

Industry Statement

ABA Industry Statement: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander¹ peoples

1. Purpose of this statement

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the oldest continuous living culture on the planet. That is something in which all Australians can take pride.

The banking industry recognises there are disparities between the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians in many areas, including economic security and financial inclusion.

The Australian Banking Association (ABA) supports all Australians having access to banking services including digital banking and cashless transactions. The ABA recognises there are barriers to some Australians accessing these services, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote communities.

The collective efforts of government, community, and businesses (including banks) is required to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can access the services they need.

This statement outlines how the banking industry provides inclusive and accessible banking services – particularly to those living in remote locations.

2. Banking Code of Practice

The Banking Code of Practice (the Banking Code) sets out the standards of practice and service in the Australian banking industry for individual and small business customers, and their guarantors. The Banking Code provides safeguards and protections not set out in law. It complements the law and, in some areas, sets higher standards than the law².

The Banking Code requires banks to provide **inclusive and accessible banking services**³ including:

- **to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**, including those in remote locations⁴
- improving **accessibility of banking services to people with limited English**, including taking reasonable measures to enhance their access to those services⁵
- where a **customer tells their bank that they are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** customer, take reasonable steps to make services accessible by⁶:
 - telling them about **accounts or services relevant to them** (including those with no, or low standard fees) and if they would like, help them transfer to another account they want; and

¹ The terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples are used interchangeably by the ABA. The ABA acknowledge that these terms do not fully reflect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that some prefer to be known by other cultural names.

² The Banking Code "Introduction: What is the Banking Code of Practice" <https://www.ausbanking.org.au/banking-code/#The%20Banking%20Code%20of%20Practice>

³ The Banking Code Part 4 <https://www.ausbanking.org.au/banking-code/#The%20Banking%20Code%20of%20Practice>

⁴ The Banking Code Clause 32

⁵ The Banking Code Clause 34

⁶ The Banking Code Clause 35



- **help them meet any identification requirements**, by following AUSTRAC's guidance on identification and verification of persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heritage
- **assist customers who reside in remote communities** (including remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) to access and undertake their banking services⁷; and
- **provide cultural awareness training to staff** who regularly assist customers in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities⁸.

3. Access to banking services in remote and rural locations

The banking industry recognises there are challenges in accessing banking services for people living in remote or rural areas. Many people receive low incomes, are a significant distance from a major commercial centre and may face challenges in travelling to them.

In 2020, the ABA reviewed the banking footprint in remote or very remote areas⁹. The review found that there were approximately 184,000 First Nations Peoples in these locations, and over 800 physical banking services (approximately 170 branches, 280 ATMs (excluding 'independent' ATMs), and 380 Bank@Post or face to face banking services). As part of this review, banks reported customers in 69 of the 94 Local Government Areas had customers that used digital banking.

The banking industry has the following in place to support First Nations customers in remote locations:

Free ATM transactions

ABA members worked together to obtain Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) approval in 2012 to provide up to 85 fee free ATMs for 5 years in remote locations. The ACCC re-authorised¹⁰ the scheme in 2017 and extended it for another 10 years

These ATMs, which are fee free for customers of participating banks, are available in selected very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Using the machines, customer can check balances and make cash withdrawals for free.

The ACCC set criteria that the ATMs be located in communities¹¹:

- that are very remote per the Australian Bureau of Statistics
- in a community store which does not provide alcohol or gambling goods or services
- in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia
- where residents do not have access to an alternative retail banking service (excluding electronic banking), such as a bank branch, bank ATM, or Bank@Post facility.

Refer to the ABA website for a list of fee free ATM locations and the eleven (11) participating banks.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customer assistance phone lines

Several of the larger banks provide dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander phone lines to assist customers in remote areas across Australia.

The lines can help customers with matters such as:

- balance and transaction enquiries – including account statement re-issue

⁷ The Banking Code Clause 36

⁸ The Banking Code Clause 37

⁹ as defined by the ABS) with a First Nations Peoples population of over 250 who made up over 5% of the population

¹⁰ For more details refer ACCC <https://www.accc.gov.au/public-registers/authorisations-and-notifications-registers/authorisations-register/australian-bankers-association-inc-revocation-and-substitution-a91593>

¹¹ ACCC Determination paragraph 13 <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/public-registers/documents/A91593%20-%20Revocation%20and%20Substitution%20of%20A91312%20-%20Australian%20Bankers%27%20Association%20Inc.%20-%20Final%20Determination%20-%202021.12.17%20-%20PR.pdf>



Australian Banking Association

- ordering replacement cards for damaged, lost or stolen cards and pin re-issues
- accessing funds
- updating contact details – address, mobile number and email address
- setting up bank accounts, including discussing alternative identification
- discussing applicable products
- stopping direct debit payments.

