If you or your family are experiencing severe financial difficulties, these services may help ease your hardship. Some of the main relief centres in Victoria include Foodbank Victoria, St Vincent de Paul, Anglicare Victoria and the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

## Other information

For general information about recovery assistance and advice please contact your local Department of Human Services office, or visit our website: [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency)

### Metropolitan

Eastern Region	9843 6000
North & West Region	1300 664 977
Southern Region	9213 2111

### Rural

Barwon-South West	5226 4540
Gippsland	5177 2500
Grampians	5333 6669
Hume	5722 0555
Loddon Mallee	5434 5555