

Strategic Plan 2025–27





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Acknowledgement of Country

AFCA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future – for they hold the songlines, the stories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of First Nations Australia.

This land is, was, and always will be traditional First Nations Country.

We also acknowledge and pay our respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work, including the Wurundjeri, Boon Wurrung, Wathaurong, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung peoples of the Kulin nation and the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

Board Chair message

It is remarkable to see how far AFCA has come since it opened its doors in 2018. This growth and maturity is evident in the new Strategic Plan for 2025-27, which continues to build on AFCA's strong foundations.



This plan sets out the Board's renewed vision and clear priorities that will guide AFCA over the next three years to deliver on its purpose to provide fair, independent, and effective solutions for financial disputes, which remains the fundamental reason for our existence.

A bold new vision to serve as AFCA's compass:
Towards an Australia free from financial disputes.

While ambitious, the Board is confident in promoting this as the ultimate goal that AFCA aspires towards.

AFCA plays a unique role in the financial services sector, resolving financial disputes and also working with key stakeholders to reduce the issues that give rise to disputes in the first place.

The context in which AFCA operates is one of mounting financial pressures on consumers, rapid technological advancements and unprecedented increases in complaints. It is more important than ever to have clear strategic direction to ensure AFCA's success.

AFCA's 2025-27 Strategic Plan introduces four strategic priorities that will be AFCA's focus areas over the next three years: equity of access, service excellence, influence, and expertise.

Successfully implementing this strategic plan will help AFCA achieve its vision and purpose. This can only happen with the ongoing commitment and hard work of our diligent employees, led by our CEO and leadership team. Thank you all for your continued efforts; I look forward to celebrating AFCA's successes in the coming years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John Pollaers', written in a cursive style.

John Pollaers OAM
AFCA Board Chair

Chief Executive Officer and Chief Ombudsman message

I am excited to introduce AFCA's 2025-27 Strategic Plan, which outlines our clear path forward for the next three years.



AFCA achieved significant milestones under our first strategic plan, which concluded in June 2024. AFCA has firmly established itself as a trusted institution within the broader financial services landscape and as a leader amongst ombudsman schemes globally.

AFCA's new vision is 'Towards an Australia free from financial disputes'. This serves as our 'north star' around which we orientate all our efforts. It recognises that AFCA's aim is to work with financial firms, consumer groups, regulators, and government to address the issues that give rise to consumer harm and generate complaints in the first place. Where issues do arise, AFCA wants financial firms to resolve these with consumers and provide fair solutions, including appropriate redress where appropriate. It positions AFCA not as a reactive service, simply resolving matters when they have already arisen, but as a proactive body using our intelligence, analysis and learnings to influence improved practices and positive reform.

In working towards this vision, we will strive to embody Ngaliimba, the concept of loving energy and finding strength to help others which is expressed in our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan.

We have also undergone a number of changes in the way we do business over recent years. This includes moving to a hybrid working model, implementing the recommendations from our first Independent Review, a major IT transformation with a new case management system and integrated consumer and member portals, establishing our 'People for Purpose' culture, updating our funding model, and starting on our reconciliation journey.

Now is the right time to focus on how we can continue to improve our core services to consumers and members in ways that are tailored to their needs, and how we can ensure equity of access for all.

I want to thank everyone who was involved in the development of this plan. The priorities were developed through extensive internal and external consultation, and discussions with AFCA's Board to set our strategic direction. This plan is reflective of the collective views of our organisation, stakeholders and Board.

Everyone at AFCA contributes to AFCA's success, and while I know we have much work to do as we implement this plan. I am excited for the service we can provide to the community and the impact we can make.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Locke'.

David Locke
Chief Executive Officer and Chief Ombudsman

Purpose, vision and summary of priorities

Our vision

Towards an Australia free from financial disputes.

