Save your retirement, from scammers

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) analysis of data reported to Scamwatch and the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network (ACORN), together with losses detected through scam disruption work, estimates scam losses in excess of $229 million in 2015.

Losses reported to ACCC’s Scamwatch alone climbed to almost $85 million, $3 million more than last year. Much of this was reported by older members of the community. Of the 49,500 reports to the ACCC with an age provided, almost 20,000 were provided by Australians over the age of 55, with over 21 million dollars lost by this group.

The Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce (ACFT) holds an annual Fraud Week. The event aims to raise awareness about scams and alert people about how they can identify scams and avoid becoming a victim.

This year, the ACFT is asking everyone to ‘wise up to scams’ and the focus of Fraud Week is on scams targeting over 55s. In 2015, these include investment scams and dating and romance scams. There are many other scams which affect older members of the community but reports to the ACCC show that these two account for half of the money lost by over 55’s in 2015.

Investment scams almost doubled in terms of the total amounts lost to just over $25.4 million. These scams pose a significant risk for Australians looking for investment opportunities, especially those looking to grow their retirement funds.

Dating and romance scams slipped to second in terms of reported loss but still accounted for almost $23 million in losses. These scams are successful because the scammer invests a great deal of time into building a trusting relationship which they ultimately use to defraud their victims.

Reducing scam victimisation is the shared responsibility of all Australians. During Fraud week, the ACFT, together with its partners in government, industry and community groups, will be asking individuals to ‘wise up to scams’ and follow some simple advice to avoid becoming a victim.

- **Do not let anyone pressure you into making decisions.** Scammers often try to create a sense of urgency so the recipient of the call will act impulsively. They do this through short deadlines, fake emergencies or threats of legal action.

- **Get a second opinion.** If someone is requesting money from you and you have any doubts, discuss it with a trusted and reliable third party.

- **Investment opportunities.** Do not respond to emails and phone calls from strangers offering predictions on shares, investment tips, or investment advice. Always do your own research before you invest any money and check the company or scheme is licensed on ASIC’s MoneySmart website.

- **Dating online.** Know who you’re dealing with. Don’t send money to someone you’ve never met in person. If someone approaches you on social media and you don’t know them, it may be a scam.

- **Cold call offering help with your computer.** If you receive a call claiming to be from Microsoft, Telstra or anyone else telling you your computer has a problem, it is likely to be a scam. Never allow anyone to remotely log into your computer.

- **Government agency calling.** Government agencies will generally write to you if you are entitled to money. If somebody calls you claiming to be from the Government
offering you unexpected money, be cautious. Get enough information on the organisation and the caller and then find independent contact details so you can check the legitimacy of what you have been told.

Obtaining information form reliable and trustworthy sources is the best way to protect yourself from scams. For tips on how to avoid scams visit the Scamwatch website. For information on how to protect yourself from investment scams, visit ASIC’s MoneySmart website. Visit the Department of Communications and the Arts’ Stay Smart Online website for more information on internet security.

You can also follow Scamwatch on Twitter or subscribe to Scamwatch Radars.

Wise Up to Scams
National Consumer Fraud Week 2016
An initiative of the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce