ecstra

Strengthening financial wellbeing in Australia

A shared call to action

ecstra

Financial wellbeing is essential for individuals, communities, and the broader economy.

It directly influences everyday life including the overall mental, physical, and social health of Australians. It is a national issue that underpins economic participation, productivity and the long-term strength of our economy.

However, the financial wellbeing of Australians has fallen year on year, with many people facing sustained cost of living pressures, rising financial stress, deepening wealth inequality, exposure to digital exclusion and harms, a surge in financial scams, and a decline in financial literacy.

These challenges are particularly acute for young people, with the sharpest falls in financial literacy among those aged 15–24.

Now is the time to invest in the financial futures of all Australians. Learn more and be part of a growing coalition working together to drive this shared call to action.

Across education, industry, consumer organisations, researchers and frontline services, including contributions shared through the National Financial Wellbeing Summit hosted by Ecstra Foundation, the message is clear:

Australia needs to commit to a National Financial Wellbeing and Capability Strategy

There is strong appetite across sectors to work together toward common goals.

This goodwill must now translate into a unified plan, led by government and supported by all sectors, with shared ambitions, measurable outcomes and long term stable investment to effect genuine change.

This shared call to action provides a potential roadmap for Australia to become an active world leader in financial capability and wellbeing.

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Investing in the financial future of all Australians

We call on the Australian Government to:

1. **Develop, implement and lead a National Financial Wellbeing and Capability Strategy** with shared goals, national accountability and long-term, stable investment.

2. **Elevate financial literacy in the Australian Curriculum** so that every young person gains essential life skills.

3. **Invest in evidence based programs, resources and teacher support** to deliver high-quality financial education nationwide.

4. **Embed financial capability across life stages** from childhood to retirement, providing practical support when people need it most. This includes in schools, workplaces, tertiary education, digital environments and communities.

5. **Strengthen system fairness and consumer protections** to ensure the systems Australians interact with daily support financial safety, inclusion and address economic security.

6. **Establish national measurement and re-engage internationally** including consistent measurement frameworks, indicators and data collection for financial wellbeing. Re-engage with OECD/INFE assessments including the PISA Financial Literacy Assessment and the International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy.

Six areas for action on financial wellbeing

1. Develop, implement and lead a National Financial Wellbeing and Capability Strategy

A new National Financial Wellbeing and Capability Strategy would connect the range of current but fragmented activities, programs and investments across policy, regulation, education, research, business and community and social services.

It would ensure cohesive interventions, minimise duplication and use evidence to target resources where they will have the greatest impact.

A government led, coordinated approach should:

- Address the significant gaps in financial education, capability and wellbeing
- Ensure financial inclusion for all people and communities
- Integrate with wider economic, social and consumer protection frameworks
- Provide a clear action plan to lift financial literacy rates and build economic security
- Use evidence to target resources where they will have the greatest impact
- Be supported by long-term, stable investment and national accountability.

2. Elevate financial literacy in the Australian Curriculum

Financial capability is an essential life skill. Financial education improves financial knowledge and behaviours, and helps reduce inequity and gender gaps in economic security.

To prepare young people for a rapidly changing financial environment, Australia must:

- Elevate financial literacy as a core, stand-alone compulsory learning area of the Australian Curriculum
- Ensure consistent, equitable delivery for students across all jurisdictions
- Embed age appropriate, real-world content that supports long term economic and social wellbeing.

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3. Invest in evidence based programs, resources and teacher support

Teachers need professional development, high-quality resources and curriculum-aligned programs to deliver financial education effectively. National leadership should:

- Invest in evidence-based workshops, tools and independent teaching resources
- Provide dedicated support for teacher training and confidence-building
- Ensure equitable access for regional, remote and lower-income schools
- Scale programs that demonstrate measurable classroom impact.

Australia developed a financial capability evaluation framework and survey instruments to track progress and measure the impact of financial capability initiatives under previous national strategies. These are currently inactive.

4. Embed financial capability across life stages

Financial capability must be supported throughout life. A national approach should ensure people can access clear, practical financial education in the environments where they make decisions and at the moments they need it most. This includes:

- **Community settings** – trusted support delivered through partners embedded in communities and place-based support, with a focus on co-locating services and providing wrap around support
- **Workplaces** – helping employees understand financial basics including salary, tax, superannuation and rights at work, particularly early in their careers
- **Life transitions** – support for people moving from school to work and navigating income changes during parenting, caring, health or other life stages
- **Pre-retirement and retirement** – accessible information on superannuation, accumulation and retirement options, longevity planning and housing decisions.

