

# What professional accountants can do for small businesses – Draft Quick Reference Guide for frontline small business support

This guide is to help people on the frontline supporting small businesses impacted by the bushfires in Australia by understanding:

- who is a professional accountant;
- what types of services professional accountants can provide;
- how to refer people to a professional accountant, if they don't already have one; and
- where to find useful tools and resources from the professional accounting bodies.

## 1. Who is a professional accountant?

A professional accountant is a member of a recognised professional body with specific qualifications. For example, a professional accountant may be a member of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand (CA ANZ) recognised by the designation CA or FCA, or a member of CPA Australia recognised by the designation CPA or FCPA, or a member of the Institute of Public Accountants (IPA) recognised by the designation MIPA and FIPA.

Members of these bodies:

- have undertaken detailed and robust technical and professional education;
- undertake additional professional development every year to keep up to date;
- follow a Code of Ethics and other professional and ethical standards which ensures work is done to a high standard and with integrity;
- follow technical standards when undertaking work so the advice and reports are consistent with high quality standards of practice; and
- are monitored with respect to their compliance with standards by their professional bodies and are subject to disciplinary action for any breaches.

## 2. How can a professional accountant help small businesses in this current bushfire crisis?

Professional accountants provide a range of services to assist small businesses achieve their objectives, improve their operations and profitability, prepare financial statements, meet their compliance obligations and try to ensure ongoing business continuity and resilience.

In the first instance following a disaster, such as the current bushfire crisis, a professional accountant can provide a business with an objective assessment of their situation, such as:

- Cashflow analysis and financial literacy education;
- Advice on business actions to take in response to issues arising from the disaster;
- Assistance in determining the financial position and solvency of a business; and
- Assistance in preparing the business for recovery, including:
  - Reconstructing financial and other relevant records;
  - Determining the financial position of the business;
  - Analysing the financial health of a business;
  - Evaluating how the business was performing;
  - Evaluating post-disaster market conditions;
  - Providing a reality check;
  - Advising on how to exit business, referring to registered insolvency practitioners if appropriate;
  - Managing business risks in the recovery;
  - Working through taxation issues and advice;

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- Assisting with documentation needed for grants and emergency loans if appropriate;
- Helping develop a new post-disaster business plan, including advice on the best options for financing your new business plan;
- Advising how to improve business performance;
- Advising on how to identify and deal with any employee, contractor or related party issues;
- Arranging referrals, if and where appropriate, to experts in areas such as insurance, finance, mental health etc.

A professional accountant can also help small businesses provide a range of reports for third parties such as governments, banks and insurers. This allows the third party to make decisions in the knowledge that the financial information is credible.

For the current bushfire crisis, a range of assistance and resources are available to impacted rural and regional businesses. This work is being administered through organisations such as [RuralAid](#) and the Business Council of Australia [BizRebuild](#) program.

### 3. What will business owners need to know when talking to a professional accountant?

When meeting with a professional accountant, businesses should be open and clear about their immediate concerns and their current financial status. This enables the accountant to assess what the most useful service would be and what will best help their business.

If the business owner has lost paperwork in the fires, we recommend they collect as many records and financial documents as they can. Professional accountants work from evidence and will need to see this in order to provide the best advice.

### 5. Where are useful tools and resources in relation to financial assistance?

CA ANZ and CPA Australia have developed a range of resilience, recovery and wellbeing tools and resources to help small businesses, their clients and communities which are available on our websites:

- **The CPA Australia [disaster recovery toolkit](#)** has been designed to assist small businesses impacted directly and indirectly by a disaster – especially where they do not have a continuity plan, or their continuity plan proves insufficient. It is intended to help businesses take a considered approach to the many elements of recovery following a disaster;
- **The CPA Australia [financial information fact sheet](#)** contains factual information to support individuals and businesses make key financial decisions following a significant event;
- **The CPA Australia [resilience and wellbeing resources](#)** include mental and physical wellbeing support resources, guides, advice and updates;
- **The CA ANZ [Australian bushfires support resources](#)** for small businesses and communities includes links to resources and guidance to assist with practical, professional and ethical issues, banking and financial matters, mental health and government assistance;
- **The CA ANZ [checklist for small businesses impacted by natural disasters](#)** covers the practical issues that small businesses should consider following a disaster;
- **The CA ANZ [wellbeing resources](#)** include tools, resources and information to support the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, businesses and their communities;
- **IPA** refers members to [Australian bushfire recovery resources](#) offered by various government agencies.

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## 6. How can I refer people to a local professional accountant?

Chartered Accountants, CPAs and IPAs work across Australia, including in regional and rural areas. Some people calling the small business financial counselling helpline may already have or know a local professional accountant. These accountants should be referred to in the first instance.

For those who do not have, or know of, a local professional accountant, CA ANZ, CPA Australia and IPA can assist with requests to identify and refer people to an appropriate local member. Contact details are listed below:

- **CA ANZ** – call the CA ANZ support number on 1300 137 322 or use the [Find a CA](#) resources on the CA ANZ website
- **CPA Australia** - Use the [Find a CPA tool](#) on the CPA Australia website or call 1300 73 73 73.
- **IPA Australia** – [Find an accountant](#) on our website or call 1800 625 625

## 7. What can a professional accountant do for impacted businesses after the immediate response?

Professional accountants can continue to help businesses once the immediate crisis is managed in a number of ways:

- Preparing financial statements and using these to assist business owners make better business decisions and act early on opportunities and warning signs;
- Helping businesses meet tax obligations, including preparing and lodging tax returns;
- Helping businesses develop budgets which support the business's strategic plan;
- Identifying if the business needs specialist or technical advice, such as legal advice or assistance from professional services firms and helping to find appropriate specialists;
- Testing the strength of business policies and procedures and making recommendations for improvement;
- Identifying the key business indicators and setting up systems and reports that give you simple-to-read and timely reports on those key indicators, so business owners can see how their business is trading and address any warning signs early;
- Identifying growth opportunities by reviewing business performance and analysing market information;
- Providing advice on financing needs;
- Assisting with cash flow management, inventory management, pricing, business process improvement and identifying opportunities for innovation; and
- Designing a business continuity plan in case disaster strikes again.

Prepared by Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, CPA Australia and IPA Australia.  
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