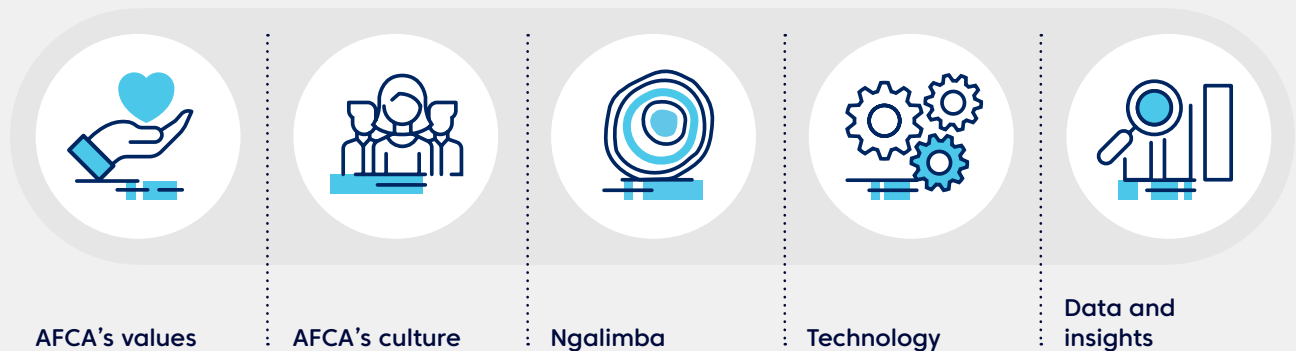
Our purpose

To provide fair, independent and effective solutions for financial disputes.

Strategic priorities



Key enablers



AFCA's values

Fair and independent

- We make fair, balanced and considered decisions
- We are evidence based
- Impartiality underpins all our work
- We ensure all parties are properly heard

Transparent and accountable

- We do what we say and what is right
- We are clear and transparent
- We explain the reasons for our actions
- We are timely, efficient and flexible
- We are trusted and supported to do our jobs and take responsibility for what we do

Honest and respectful

- People are at the heart of everything we do
- We respectfully listen to all views
- We show integrity in all our dealings
- We are professional and treat everyone with dignity

Proactive and customer focused

- We are outward facing and proactive
- We use data and experience to influence, inform and look ahead
- We help businesses to improve their customer service and minimise disputes
- Our services are accessible to all
- We actively engage with diverse audiences, including those who may need extra help

Environmental analysis

AFCA's 2025-27 Strategic Plan provides clear direction on how we will deliver on our vision and purpose as an organisation.

However, we are aware that the environment in which we operate is dynamic and can impact our ability to achieve our objectives. It is important that we remain alert, resilient, and able to adapt to change and rise to challenges when necessary. In developing this strategic plan, we have given consideration to a number of key environmental factors.

Climate change

The increasing occurrence and severity of extreme weather events makes climate change a widely accepted reality that must be dealt with. Climate change exposes everyone in Australia to greater physical and financial risk. Extreme weather events will continue to devastate communities, destroy infrastructure and harvests, and disrupt both supply chains and AFCA's workflow. Climate change also impacts the availability and affordability of insurance, particularly in high-risk regions. Increased interest in sustainability and a green economy will also require regulatory changes and invite greater scrutiny on issues like greenwashing.

Technology advancements

Advancements in technology presents opportunities for internal changes at AFCA in terms of our systems, processes and the way we work, but will also impact Australia more widely by changing how financial services are delivered to people. Recent years have seen a remarkable advancement in artificial intelligence which can contribute to everything from greater data insights, predictions, and decision-making to operational efficiencies across many sectors. However, the proliferation of artificial intelligence brings with it new and unique challenges for businesses. The increased interconnectedness of systems also exposes organisations to greater cyber security risk which has the potential for great harm and disruption. Business readiness and business continuity planning continue to be relevant concerns.

The legislative and regulatory landscape

This includes proposed legislative changes, AFCA's relationship with government, regulators and other relevant bodies. Any changes addressing issues such as scams, buy now pay later, mortgage stress, insurance affordability, retirement savings and digital currencies will also influence AFCA's work.