5. Strengthen system fairness and consumer protections

Financial wellbeing cannot be achieved through education alone. A national approach must also address the systems Australians interact with every day such as banking, credit, debt management, housing, superannuation and digital financial services. This includes ensuring:

- Clear and accessible consumer information
- Fair, simple and inclusive financial products
- Strong regulatory and safety frameworks including across financial services, income support policy, taxation and housing
- Accessible financial advice and support pathways
- Supports for people most at risk, including those experiencing financial stress, family violence, economic abuse, digital exclusion or structural disadvantage
- Long term sustainable funding for front line services.

6. Establish national measurement and re-engage internationally

National and international benchmarking strengthens domestic policy design and ensures Australia's approach aligns with international best practice.

Australia developed a financial capability evaluation framework and survey instruments to track progress and measure the impact of financial capability initiatives under previous national strategies. These are currently inactive.

To track progress effectively and strengthen accountability, leadership and collaboration is needed to:

- Set nationally agreed indicators of financial wellbeing and capability
- Lead coordinated data collection across government, regulators, education and community organisations
- Re-engage with the OECD/INFE international assessment programs, including the International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy and PISA Financial Literacy Assessment.

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Why national action is needed now

Financial wellbeing intersects with areas including health, education, employment, housing, climate resilience and digital participation. Australia faces a rapidly changing financial landscape.

Key challenges include:

- **High financial stress:** one in three Australians struggle to meet household expenses
- **Mental health impact:** nearly half (46%) cite financial pressure as a leading cause of distress and those experiencing financial issues are twice as likely to experience mental health challenges
- **Inequality in financial wellbeing:** access to economic resources, care and support is important to maintaining good physical health. Those living in lower socio-economic areas face worse health outcomes across multiple measures
- **Declining financial literacy:** rates have fallen across all age groups, with the greatest drop among young people. Australia's PISA financial literacy scores have declined since 2012
- **Climate and financial strain:** Extreme weather and climate change exacerbate economic hardship, causing displacement, rising utility and insurance costs, and emotional stress
- **Growing digital divide:** one in five Australians face digital exclusion, limiting their ability to manage money in an increasingly online financial system
- **Increasing complexity of financial systems:** the rapid growth in complex and accessible financial products such as micro-investing platforms, instant credit offerings, AI-driven advice tools and digital currencies require stronger personal digital financial literacy, advanced decision making skills as well as enhanced consumer protections.

National strategies are critical in setting a clear, unified vision and roadmap for change. Over 70 countries, including G20 and OECD members, are advancing national financial literacy and capability strategies to address many of the same issues we are experiencing.

Their approach contrasts starkly with Australia, which currently is without an active coordinated national strategy. Once a global leader we are now out of step with international best practice and risk falling behind global peers.

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Invitation to act

We invite Government to convene a cross-sector working group, including educators, regulators, consumer advocates, community organisations, academics and industry to build a connected ecosystem to:

- Inform the development of a new national financial wellbeing and capability strategy, including developing a set of shared national outcomes and indicators
- Contribute to the mapping of existing initiatives, gaps and duplication to inform coordinated action, and ensure investment targets areas of greatest need and potential impact
- Share evidence, insights and best practice domestically and internationally
- Collaborate on programs, research and innovation
- Engage communities and priority cohorts to ensure approaches incorporate lived experience and diverse perspectives.

We also invite organisations and advocates who share our commitment to a national approach to financial wellbeing and capability to sign on as a supporter, and to learn more about opportunities for collaboration. Click **here** to join.

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A national approach to financial wellbeing and capability is supported by:

ABCN Business Partnering with Education	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Business Educators Australasia Inc.	CWES Centre for Women's Economic Safety	CISVic
CPRC Fairer markets for Australians	RMIT University Consumer Wellbeing Research Group	CPA Australia	ecstra	financial basics foundation
financial counselling australia	Financial Rights Legal Centre	First Nations Foundation	Global Sisters	Mob Strong Debt Help
Money School	Redfern Legal Centre	Super Consumers Australia	UNSW Sydney Tax & Business Advisory Clinic	way forward debt solutions
Welfare Rights Centre	Wellbeing Research	Western Sydney University Tax Clinic	WEstjustice	white box enterprises

Associate Professor Michelle Cull Western Sydney University	**Phil Lambert** Phil Lambert Consulting	**Professor Susan Thorp** Monash Business School

About Ecstra Foundation

Ecstra Foundation is committed to a future where people can achieve their best financial wellbeing.

We invest in partnerships, programs and people to provide effective financial education at key life stages and to improve community financial capability and wellbeing.

We also support a range of consumer organisations working to address the many structural barriers to greater financial inclusion and economic security.

Our flagship program, Talk Money with Ecstra Foundation, is the largest, free, face to face financial education program offered in schools nationally, ensuring more Australian students have access to money lessons for life.

Now is the time for Australia to act, by bringing together the collective expertise, evidence and commitment that already exists to help improve the financial lives of all Australians.

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Phone +61 2 8330 6610 **Email** info@ecstra.org.au
Ecstra Foundation ecstra.org.au **Talk Money** talkmoney.org.au