Contact details for some of these phone lines are as follows:

- ANZ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assistance Line - 1800 037 366
- CBA Indigenous Customer Assistance Line (for customers in remote areas) – 1800 700 682¹²
- NAB Indigenous Customer Service Line – 1800 996 100¹³
- St George, Bank of Melbourne, and Bank SA Indigenous - 1800 061 548
- Westpac Indigenous Call Centre – 1800 230 144¹⁴

Bank@Post

Over 80 banks have made arrangements with Australia Post to allow their customers to access banking services including deposits, withdrawals, and balance enquiries at over 3,300 Post Offices across Australia. Of these, over 1,800 are in rural and remote locations. This service is known as Bank@Post.

In addition, some banks also have the following services available through Bank@Post:

- account enquiries and business barcode deposits (small business deposits without a business bankcard).
- offline withdrawals and deposits, and transfer between accounts.
- passbook transactions.

Details of participating banks, locations of participating Post Offices, and Frequently Asked Questions are available on the Australia Post website¹⁵.

Note Australia Post also offers:

- domestic Money Transfers (money orders) and International Money Transfers (Western Union)
- converting coins to cash¹⁶
- payment of eligible bills¹⁷.

Digital banking

As internet availability and mobile phone network coverage increases, more and more customers in remote locations are accessing digital banking. This may be through a mobile phone, a tablet or computer.

Recognising that customers in remote locations may be new to digital banking, many banks have produced 'beginner's guides' on how to go about on-line banking.

Guides include how to register, log in, and undertake common banking tasks. They also discuss the importance of maintaining security over log-ins and PINs.

¹² CBA website <https://www.commbank.com.au/corporate/industries/indigenous-banking.html>

¹³ NAB website <https://www.nab.com.au/contact-us/personal/indigenous-customer-service>

¹⁴ Westpac website <https://www.westpac.com.au/about-westpac/indigenous/your-money/>

¹⁵ Australia Post <https://auspost.com.au/money-insurance/banking-and-payments/bank-at-post>

¹⁶ <https://auspost.com.au/money-insurance/banking-and-payments/change-your-cash>

¹⁷ <https://auspost.com.au/money-insurance/banking-and-payments/pay-bills-with-post-billpay>



Further information is available on individual bank websites.

4. Customers who prefer to speak another language

Customers who would prefer to speak in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language can request an interpreter when they call a bank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customer assistance line or call centre.

Common services used by banks to provide interpreter services include:

- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>
- Language Loop <https://languageloop.com.au/>

Refer to individual banks or the above service websites for further details.

5. Low or no fee basic bank accounts¹⁸

Banks provide free basic banking services to assist people on a low income.

Eligible customers include individuals that hold a valid current government concession card (Commonwealth Seniors Card, Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card).

Banks will ask customers if they hold a government concession card when they open an account. Otherwise, banks may only be aware that a customer is a low-income earner if they tell their bank. In these circumstances, banks will give people information about accounts that may meet their needs, including low or no fee accounts.

Basic bank (and other kinds of low or no fee) accounts have at a minimum:

- no account keeping fees
- free periodic statements
- no minimum deposits (although there may be a requirement that government payments are made to this account)
- free direct debit
- access to the customer's choice of debit card (e.g. Eftpos), or a scheme card offered by the bank (e.g. Visa or Mastercard Debit) at no extra cost
- free and unlimited Australian domestic transactions (although there may be charges for non-basic transactions, such as bank cheques, telegraphic transfers, or ATMs owned by third parties).
- special features, including: no dishonour fees, no overdrawn fees, and no informal overdrafts (except where its reasonably impractical to prevent this).

6. Customers without conventional identification documents¹⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers may not have conventional identification documents, such as a driver's licence or a birth certificate, or there could be conflicting information on different documents. For example, different government agencies may record different dates of birth for the same person, which makes it difficult to establish or verify their identity.

