

Dealing with financial matters after an emergency

This information provides advice for those who are experiencing financial difficulties due to the damage or loss of property caused by an emergency such as a fire. It outlines some of the support services available as well as identifies important considerations that may be helpful when trying to manage finances in the aftermath of an emergency.

Financial matters

Accountant/Financial Planner

Seeking advice from your accountant or financial planner after an emergency is one of the first steps you should consider when managing your finances. An accountant or financial planner can provide personal financial advice and can help to identify appropriate strategies and options available to you. To find out more about financial planners, visit the Financial Planning Association of Australia (FPA) website, the peak professional body for Australia's Financial Planners at www.fpa.asn.au

Financial Counselling Service

The pressures of financial hardship especially in the aftermath of an emergency can cause stress and uncertainty. To help assist during this difficult time, the Victorian Government funds a large number of financial counselling services across Victoria. For a referral to a financial counsellor, contact the Financial and Consumer Rights Council on 03 9663 2000.

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

Financial counsellors can assist by:

- Helping clients identify financial and business options and negotiate with their lenders
- Giving clients information about government and other assistance schemes
- Referring clients to accountants, agricultural advisers and educational services
- Referring clients to Centrelink and to professionals for succession planning, family mediation and personal counselling, and emotional and social counselling.

Centrelink

Centrelink also provides financial advice as well as a financial counselling service for people who are experiencing financial difficulties. This counselling service can be accessed through Centrelink's Social Worker Network. For more information on financial advice or counselling contact Centrelink on 131 021.

Insurance

If you have been affected by an emergency, it is critical that you make contact with your insurance company as soon as possible. You will need to register your intention to claim and seek advice about the claim process. Insurers should be contacted before authorising major repairs and it is important to remember that insurance policies vary, so make sure you check with your insurer to see what options are available.

Direct financial assistance

Victorian Government

The Department of Human Services (DHS) administers a range of Personal Hardship Grants that are available to people who have had their principal place of residence affected by an emergency and where an evacuation has been required. These grants are intended to cover a range of expenses such as food, clothing, medications, accommodation and one off transport costs. For further information contact DHS (contact details are listed on the next page).

Victorian Government Assistant Schemes can also help in times of financial hardship. Rural Finance is responsible for administering Natural Disaster Relief Schemes such as Exceptional Circumstances Interest Subsidies and FarmBis on behalf of the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments. Rural Finance also offers finance to the rural sector for a range of purposes including mortgage, refinance, land purchase, housing, property and development. For more information visit www.ruralfinance.com.au

For information on the Insurance Council of Australia, the peak industry body, visit the following website: www.insurancecouncil.com.au/Home/default.aspx

Australian Government

Centrelink provides a range of support services to those in crisis or affected by an emergency. Services available can include:

- **Crisis Payment:** for people in severe hardship who have been forced to leave their home.
- **Special Benefit:** for people in severe financial need due to circumstances outside 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 adjust to the financial circumstances.

For further information contact Centrelink 136 150 or visit their website at:

www.centrelink.gov.au

Local government

Support may be available through your local government. Contact your local council for information and advice about the support services in your community. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) provides details of your local council, visit www.mav.asn.au or phone (03) 9667 5555.

Tax matters

If you have been affected by a crisis such as a bushfire, the Tax Office may assist with helping you meet any upcoming obligations. For more information contact 13 11 42. The Tax Office can help with:

- Fast tracking refunds for those impacted by a bush fire
- Giving you extra time to pay debts – without interest charges
- Help you reconstruct your tax records where your documents have been destroyed.

Banking matters

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

Income

Depending on the nature of the emergency, work commitments may change and can impact on your flow of income. Consider how this will impact on your household and talk to your employer to find out about leave entitlements, flexitime options and any other entitlements or arrangements that may assist during this period.

Other support

Emergency Relief

There are several welfare organisations who provide emergency relief in the form of food, clothing and household goods such as furniture and blankets. For those experiencing severe financial difficulties, these services may be of some assistance by alleviating some of the financial hardship. Some of the main relief centres in Victoria include Vic Relief and Foodbank, St Vincent de Paul, Anglicare Victoria and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Other information

For general information about recovery assistance and advice contact your local Department of Human Services office or visit our website:

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency

Department of Human Services Offices

Metropolitan

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

Country

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