Economic variability

The Australian economy has continued to experience volatility in recent years, with increases in interest rates, decreased housing affordability and the rising cost of living as a result of higher inflation. Combined with mortgage stress, vulnerability to scams and the strains on household finances, increased consumer dissatisfaction could increase complaint volumes significantly.

Operational complexities

The dynamic landscape of financial services leads to constant changes to AFCA's operational environment. Recent years have shown an unanticipated and unprecedented increase in complaint volumes to AFCA. With new issues emerging due to evolving financial products or economic factors, changes can be expected in complaint types, complainant profiles and complaint volumes across products. AFCA's expanded jurisdiction may also extend both AFCA's member types and profiles.

AFCA's strategic priorities

AFCA's four strategic priorities are our primary focus areas over the next three years. These priorities provide us with clear direction and guidance to ensure our efforts lead AFCA to achieving its vision and purpose.



Equity of access



Objective

To ensure fairness and equity across all of AFCA's services.

AFCA provides an important service for all consumers and small business owners who have a dispute with a financial services firm. We believe everyone deserves fair and respectful treatment, to have their point of view heard, and to get a fair outcome that is not impacted by their level of literacy, technical or legal knowledge, their background, financial means or other experience.

The majority of consumers who access AFCA's services are self-represented and we want to empower consumers to use AFCA's services without legal or other representation. AFCA will innovate the ways in which customers can engage with AFCA, tailoring services to customers with extra needs including managing their complaint through storytelling.

AFCA will ensure our service is personal and empathetic with all parties, including financial firm members, with effective, tailored communication and an approach characterised by the importance of human connection. In this way, prioritising equity of access for all enables procedural and substantive fairness. It also means creating work environments and delivering services that are flexible, culturally responsive, trauma informed, and free of barriers for stakeholders from any and all backgrounds to navigate the process effectively.

AFCA is committed to reconciliation and will continue to build relationships, respect and trust with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Key outcomes

1 Reduced barriers to access and use

AFCA's services are accessible to all customers, regardless of background, identity (or intersections of identities) and circumstances, with channels appropriate to their needs. This means we understand who our customers are, and we adapt to their specific needs to deliver a personalised service and experience with AFCA. We make sure that every customer can access AFCA's services and navigate the process easily, and follow this through to resolution. This involves offering services in multiple languages, providing alternative engagement channels, and supporting customers with additional needs. It includes providing a people-centred and empathetic service.

2 Culturally competent services

All customers feel respected, understood, and heard during their interactions with AFCA. Our people are from diverse backgrounds and reflect the communities we serve. We are empathetic, with strong soft skills and cultural training, and we work to understand each customer's individual circumstances. Our people have a deep understanding of AFCA's reconciliation commitments, including improving financial inclusion and the accessibility of our service for First Nations peoples.

Equity of access (continued)



Objective

To ensure fairness and equity across all of AFCA's services.

Key outcomes

3 Empowered customers

Customers feel confident and equipped to navigate the dispute resolution process. This includes providing flexible processes that keep customers engaged, offer clear and accessible information in multiple languages and formats, and supply self-help tools and resources. Additionally, we empower communities through targeted outreach and education initiatives.

4 Increased trust and confidence

Customers from diverse backgrounds and circumstances trust AFCA to handle their complaints fairly and respectfully and recommend our services to others. This is achieved through increased transparency about processes and outcomes, strong partnerships with trusted community organisations, and storytelling that supports all consumers to interact with AFCA.

Service excellence



Objective

To provide a fair, high quality, consistent and timely service.

At AFCA, service excellence means delivering on our commitment to accessibility, independence, fairness, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. AFCA has grown significantly, and the demand for our service is at a record high, putting pressure on the business. Our priority is about providing a positive experience for customers and members throughout the dispute resolution journey through better resolution times, quality and removing unnecessary barriers to minimise customer effort.

