



Thousands turn to free financial counselling during latest lockdowns

Thousands of individuals and small business owners have sought help from the [National Debt Helpline](#) (NDH) and [Small Business Debt Helpline](#) (SBDH) as they struggle with financial issues during the current lockdowns.

The two national not-for-profit organisations run **free** financial counselling helplines and chat services, to help individuals and small businesses cope with financial hardship.

Both bodies are coordinated by Financial Counselling Australia (FCA), the peak body for financial counsellors in Australia.

Since the start of the year more than 71,900 calls have been made to the helplines. The NDH has received 70,183 calls and the SBDH, which is a relatively new service, has received 1,768 calls.

Small Business Debt Helpline – 1800 413 828

Demand has increased dramatically over the past few months, with 80% more calls in July than May.

The top five calls are, in no particular order:

- Uncertainty about government grants and how to access them
- Commercial leases – people unable to pay due to insufficient income during lockdowns
- Issues with debt collectors
- Problem with personal guarantees – risks and lack of understanding
- Overall financial stress – most callers are in a state of distress and frustration

National Debt Helpline - 1800 007 007

Demand on the phonenumber has not increased dramatically but visits to the website from the start of the year to the end of July are 25% higher than the same period last year.

There were more than a quarter of a million website visits from 1 January to 31 July.

The top five calls are, in no particular order:

- Mortgage arrears – difficulty paying, how to get hardship arrangements, catching up on arrears, some owners handing keys over to the banks
- Rent arrears and homelessness
- Credit card debt and personal loans, including car loans
- Struggling to afford utilities, such as electricity and water
- Separation and family violence



Financial counsellors are different to financial planners or advisors. They don't provide investment advice nor are they lenders.

Anyone who is struggling financially can contact the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007 or visit ndh.org.au.

Small business owners and sole traders can call the Small Business Debt Helpline on 1800 413 828 or visit sbdh.org.au.

Quotes attributable to Fiona Guthrie, CEO of FCA

"People are really struggling during these lockdowns. It's great so many are reaching out for free help from financial counsellors, but we know there are many more who are suffering in silence or don't know where to turn."

"We want people to know that financial counsellors care and are here to help. They provide free, independent and confidential advice to people in financial hardship."

"Assistance is only a phone call away. That initial conversation is likely to take a weight off your shoulders, because financial counsellors are trained to help you get back on track financially."

To arrange an interview with Fiona Guthrie, Helen Davis (General Manager of the Small Business Debt Helpline) or a financial counsellor working on the helplines, call Mike Bruce on 0403 920 189 or email mike.bruce@financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au.