



# Help for victims of fraud

## (Project Sunbird)

The WA Police Major Fraud Squad is now working with the Department of Commerce to identify and prevent consumer fraud in Western Australia. Consumer Protection's WA ScamNet website ([www.scamnet.wa.gov.au](http://www.scamnet.wa.gov.au)) has information about Project Sunbird and general advice to help you identify and avoid scams and fraud.

Through joint operations between Consumer Protection and the WA Police Major Fraud Squad we know that between 2011 and 2013 organised criminals defrauded Western Australians out of at least \$11 million. The WA Police have identified hundreds of individuals repeatedly sending money overseas and most of these people have been found to be victims of fraud.

Many of these are romance or relationship frauds. These frauds often appear to be intimate relationships with phone calls, emails and even gifts exchanged over long periods of time. If you or someone you know has begun an online relationship with a person overseas and that person requests money for whatever purpose, it will likely be a fraud.

If you have received a letter from Project Sunbird or you can identify with the situations described we urge you to stop sending money now and contact our investigators.

### Victim support

If you are a victim of fraud you may find personal and/or financial counselling useful. Some of the services listed below are free and using others you may be eligible for a rebate.

You can also find a private psychologist via the Australian Psychological Society ([www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)). If you want to access the Medicare rebates for psychological counselling you will need to choose a psychologist who is a registered Medicare psychology provider. There is a link on the Society's website that will provide you with this list.

The State Government's Victim Support Service ([www.victimsofcrime.wa.gov.au](http://www.victimsofcrime.wa.gov.au)) has a useful website which includes an online directory of service providers. The website explains some of the effects crime can have on a person and will help you understand your rights within the criminal justice systems.

### Personal counselling

#### Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia (WA) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliation. They are committed to enhancing the lives of communities, families and individuals and supporting positive and respectful relationships.

1300 364 277

[www.wa.relationships.com.au](http://www.wa.relationships.com.au)

#### Centrecare

Centrecare offers extensive specialised counselling services both in the metropolitan and regional areas of Western Australia.

9325 6644

[www.centrecare.com.au](http://www.centrecare.com.au)

#### Lifeline

Lifeline provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to online, phone and face-to-face crisis support and suicide prevention services.

13 11 14

[www.lifelinewa.org.au](http://www.lifelinewa.org.au)

#### Women's Healthworks (north of the river)

This service provides counselling for a minimal cost. You can refer yourself into this service which is staffed by a Counselling Psychologist and intern psychologists on placement from universities.

9300 1566

[www.womenshealthworks.org.au](http://www.womenshealthworks.org.au)

### Communicare

Communicare Psychological Services (CPS) provide a range of services to support adults in a variety of areas including well-being, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, anger management, grief and loss, domestic and relationship issues.

9251 5777

[www.communicare.org.au](http://www.communicare.org.au)

### Financial counselling

There are several agencies in Western Australia that offer free or low-cost financial counselling. The Financial Counsellors' Association of WA has an online directory and can put you in touch with a financial counsellor in your area.

#### The Financial Counsellors' Association of WA

1800 007 007

[www.financialcounsellors.org](http://www.financialcounsellors.org)

### Legal advice

#### Consumer Credit legal Service

Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA) is a charitable organisation that provides legal advice in financial matters against a bank or other financial institution.

9221 7066

[www.cclswa.org.au](http://www.cclswa.org.au)

#### Community Legal Centres

Community Legal Centres (CLCs) are community based organisations providing free or low-cost legal services to the community. Many people who use this service do not qualify for legal aid but cannot afford to engage a lawyer in private practice. There are currently 28 centres throughout metropolitan, regional and remote Western Australia. Their services include information and advice, casework, representation, advocacy and community legal education, although not all centres provide all services.

9432 9790

[www.communitylaw.net/CLC-Directory](http://www.communitylaw.net/CLC-Directory)

### Citizens Advice Bureau

The Citizens Advice Bureau has metro and regional offices where you can access general legal advice and get power of attorney information.

9221 5711

[cab@cabwa.com.au](mailto:cab@cabwa.com.au)

[www.cabwa.com.au](http://www.cabwa.com.au)

### Repeat victimisation

Increasingly, Consumer Protection and WA Police are finding that once a relationship or investment fraud victim tells the fraudster that the game is up, there is a danger they will be targeted by a secondary scam.

Usually victims targeted in secondary scams are contacted by people claiming to be connected to the persona used in the original fraud, such as immigration staff or other officials requesting money associated with the previous scam. Occasionally there may be new declarations of love or offers of investment or even restitution for the money lost.

Bogus stories that have recently come to light have included:

- offers of scam compensation from law enforcement or government agencies even though no such scheme exists;
- a supposed doctor calling to alert a fraud victim that the scammer had attempted suicide and needed medical bills paid or he would not survive;
- a woman contacting a fraud victim to explain she is the scammer's wife and she wants to leave but needs money to do so; and
- claims made to a fraud victim that the scammer is facing jail unless more money is sent.

 [ConsumerProtectionWesternAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/ConsumerProtectionWesternAustralia)

 [@ConsumerWA](https://twitter.com/ConsumerWA)

**National Relay Service: 13 36 77** for the hearing impaired.

This publication is available upon request in other formats to assist people with special needs.

#### Regional Offices

Goldfields/Esperance	(08) 9026 3250
Great Southern	(08) 9842 8366
Kimberley	(08) 9191 8400
Mid-West	(08) 9920 9800
North-West	(08) 9185 0900
South-West	(08) 9722 2888

### How to avoid repeat approaches

Recognising that you have been a victim of consumer fraud can be a devastating personal experience not only in terms of the financial loss but also a sense of betrayal and a loss of trust.

There are a number of simple precautions however that can help ensure you do not become a victim again.

It is very important that you now ensure there is no malicious software on your computer, change your email address and home/mobile phone numbers and close or amend your Facebook or other social media accounts and limit who can access them. If you believe your bank details may have been passed on you should also consider contacting your bank.

In future do not follow any links or call numbers supplied to you in an email. It takes a minute or two more to look up the number in the Yellow Pages or another independent directory service but this may save you following a scammer’s false lead and prevent heartache later on.

Reconsider the personal information you share and post on social/business networking services. Scammers use publicly available information to identify potential victims to groom. Review your social media profile and delete and/or amend your Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter or other accounts so that you do not keep getting requests from individuals associated with the fraud.

If you are reconnecting with your real friends and family online, ensure your security settings on Facebook and other social media are set at the highest privacy level and set a reminder for yourself so that you check them every three to six months. If possible, do not include your own photo on the page; instead use an icon or image of an object to represent yourself. Using a derivation of your name, or a nickname, may also help you to manage your online profile and avoid reconnecting with scammers.

In future do not accept social networking friend or follow requests, or respond to emails, from people you have not met or that your friends and family cannot vouch for – the best way to keep scammers out of your life is to never let them in.

Do not respond to out-of-the-blue social media messages from strangers, such as a friend request on Facebook.	Be concerned if a person refuses to chat real-time via a webcam and be mindful that even Skype is not scammer proof – watch out for pre-recorded videos.
Be on your guard if someone you meet on an online dating site asks you to take the conversation over to email or instant messaging.	Do not send money on the promise that you will receive a large lottery win, inheritance, gold bars or money from a disused bank account.
Be wary of overseas-based singles, especially if they profess their love for you after a short amount of time or want to know about your financial status.	Alarm bells should ring if someone you do not know personally (have not met face-to-face) requests money, particularly by a wire transfer service such as Western Union or direct bank transfers.
Remember that just because someone shares personal photos does not mean the pictures are of them – scammers often steal other people’s photos.	Scammers can be patient – often schemes have been running for 6 to 12 months before any cash is requested in most cases victims report that cash requests are small in the beginning.
Don’t be fooled into thinking that talking to somebody on the phone regularly means you know them and that they are who they say there are.	

## Checklist

✓	Call our investigators today if you have received a letter from Project Sunbird.
✓	Change your email address if the scammer is aware of it.
✓	Change your home/mobile number if the scammer is aware of it.
✓	Delete or amend your current LinkedIn, Facebook, Skype and other social media accounts. Review your online profile (Google your own name) and delete information as appropriate.
✓	If you delete your current accounts and then want to re-establish a social media account, do so without a personal photo, include little or no personal information and use a nickname instead of your full name.
✓	Request a <b>special category enrolment</b> on the State or Federal electoral roll that will ensure your address is not shown. More information is available at <a href="http://www.waec.wa.gov.au">www.waec.wa.gov.au</a> .
✓	Check your security settings on Facebook and other social media are set at the highest privacy level and check them periodically.
✓	Get a professional virus scan on your computer and all the handheld electronic devices you have used to access the web.
✓	Contact your bank if you believe your account details have been provided.
✓	Do not follow links or call numbers supplied to you in an email. Always look up the number or address in an independent directory (like the Yellow Pages). If the details do not match it is likely you are being scammed.
✓	Do not make up-front payments via money order, wire transfer or international funds transfer. It is not possible to trace money sent this way.
✓	Put the WA ScamNet website into your favourites so you can access it easily. Uses the link to report a suspected scam or check to see if the details you have been sent match a known fraud.

[www.commerce.wa.gov.au/](http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/)  
ConsumerProtection

[www.scamnet.wa.gov.au](http://www.scamnet.wa.gov.au)  
[www.police.wa.gov.au](http://www.police.wa.gov.au)

To contact our investigators call  
1300 30 40 54