

A photograph showing a person's hands reviewing documents on a desk. One document has the word 'SCAM' written in large, bold, black letters across it. A pen and glasses are also visible on the desk.

Scams robbed Australians of more than \$2 billion last year

Australians lost a record amount of more than \$2 billion to scams in 2021, despite government, law enforcement, and the private sector disrupting more scam activity than ever before, the ACCC's latest Targeting Scams report reveals.

The report compiles data from Scamwatch, ReportCyber, major banks and money remitters, and other government agencies, and is based on analysis of more than 560,000 reports. Reported losses to all organisations totalled almost \$1.8 billion, but as one-third of victims do not report scams the ACCC estimates actual losses were well over \$2 billion.

Investment scams were the highest loss category (\$701 million) in 2021, followed by payment redirection scams (\$227 million), and romance scams (\$142 million).

“Scam activity continues to increase, and last year a record number of Australians lost a record amount of money,” ACCC Deputy Chair Delia Rickard said.

“Scammers are the most opportunistic of all criminals: they pose as charities after a natural disaster, health departments during a pandemic, and love interests every day.”

“The true cost of scams is more than a dollar figure as they also cause serious emotional harm to individuals, families, and businesses,” Ms Rickard said.

Based on reports to Scamwatch in 2021, women reported the most scams but men lost more money than women, and men's losses to investment scams were double women's losses. In culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women had slightly higher losses than men.

People aged 65 and over reported the highest losses, and reported losses steadily increased with age.

In 2021, Scamwatch received record levels of reports and losses from Australians that may have been experiencing vulnerability or hardship. People with disability made twice as many reports compared to 2020, and their financial losses increased by 102 per cent to \$19.6 million.

The number of reports by Indigenous Australians increased by 43 per cent between 2020 and 2021, and reported losses increased by 142 per cent. People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities experienced an 88 per cent increase in losses last year compared to 2020.

“The increasing number of reports by people experiencing vulnerability is a very worrying trend. Everyone from government, to banks, and digital platforms needs to do more to address this,” Ms Rickard said.

“The ACCC is particularly wanting banks to match payee information in pay anyone transactions. This has been shown to have a real impact in countries that have done so.”

ACCC research presented in the report shows that scams are almost ubiquitous in Australia today. Ninety-six per cent of respondents had been exposed to scammers in the previous five years, and 20 per cent had fallen victim. Of those who lost money, 56 per cent were unable to recover any of it.

Source: ACCC Scamwatch