

# Financial and Consumer Rights Council and its role in advocacy

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VRGF Conference  
14 August 2018

# Introduction

## FCRC: the peak body for Victorian financial counsellors.

- ▶ Introducing financial counselling
- ▶ What is a peak?
- ▶ How does the peak role translate into advocacy?
- ▶ How does peak body advocacy work in practice?
- ▶ How can we have an impact on systemic issues encountered by financial counsellors such as gambling harm?

# Role of Financial Counsellors (FCs)

- ▶ Financial counsellors have expertise in assisting and advocating for people vulnerable to or from economic abuse, or in financial hardship.
- ▶ FCs understand how to educate clients to self-advocate, or where appropriate, how to access and negotiate with creditor organisations and government agencies on behalf of clients.
- ▶ FC advocacy has led to the creation of hardship programs, development of stronger consumer codes, and much improved responses by industry and government to vulnerable people.
- ▶ FC expertise is increasingly being developed through specialisation in areas such as family violence and gambling, but generalists encounter most types of situations over time.

*FCs are NOT Financial Planners or Financial Advisers*

# Current FC sector

- ▶ FCs operate under a specific credit licence exemption from ASIC, requiring professional standing
- ▶ In Victoria, FCs funded by CAV, VRGF and DSS; CAV share is bigger than the other two combined
- ▶ DSS funded agencies (small part of sector) now undergoing open tender process (closed tender for DSS gambling FCs).
- ▶ Heavy demand in the CAV funded agencies. Waiting lists of up to 3 months. Increasing risk of FC burnout as high volume and high proportion of complex cases, relatively small sector, many isolated workers.
- ▶ Distinction between specialist services and generalist FCs, where both are needed and both need to be skilled appropriately.

# What is a peak body?

- ▶ (Australia) an organisation which represents an entire sector of industry or the community to the government, often incorporating other organisations in that area.

(YourDictionary.com)

- ▶ A **peak organisation** or **peak body** is an Australian term for an advocacy group or trade association, an association of industries or groups with allied interests.

(Wikipedia)

# How does the FCRC peak role translate into advocacy?

- ▶ Advocacy and representation are inherent to the definition of peak body:  
*We call ourselves a peak because of our advocacy role*
- ▶ Our members are themselves engaged in advocacy in their casework
- ▶ FCRC provides a collective avenue/voice for its members as advocates on systemic issues
- ▶ FCRC also advocates for the sector:
  - ▶ to be better funded, to expand; to be better understood
  - ▶ to establish safe and sustainable work practices

# How does FCRC peak body advocacy work in practice?

- ▶ We get our members together in their geographic locations (in regional networks), and in working on systemic issues (in working groups).
- ▶ We resource and support those groups through our office and governance structure (Board).
- ▶ We organise and direct campaigning with members; we work with other peaks and consumer organisations on campaigns.
  - ▶ Examples - SACC legislation; URGS reform; Rank the... reports
- ▶ Collective organisation and structures are crucial

# How can we have an impact on systemic issues such as gambling harm?

- ▶ Identify things that need to change
- ▶ Identify barriers to good change, and things that might support it:  
Legislation, regulation, policy, advertising, industry/corporate behaviour
- ▶ Importance of strategy
  - ▶ Pick our battles:
  - ▶ Quick/easy wins? Plug away at longer term? Assess feasibility, capacity
  - ▶ Sudden shifts in political climate can open up opportunities
- ▶ Patience
- ▶ Innovation
- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Alliances

# Conclusion

► What next:

Gambling Issues Working Group meeting, 22 August at FCRC, Level 6, 179  
Queen Street Melbourne or by teleconference

# THANK YOU!

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