AUSTRAC guidance encourages banks to set protocols to identify and verify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers when they can't complete standard customer identification and verification.

¹⁸ The Banking Code Chapters 15 and 16

¹⁹ AUSTRAC guidance <https://www.austrac.gov.au/business/how-comply-and-report-guidance-and-resources/customer-identification-and-verification/identifying-customers-who-dont-have-conventional-forms-id>



This might include using 'reliable and independent' means of alternative identification for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers, such as one or more of the following (or similar):

- an Indigenous community identity card
- a reference from a community Leader²⁰ (e.g. Elder) or Financial Counsellor
- a reference from a board member of a local Aboriginal Land Council or Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander organisation²¹
- a government letter that shows the customer's name.

Customers should contact individual banks to discuss what identification documents they may be able to use to open an account.

7. Cultural awareness training for bank staff

Staff across the banking industry, who regularly assist customers from remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, receive cultural awareness training to assist in delivering culturally informed banking services.

8. 'How to' banking guides

The banking industry, as well as many individual banks, have guides available to assist customer to do their banking.

Refer individual bank websites for their guides.

Easy English Banking guides

The banking industry has 'easy English' step-by-step guides available on the ABA website to assist people to undertake their banking.

The 'easy English' guides present understandable and concise information for people with low English literacy. Typically, the guides present one idea at a time, supported by basic language and graphics, simple layout and design, and lots of white space.

The resources are available to be used by individuals, community organisations, and government for tailoring. For example, a local council or community organisation may wish to translate them into a local language and made available to their community.

Guides include:

- Fee free (basic) bank accounts, benefits and eligibility
- How to open a bank account and the necessary identification requirements
- Phone verification procedures
- Appointing an authorised representative
- How to download a banking app on a mobile phone and how to use internet banking
- How to manage security risks by keeping PIN and log in details private
- How to avoid being scammed.

²⁰ Registered with the Office of the Register of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) <https://www.oric.gov.au/>

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9. Support for people, businesses and communities

Individual banks have broad support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, businesses and communities, including Reconciliation Action Plans.

A high-level overview of the types of support provided by many banks is provided below. Refer to individual bank websites or the Reconciliation Australia website²² for further details.

Overview of types of support provided by individual banks

- **Building respectful relationships** with peoples, communities and community organisations to support positive outcomes through cultural awareness and recognition. This includes encouraging employees to improve their cultural awareness through training, engagement and participation with community (e.g. participating in communities and events such as NAIDOC²³ and National Reconciliation weeks), understanding and using Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocols, as well as raising awareness of aspirations, cultures, rights and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes understanding the impact of decisions on communities and customers, such as free, prior and informed consent for project finance that impact communities.
- **Increasing employment and career opportunities** for meaningful careers through employment and promotion targets (to achieve parity), employee collaboration networks, education and career pathways, mentoring and career support programs, as well as ensuring open, inclusive and respectful workplaces.
- **Increasing business opportunities** through procurement strategies (to achieve parity), membership of Supply Nation²⁴, spending targets, cultural awareness training, microfinance, and supplier capacity and capability building.
- **Providing financial capability programs** in partnership with government and community service providers for both businesses and individuals. This can include supporting customers, businesses, and communities to achieve financial goals, prepare for the unexpected and to have financial resilience.
- **Supporting and building capability of community organisations** through partnerships, grants, support to obtain grants, skilled volunteering, secondments, and initiatives to support home ownership.
- **Supporting financial inclusion, resilience and economic prosperity** through microfinance, projects to increase financial resilience, and sharing research. Also, improving banking experiences through inclusion in designing banking products, and including the voice of customer advocates. Banks have also developed capability tools and approaches for working with businesses.

Reconciliation Action Plans²⁵

Many Australian banks have Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) in place, some of them for many years.

The RAP Program contributes to advancing the five dimensions of reconciliation by supporting organisations to develop respectful relationships and create meaningful opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The five dimensions of reconciliation are race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity, and historical acceptance.

²² <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/who-has-a-rap/>

²³ <https://www.naidoc.org.au/>

²⁴ Australia's leading database of verified Indigenous business <https://supplynation.org.au/>

²⁵ <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/>