We foster a culture of continuous improvement, where we constantly seek ways to enhance service delivery through data insights and innovative solutions. We use technology to maximise efficiency and streamline processes for effectiveness. Our people are passionate about taking a human-centred approach in everything they do.

Key outcomes

1 Better resolution times

Customers receive fair, timely and efficient resolution to their complaints, minimising delays and frustrations. We leverage technology solutions such as artificial intelligence for faster complaint processing, streamline and tailor processes where possible and act with urgency to resolve matters. We have systems in place to identify and triage issues that need to be dealt with in a bespoke way. This requires a commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration. By tapping into diverse perspectives from across AFCA, we will drive service enhancements and resolution of complaints.

3 Consistent and predictable service

Customers experience a consistent standard of service across all touchpoints, regardless of the staff member or communication channel used. This is achieved through an appropriately skilled workforce who are empowered to take a human-centred approach, comprehensive and consistent training, access to internal knowledge resources and robust quality assurance measures.

2 Enhanced quality in case handling

Complaints are handled with thoroughness, accuracy, and fairness. This is achieved through a consistently applied quality management framework with robust quality control, leveraging appropriate technology and use of data and insights to continuously improve our service. Ongoing training and transferrable skillsets ensure our people have the latest capability, knowledge and skills for complex casework. This focus on quality case handling ultimately leads to improved complaint resolution rates and fairer outcomes.

4 Improved customer satisfaction

Customers are happy with the overall service experience, including timely communication, clear explanations, and feeling that their circumstances have been heard and understood. Regular feedback mechanisms and a focus on undertaking robust customer experience mapping will help identify areas for improvement in the customer journey, improving satisfaction.

Influence



Objective

To reduce financial disputes and drive improvements in the financial services sector through our strong relationships and courageous voice.

AFCA champions fairness in financial services and seeks to improve practices in the sector while maintaining our position as an independent, credible and authoritative voice. By identifying areas for improvement through our data, we can influence positive change in how financial institutions interact with consumers and small businesses.

We will leverage evidence-based, data-driven insights on behaviour and trends to support financial firm members, government bodies, regulators, consumers and key stakeholders to drive systemic change and work together towards reducing the occurrence of financial disputes.

Key outcomes

1 Future-focused solutions

AFCA will grow into a centre of excellence by combining the knowledge, experience and expertise of our people alongside deep data analytics, insights and research capabilities. Our future-focused approach includes identifying emerging issues and trends within the financial sector. Using our voice and deep data analysis, we collaborate and partner with stakeholders and provide thought leadership, whether in relation to addressing systemic issues, developing industry best practice or supporting future regulatory and policy changes. This proactive approach contributes to a more stable and adaptable financial services ecosystem.

2 Increased transparency in the financial sector

We promote transparency by sharing complaint data and insights, and important information through AFCA's Forward-Looking Reviews. We further mature our data and analytics capabilities to provide data and meaningful insights that shifts policy, behaviour and brings awareness to issues. We identify opportunities to enhance our external reporting to provide more targeted reporting to financial firms, regulators, and the financial sector and community more broadly through platforms such as AFCA's Datacube. This empowers consumers and small businesses and fosters a culture of accountability within financial firms.

3 Influence behaviour in financial services

We influence behaviour across the financial services sector by promoting best practices and encouraging accountability. By harnessing the power of data, we provide actionable insights that improve overall industry standards. We engage proactively with financial firms, industry, government and key stakeholders to further a shared commitment to responsible behaviour, setting a higher standard for the financial services sector. We aim to foster a culture where fairness and transparency are at the core to benefit all stakeholders, and contribute to a healthier, more robust financial system.

Expertise



Objective

To engage and empower a skilled workforce with the knowledge and experience we need now and into the future.

AFCA is a knowledge-based organisation. Expertise refers to the cultivation of a highly skilled, diverse, and adaptable workforce that embodies AFCA's values and is equipped to meet current and future challenges. This expertise is critical as it ensures that we can provide exceptional service to every customer at AFCA through human connection, adapt to evolving needs, and deliver tailored support.

