

Scams

Information about scams and how to avoid them

What is a scam?

A scam is an offer or scheme designed to trick you into giving away your money or personal details or information. Many people think scams only target certain groups, such as old people or people who do not speak English well. However, anybody can be the victim of a scam.

How do scams work?

Scams may work by:

- > pretending to be the government or a company that you know and trust
- > telling you that you have been specially selected to win money or a prize
- > scaring you into thinking you will miss out or be unsafe if you do not accept an offer or provide them with your personal information
- > offering you something for 'free'; you then feel pressured to give something in return
- > using realistic-looking websites or other tools, when in fact they are fake.

Knowing how scams work can help you protect yourself.

What are some common scams?

Banking and personal information scams

- > You get a letter or email pretending to be from your bank, credit union or a government department, such as the Australian Taxation Office or Centrelink
- > The letter or email offers you a tax return or to increase your Centrelink payments and asks you to send your credit card number, account number, online banking password or personal information
- > The scammers use your details to steal your money or identity.

Protect yourself:

- Never give your credit card, bank account or other financial details by email
- Be careful of doing online banking in a library, internet cafe, or other public area. Your personal details may be at risk

- Banks and other legitimate companies will never ask for your financial details via email
- Government departments will never ask for personal details in a letter or email.

Mobile phone scams

- > You get a call or text message from a number you do not know
- > Messages may advertise cheap or free ringtones, offer great prizes, or claim to be from a 'secret admirer'
- > When you return the call or respond to the message, you are charged at very expensive rates
- > If you respond, you may be disappointed in the product or signed up to a service you do not want or cannot stop. You may also be left with a huge phone bill.

Protect yourself:

- If you get a missed call or text message from an unknown number, delete or ignore it, or reply 'STOP'
- Be careful of phone numbers beginning with 190 or SMS and MMS numbers starting with 19. These are charged at premium rates and can be very expensive.

Rental scams

- > A rental property is advertised at a very cheap price
- > The owner claims to be overseas and tells you that you cannot inspect the property
- > The owner asks you to send them money for bond or rent in advance
- > After you pay, they promise to send or courier the keys to you but never do.

Protect yourself:

- Always inspect a property before you agree to sign a lease
- If you are unsure, arrange to rent through a real estate agency rather than directly with a landlord or property owner.

Lottery and competition scams

- > You get a telephone call, text message, email or letter saying you have won money in a lottery, or a prize in a competition
- > You are asked to send a fee (often by wire service to another country) so you can collect your winnings
- > When you send the money, you do not get anything in return.

Protect yourself:

- If you did not enter the competition or lottery, ignore or delete the offer
- Never send a fee or bank account details to collect a prize. Legitimate lotteries and competitions do not ask you to pay a fee to collect your winnings.

Get-rich-quick schemes (investment scams)

- > You get a phone call or email offering an investment opportunity or other type of financial scheme at an extremely high interest or return rate
- > You may also be offered early access to your superannuation (retirement savings) or gambling software that claims to pick winners of sporting events or stock market movements
- > These scams may cause you to lose a lot of money and put you into debt.

Protect yourself:

- Do not believe an offer that promises you will 'get rich quick'
- If the offer seems too good to be true it probably is
- The only people who make money are the scammers.

Remote access computer scams

- > You get a call from somebody asking you for remote access to your computer to run a virus scan
- > They tell you that your computer is infected with a virus, even if it is not infected
- > They ask you to pay money for antivirus software and may ask you to enter personal and credit card details on a website.

Protect yourself:

- Never give a stranger remote access to your computer
- Do not give your personal, credit card or online account details over the phone unless you made the call and the phone number came from a person or company you trust
- If you are concerned about your computer, contact your software or hardware supplier.

I think I have been scammed... what can I do?

If someone has gained access to your bank account or credit card details, call your bank **immediately** to cancel those accounts. You should also contact the bank if you have transferred funds online to someone you think is a scammer. The bank may be able to cancel the transfer before it is processed.

If a scam involves your mobile phone, call your phone provider and tell them what has happened. You should also contact the:

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman
tio.com.au
1800 062 058

To report an investment scam, contact the Australian Securities and Investment Commission on 1300 300 630.

If you want to report a scam or think you have been the victim of a scam, visit SCAMwatch, a website run by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission at scamwatch.gov.au or call 1300 795 995.

You can also report a scam to your local consumer protection agency:

Australian Capital Territory

Office of Regulatory Services T. (02) 6207 3000
ors.act.gov.au

New South Wales

NSW Fair Trading T. 13 32 20
fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

Consumer Affairs T. 1800 019 319
consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au

Queensland

Office of Fair Trading T. 13 74 68
fairtrading.qld.gov.au

South Australia

Consumer and Business Services T. 131 882
cbs.sa.gov.au

Tasmania

Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading T. 1300 65 44 99
consumer.tas.gov.au

Victoria

Consumer Affairs Victoria T. 1300 55 81 81
consumer.vic.gov.au

Western Australia

Consumer Protection T. 1300 30 40 54
commerce.wa.gov.au/consumerprotection