



# Help for victims of fraud

## (Project Sunbird)

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Project Sunbird is a joint anti-fraud initiative implemented by the WA Police Major Fraud Squad and the Department of Commerce, Consumer Protection Division. The purpose of Project Sunbird is to prevent West Australians falling prey to relationship and investment frauds. From January 2013 to July 2014, victims of fraud reported losses totalling more than 26 million dollars to WAScamNet.

There is more information about Project Sunbird, as well as general advice to help you identify and avoid scams or frauds, on the WAScamNet website:  
[www.scamnet.wa.gov.au](http://www.scamnet.wa.gov.au)

Save the website to your favourites so you can access it easily, report suspected scams and see if details you have been sent match a known fraud.

Since 2013, Project Sunbird has sent more than 2,150 letters to suspected fraud victims in Western Australia who have been sending money to the West African countries of Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo.

### Protecting yourself

- Do not respond to out-of-the-blue social media messages from strangers, such as a friend request on Facebook.
- Be on your guard if someone you meet on an online dating site asks you to move the conversation over to email or instant messaging.
- Remember that just because someone shares personal photos, it does not mean the pictures are of them – scammers often steal other people's photos. Run a Google Image search on photos and search words in their description to check if they're the real deal.
- If you can find out the IP address of an Internet user, you can get an idea what part of the country or world they're in by using an IP lookup tool.
- 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 they are.
- 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.
- Do not send money on the promise that you will receive a large lottery win, inheritance, gold, or money from a disused bank account.
- 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.
- Be wary of anyone who confesses their love for you after a short amount of time and has a sudden crisis where they need your financial assistance.
- Seek advice from trusted family members or friends if you are being asked by an online friend to send money overseas.
- Before travelling to meet on an online friend overseas be 100 per cent sure the journey is safe – check with police and register with [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au)
- Scammers can be patient – often schemes have been running for six to 12 months before any cash is requested and in most cases victims report that cash requests are small in the beginning.
- Do not send money in the hope of recovering what you have sent. If the money is rightfully yours it shouldn't cost anything to recover it.

## Being targeted again

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 eg employer, lawyer, 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 a chance to get back money lost.

### Bogus stories include:

- 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 needs medical bills paid or he/she 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 that the scammer is facing jail unless more money is sent.

## Tips:

- Do not follow links or call numbers supplied to you during a contact you did not initiate. 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 a BSB number search to see where a bank account is based or whether it's a pre-paid credit card you are transferring to, which lacks traceability in terms of the owner. Payments made via money order, wire transfer or international funds transfer cannot be traced.

## Victim support

If you are a victim of fraud you may find personal and/or financial counselling useful. Some of the services listed in this fact sheet are free and you may be eligible for a rebate with others.

You can also find a private psychologist through 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 has a useful website [www.victimsofcrime.wa.gov.au](http://www.victimsofcrime.wa.gov.au) including 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.

### 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

## Contact details of organisations that can assist

### Support Group

#### Relate Offline

A not-for-profit WA support group for fraud victims

0475 692 228

[perthrelateoffline@gmail.com](mailto:perthrelateoffline@gmail.com)

### Personal Counselling

#### Relationships Australia

A community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliation.

1300 364 277

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

### Lifeline

Provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to online, phone and face-to-face crisis support and suicide prevention service.

13 11 14

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

### Financial Counselling

#### Financial Counsellors' Association of WA

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

1800 007 007

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

### Legal advice

#### Consumer Credit legal Service (WA) Inc. (CCLSWA)

CCLWA 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 (CLCs)

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. Their services include information and advice, casework, representation, advocacy and community legal education. Not all centres provide all services.

9432 9790

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

#### Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

CAB has metro and regional offices where you can access general legal advice and get power of attorney information.

9221 5711

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

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

## Checklist

✓	Don't panic or ignore it.
✓	Call our investigators as soon as possible if you have received a letter from Project Sunbird.
✓	Cease all contact with the scammers immediately. Do not tell the scammers you have been in touch with Consumer Protection or WA Police.
✓	Change your email address if the scammer is aware of it.
✓	Contact your bank if you believe your account details have been provided.
✓	Contact relevant agencies to let them know your account and/or personal details are no longer confidential.
✓	Keep an eye on bank statements in future. Consider getting a credit history report.
✓	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. When you want to re-establish your accounts, do so without a personal photo, include little or no personal information and use a nickname instead of your full name.
✓	Check your social media account security settings are set at the highest privacy level and check the setting periodically. Review your online profile (Google your own name) and delete information as appropriate. Get a professional virus scan on your computer.
✓	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>

[www.commerce.wa.gov.au/  
ConsumerProtection](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