



# Financial abuse during COVID-19

The ever-changing environment of the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the lives of people across the world, including in Australia. Care has developed a series of COVID-19 factsheets about your consumer rights related to banking and credit law. This factsheet provides information about financial abuse in the context of domestic and family violence during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

## Financial abuse during COVID-19

Financial abuse, sometimes also called economic abuse, can happen to anyone at any time, but the COVID-19 crisis is creating an environment which is increasing the risks of domestic and family violence, including financial abuse. Job loss, reduced work hours and pay, and increasing anxiety about the family's financial security may affect you and your family's health, wellbeing, and relationships.

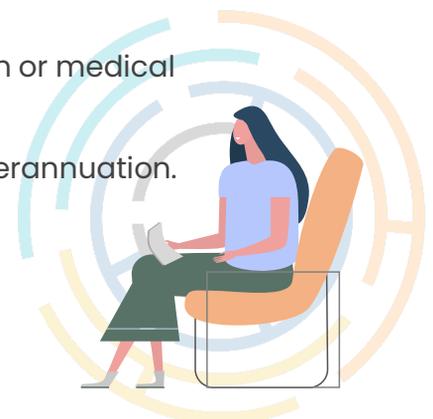
These pressures may exacerbate financial abuse. They may also make it more difficult to identify due to being mistaken for other forms of financial stress, or simply because of a person's social isolation during lock downs.

## What is financial abuse?

Financial abuse happens when a loved one, a family member, a friend or a carer uses money, assets, or income to control another person or their financial decisions. Financial abuse is a form of domestic and family violence.

Financial abuse may include:

- Restricting a person's access to bank accounts or household savings.
- Using social distancing as a reason to stop a person from working or putting pressure on them to change their work arrangements.
- Taking control of a person's Centrelink payments including their regular or COVID-19 pandemic related entitlements or payments.
- Forcing a person to make changes to their will, enduring power of attorney, or loan contracts.
- Stopping a person from being able to get food, medication or medical attention during lockdown.
- Forcing a person to make an early withdrawal of their superannuation.



If you need to exit this fact sheet click this 'quick escape' button to redirect to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)



## Safety is key

It is important that you think about your safety before you make any changes to your financial arrangements. When you discuss your safety concerns with your bank, Centrelink and other agencies, it is a good idea to request that this information is kept confidential and is not communicated to others – including the person who is perpetrating the abuse.

If you think that you may be experiencing financial abuse and you have safety concerns, contact the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) on **(02) 6280 0900**.

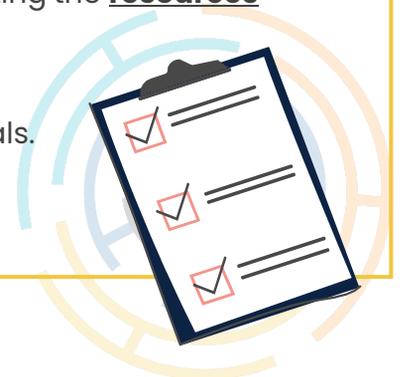
You can access information about how to increase your safety during COVID-19 at the **DVCS website**.

For immediate safety concerns and in an emergency, contact Police on **000** or **131 444**



## Tips for increasing your financial safety

- Regularly check your bank account balances and mailed statements.
- Change your key identifying information such as passwords, access pins and security questions.
- Put in place arrangements for access to your joint accounts so that your consent is required prior to transactions being processed.
- Contact your bank, financial institution, or telephone and utilities providers for financial hardship assistance if you are struggling to meet expenses (see our factsheet: **'Financial hardship during COVID-19'** by visiting the **resources section of our website**.)
- Open a separate bank account for your wages, social security payments and early superannuation withdrawals.
- Do not sign any document which you have not read or you do not understand.



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## If you are experiencing financial abuse Care can help

Care has been supporting the Canberra community since 1983 and we believe in financial fairness for all. We are a community organisation that provides free and confidential support and assistance to people living on low to moderate incomes, and those who are vulnerable or are experiencing financial difficulty.

### Care's programs that can support you:

**Care Consumer Law** offers free legal assistance to people living in the ACT in the areas of credit, debt and consumer law, including in the context of domestic and family violence and financial abuse. To make an appointment with a lawyer, call us on **(02) 6143 0044** or email **[clc.admin@carefcs.org](mailto:clc.admin@carefcs.org)**.

**Care Financial Counselling** provides free, confidential and independent services to assist people experiencing financial difficulty. Financial counsellors can also undertake financial safety planning. If you would like to speak to a financial counsellor about your situation, contact the National Debt Helpline on **1800 007 007** or via the live chat feature on **[www.ndh.org.au](http://www.ndh.org.au)**.

**Care Community Loans** offers 0% interest loans for up to \$1,500 for people on low to moderate incomes in Canberra and the surrounding NSW community to purchase essential goods and services. It also has a specialist loan program, Assistance Beyond Crisis, for people who have experienced and left a domestic or family violence, for up to \$5,000 at 0% interest. For more information about these loans, call **(02) 6257 1788** or email **[microfinance.admin@carefcs.org](mailto:microfinance.admin@carefcs.org)** or visit Care's **[website](http://www.carefcs.org)**.

**Other resources:** Care has a booklet titled *Understanding Financial Abuse* which can be downloaded from our resources section on our website or by **[clicking here](#)**.

## Get in Touch

Are you experiencing financial abuse from a partner, a carer, or a family member? Is a person close to you controlling your access to money or has taken your money without your knowledge or consent?

**Help is available.** If you live in the ACT, contact Care Consumer Law for free legal advice.



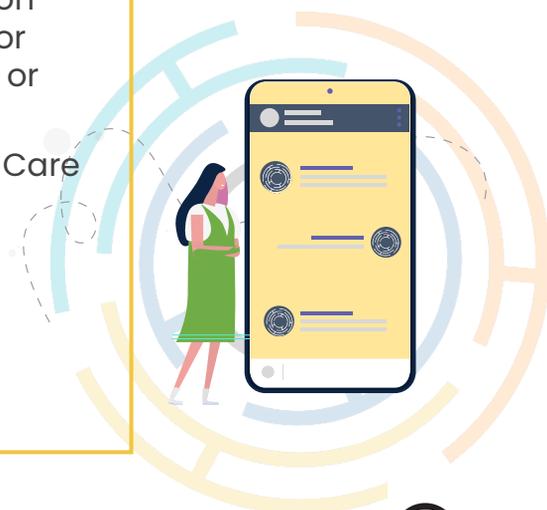
**02 6143 0044**



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This factsheet was made with the assistance of the ACT Government

