

FACT SHEET



RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO FINANCIAL DISTRESS

A practical guide for Community Engagement Points

OVERVIEW

- Money worries can affect anyone, regardless of age, income or background.
- Rising living costs, unexpected bills, debt or job changes can create significant pressure.
- Financial stress can impact mood, relationships, physical health and day-to-day functioning.
- Distress may come from unstable employment, housing costs, family responsibilities or sudden income changes.
- People experiencing financial strain may feel overwhelmed, ashamed or unsure where to turn.
- Because money stress is often private or stigmatised, many people try to manage it alone for too long.
- Financial distress can build gradually and may not be spoken about directly.
- Not all financial distress requires a formal service response.
- Sometimes the most powerful support is simply being noticed, listened to and met with compassion.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This fact sheet is for any Community Engagement Point that may come into contact with people experiencing distress due to financial pressure.

This includes, but isn't limited to:

- Community centres and neighbourhood houses
- Financial counsellors and emergency relief services
- Local banks and credit unions
- Workplaces and employers
- Small businesses and cafés
- Housing or tenancy services
- Sporting clubs and recreation groups
- Cultural, faith and volunteer groups
- Libraries and community hubs

As a Community Engagement Point (CEP), you may be in a unique position to spot the signs of financial stress early. We are building a Network of Community Engagement Points (local people and places) who can offer a compassionate first response and, when needed, connect people with further support.

Anywhere people naturally spend their time — and naturally share their worries — may become a moment of support.



Network of Community Engagement Points (NetCEP) is a program that enables trusted people and places, like community centres, sports clubs, and local businesses — to offer a compassionate first response when someone is having a tough time. Read more at www.netcep.com.au.



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Financial distress isn't always talked about openly. Shame, embarrassment, or stigma can make it hard for someone to raise the topic directly. As a Community Engagement Point, you might notice:

- Low mood, irritability, withdrawal, or increased anxiety
- Comments like "I don't know how I'll get through this week" or "I can't afford anything right now"
- Avoiding conversations about money, bills, or housing
- Difficulty concentrating or appearing overwhelmed
- Expressions of guilt or failure — feeling like they're letting others down
- Signs of practical struggle (e.g., skipped appointments due to fuel costs, avoiding activities with fees)

Any of these may signal that someone is carrying financial worry beneath the surface.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

You don't need to solve someone's financial problems — but you can play a vital role by being a calm, compassionate presence. You can:

- Listen without judgement if they want to talk
- Acknowledge the stress they're experiencing
- Normalise financial strain — many people in our community are facing similar pressures
- Keep it practical and simple — you don't need details or paperwork
- Offer options, not instructions
- If they're open to it, connect them with the local Short-Term Support Team (STST) for free, confidential, short-term support
- Provide reassurance that accepting support is not a sign of failure

Early recognition and a warm response can help someone feel less alone and more able to take steady steps forward.

IN PRACTICE

AT A COMMUNITY CENTRE WITH A FINANCIAL COUNSELLING PROGRAM

1

Leah, who helps coordinate programs at the local community centre, notices that Tom — a regular who attends the centre — seems stressed and distracted.

When she gently asks how things are going, Tom admits he's behind on bills and worried about his debts

2

Leah listens without judgement and reassures him that many people experience money worries. She lets him know he can link in with the centre's financial counselling program — and that if he'd like extra short-term support, she can also connect him with the Short-Term Support Team (STST), delivered by a local service provider.

3

Tom agrees, giving consent for the referral. The STST follows up to provide short-term, compassionate, confidential support alongside the financial counselling service — helping him explore next steps, plan, and feel more in control.

