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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**National Hardship Register launched to protect vulnerable consumers**

*The Australian Collectors and Debt Buyers Association (ACDBA), in a joint initiative with the financial counselling sector, has launched the **National Hardship Register (NHR)** to help address the issue of long-term and severe financial hardship faced by a number of vulnerable consumers.*

*When a person experiencing severe, long-term hardship is included in the NHR, debt collection activity from subscribing ACDBA members ceases.*

*Peter Boehm Chair of the ACDBA acknowledged the hard work and cooperation between the ACDBA and community groups in establishing and launching the NHR and commented, "This is a fantastic initiative resulting from a shared desire by our members and community groups to help those in severe financial difficulties."*

*Fiona Guthrie, Chief Executive Officer of Financial Counselling Australia welcomed the launch of the NHR stating, "Financial counsellors are pleased to be working constructively with the debt collection industry through the ACDBA around the National Hardship Register. This is a sensible response to assisting people who are in such dire circumstances they simply can't pay their debts."*

*Consumers accepted on to the register are afforded a number of benefits when dealing with ACDBA subscribing members, which include:*

- *Debt collection will stop*
- *Debt buyers will waive the debt in full after three years providing the consumer remains on the NHR during that time*
- *For some people, the NHR provides a less harsh option in comparison to bankruptcy*

*Consumers wishing to be considered for inclusion on the register must meet certain eligibility criteria based on an assessment of their income and expenditure and asset position and must be recommended for inclusion by a free not-for-profit financial counsellor linked to the NHR. All referrals are considered by the NHR Oversight Committee which comprises an independent chair, three industry representatives and three community representatives.*

*Around 160 people are now included on the NHR. The data from this group shows that the majority of these people were on very low incomes, such as Disability Support Pensions, and many are experiencing serious mental or physical health problems.*

*National Hardship Register: [www.nhr.org.au](http://www.nhr.org.au)  
ACDBA: [www.acdba.com](http://www.acdba.com)*

**END OF MEDIA RELEASE**