We empower our people to excel in their roles and contribute to the organisation's vision and purpose through the work they do every day. Our people embody our culture by demonstrating our cultural qualities in their work and showing empathy in all customer interactions. By developing an exemplary workforce, AFCA can ensure it has the expertise needed to deliver exceptional service today and in the future.

Key outcomes

1 Enhanced staff capabilities

We invest in skills development to ensure our people have the latest knowledge and expertise to handle complex financial complaints for the diverse communities we serve. This includes a deep understanding of the skills and capabilities of the future as we invest and implement changes into new technologies and automation. We are committed to working with our people over time to develop and transition skillsets into areas such as data analytics and the use of technology, cultural competency, and embedding empathy as a core cultural attribute as part of AFCA's culture story. It also includes training for handling specific financial products and maturing AFCA's knowledge management practices. Alongside the development of technical skills, we will provide training on enhancing communication skills, cultivating empathy and demonstrable empathetic behaviours and on drawing from the strengths of our peoples' diverse lived experiences.

2 Career development

We offer opportunities that enable our people to grow their skills, knowledge and leadership potential. This includes access to professional courses, internal secondments, and career progression pathways. Retaining experienced employees will ensure we preserve organisational knowledge and foster a positive workplace culture.

Expertise (continued)



Objective

To engage and empower a skilled workforce with the knowledge and experience we need now and into the future.

Key outcomes

3 Targeted recruitment

We use an enhanced recruitment approach to attract highly skilled and diverse candidates to ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve, align with our values and bring a wealth of lived experience, soft skills and empathy to their roles. This ensures we can meet evolving customer needs within the context of a dynamic and complex technical, legal and social ecosystem of financial services disputes. This approach includes leveraging multiple recruitment channels, professional networks, and partnerships with educational institutions. This proactive approach to recruitment will help us build a resilient and adaptable workforce that can deliver exceptional service.

4 Empowered and agile workforce

A hybrid work model with flexibility and agility empowers our people to work effectively from various locations while maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This model includes a pragmatic location strategy, driven by a deeper understanding of what all customers need to access our services and how our services are delivered. By providing an accessible service for all customers and flexible work options for our people, we support an improved customer experience, employee wellbeing, and attract a broader and more diverse talent pool.



Enablers

Enablers help us deliver on our strategic priorities. AFCA has worked hard to create firm foundations which will propel us in the right direction and assist us to flourish. We will leverage these enablers to deliver on our strategic priorities.



AFCA's values

AFCA's values are the foundational principles that guide everything we do. They are:

- Fair and independent
- Transparent and accountable
- Honest and respectful
- Proactive and customer focused



AFCA's culture

AFCA has a People for Purpose culture with four clearly defined cultural qualities:

- Our approach is human-centred
- Our teams are empowered and take ownership
- Our passion for inclusion sets us apart
- Our ideas move us forward



Ngaliimba

AFCA commissioned artwork by Edwin Lee Mulligan to commemorate the launch of AFCA's Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan, which he named 'Ngaliimba', meaning loving energy: finding strength to help others. At AFCA, we walk alongside people from different backgrounds, to ensure fair outcomes to financial disputes.



Technology

We have invested in technology capabilities, infrastructure and systems in recent years to secure a strong baseline from which to grow. We can now utilise technology, including AI solutions, to achieve outcomes aligned with our strategic priorities.



Data and insights

We have matured our data analytics and insights capabilities and are now in a position to support data-driven, evidence-based solutions, activities and decision-making.

Measuring success

AFCA's strategic plan is the high-level roadmap of AFCA's strategic direction as an organisation over the next three years.

Each year, we will develop an annual plan that identifies key initiatives and actions we will take to achieve the objectives and outcomes under each strategic priority.

Each strategic priority will also be measured through appropriate metrics and monitored carefully through various channels by AFCA's Board, the Executive, senior leadership and key stakeholders.





Contact us

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