

CONTENTS

- Spring - time for a financial health check. Page 1
- Is your fixed interest loan about to expire? Page 1
- How to release the pressure. Page 2
- Beat the affordability trap. Page 2
- Maximise your home's appeal in a buyer's market. Page 3
- Quick tips for boosting your home's sales price. Pg 3
- A thorough final inspection is critical. Page 4
- Spring fever – counter those allergies. Page 4

Spring - time for a financial health check

If your personal financial situation is not as bright and clear as the flowers of spring it could be a good idea to contact us for a financial health check.

If you've had the same home loan for several years, or are being unnecessarily burdened by debt repayments, then the chances are that a health check will deliver considerable benefits.

Our review of your finances will examine your expenditures, your loan commitments, financial requirements and your general progress on the road to financial health.

A health check of your loan could reveal some undesirable ailments such as monthly fees, hidden costs, penalties for additional payments etc.

It could also expose whether your existing loan has fancy features that you don't need or use.

Loan products and rates change regularly. Your current loan may not incorporate features that you should and could have.



Importantly, a health check will help you to place yourself in a position where you can possibly take advantage of future investment opportunities in an ever changing market.

If you have experienced a change in your circumstances, wish to review your finances or consolidate your debts give us a call and let's have a look at options best suited to you.

Is your fixed interest loan about to expire? Make sure to review your future options

When your fixed interest loan reaches the end of its term your lender will notify you by letter.

If you do not take further action, your fixed loan will automatically be converted into a variable loan at the lender's chosen interest rate.

This is obviously not a desirable situation since you should have the opportunity to review your future loan arrangement.

The unfortunate fact is that some of us let the matter slip and only at a later stage do we find that we are paying a variable interest rate which may not be anywhere near the best available.

Our advice therefore is to come in and see us a month or two before your fixed loan is due to reach full term. By exploring various options we may be able to help you save money.



How to release the pressure!



If your mortgage repayments are becoming increasingly difficult to manage consider these tried and tested techniques to get back on top.

Higher interest rates in recent years, combined with the higher cost of living, have resulted in a significant number of borrowers finding themselves struggling to stay afloat.

If you feel you're in this situation don't give up: there are a number of ways to make your loan repayments that little bit more manageable.

- **Extend the life of your loan:**
Adding an extra five years to your loan term can minimise your repayments.
- **Change to interest only:**
This could reduce your loan repayments but remember it's only a short term strategy - otherwise you'll never pay off your home.
- **Change your loan type:**
You may be paying extra for loan features you don't need when a basic product could be cheaper.

- **Consolidate your debt:**

If you're juggling credit card debt, personal loans or car finance with a mortgage, you may find one loan easier to manage and cheaper.

By rolling other debts in with your home loan, you'll pay your mortgage rate on all of your debts, which is likely to be the lowest.

These are just a handful of ways to better manage your loan repayment so make sure you chat to one of our brokers about any concerns you have. They're best placed to find a solution for you.

Step one: Your broker is in the ideal position to help you manage your debt commitments and should be your first point of call should you find yourself struggling.

Not only do they have access to a range of lenders: they're experienced in finding the most appropriate solution to the very common issue of managing mortgage repayments.

The sooner you act, the quicker your broker can help alleviate some of the pressure you may be facing; he/she can also potentially save you thousands of dollars in interest and take years off your mortgage.

(Source: Plan Australia Newsletter)

Beat the affordability trap - start small, think big

Your first home doesn't necessarily have to be your dream home.

Backed by a solid plan, a little flexibility and a long-term approach, your home ownership dreams may quickly become a reality.

The trick to beating the affordability trap is to start small and to keep your eye on the final prize.

Even a modest property investment can be a stepping stone to bigger and better things through allowing you to get the most out of the equity you build in your property with each and every mortgage repayment.

Equity is simply the difference between a property's value and what you still owe on your mortgage.

Through starting with a more humble first home purchase not only will you build equity more quickly, your initial deposit amount will also be smaller - which means you won't need to spend as much time or money renting before you make your first purchase!

When deciding on how much you can afford to spend on your first home you will need to take a close look at what you can realistically manage in mortgage repayments.



Your budget should be your guide - so set yourself a price limit, arrange a mortgage pre-approval through your broker and start searching for properties that match.

It is important to look for suburbs where values are still growing so you can achieve the maximum return on your investment (i.e. grow your equity).

This may mean moving to an area that is not initially ideal; just remember that you're looking to get your foot in the door and you won't have to be there forever!

Properties in need of a little TLC or a few minor improvements are also a great way to jump into home ownership without breaking the bank.

Once you have pinpointed the right property, immediately start working at building your equity.

A tight control on your household budget and other debt will let you chip away at your repayments. With capital growth as your goal, you may soon be on the move and ready for that next buy.

(Source: Plan Australia newsletter).

What you should do to maximise your home's appeal in a buyer's market



Selling in a buyer's market can be tough but with the right approach you should still be able to achieve a solid sale price.

Are you looking to move on to something bigger and better? Perhaps work has taken you to a new area or maybe with the kids now moved out you're ready to downsize?

It can be a tough gig selling in a sluggish market but with the right approach you can still achieve the best sale price.

Before you embark on the sales process you'll need to consider your objectives: most importantly, are you looking for a fast sale or to achieve the maximum price?

While there's still every chance you'll achieve both, it's best to consider which is more important as this will dictate your sales strategy.

With your strategy established you can start to think about preparing your property for sale.

To achieve the best result you'll need to think like a buyer and consider what a prospective buyer will like and dislike about your property.

First and foremost you'll need to detach yourself from your emotions; it's important to remember that the things that appeal to you about your home may not necessarily push someone else's buttons. So make a list of all the aspects of the property that may be a problem and consider what can be done to mitigate the negatives.

While there's obviously nothing you can do about the location and structural matters, you can have a considerable impact on cosmetic appearance.

If you have a yard, for example, get to

work on fixing it up as soon as possible so that when prospective buyers arrive it's clean and green.

Fencing is also something that can make a big difference since buyers with young kids or pets may well look for a well fenced property.

You can also make a big impact on the interior without having to spend a fortune. You may well love all your furnishings and ornaments but will buyers?

If you've chosen an auction over private sale it may be worth stripping out all your belongings and shipping in hired furniture for a day; it may well make your place feel bigger if it's not so cluttered.

With your home looking at its best you'll be in the best position to attract your desired price; you'll also feel a lot more confident when it comes to negotiating. (Source: Plan Australia newsletter).



Quick tips for boosting your home's sale price

Mini make over: Take the time to fix up any small problems such as damaged fly screens, loose door handles and peeling paint.

These are inexpensive to repair and can spoil the overall feel of your house. Such blemishes can also send potential buyers' minds speeding into 'spot the flaw' mode.

A cheat's renovation: Some smart decorating can be just as good as renovation - and a lot cheaper.

Make sure your home is shiny clean from head to toe, clutter free and dressed to impress.

Fill your vases with fresh flowers, ensure fruit bowls are filled with fruit and why not finish it all off with some scented candles. (Source: Plan Australia newsletter).

A thorough final inspection is critical

In all the excitement and anticipation that comes with your imminent move into your new home it is easy to overlook the need to undertake a thorough final inspection of the property before taking possession.

Buyer Beware

It is important to remember that unless the contract makes specific provision, properties are sold in reasonably the same state as when first inspected.

So it is necessary to conduct a thorough visual inspection. If you want changes to be made to the property prior to the sale and/or you want to ensure certain items are included in the sale, you should insert specific terms (or conditions) in the contract.

The timing of the final inspection is important if you are to avoid future problems. It should ideally be scheduled close to the settlement date and if possible after the seller has moved his belongings out. The real estate agent who sold you the premises should attend with you.

Right To Inspect

As a buyer you have a right to inspect the property. So what should you look for? For a start, anything mentioned in the sales contract such as appliances, built-in furnishings, window treatments, fittings etc. Don't go to the inspection without a checklist. This can be compiled from the sales contract as well as looking around your existing home.

Spring fever - counter those allergies

Nothing can dampen the joy of spring more than bothersome hay fever. Consider these tips this season to keep your symptoms at bay.

- **Spring clean:** Reduce your exposure to dust and pollen by keeping your home squeaky clean.
- **Be informed:** Check the forecasts for wind and pollen and try to avoid outdoor activities if the forecast isn't good.
- **Keep your bed allergy free:** Wash your bed linen in hot water and avoid hanging it out on a clothesline - opt for the dryer instead.
- **Protect your nose:** Smear the inside of your nose with petroleum jelly or oil such as sesame or almond to stop pollen from touching the lining and to reduce irritation caused by tissues.
- **Quit gardening:** Hire a gardener - do not even attempt lawn mowing - you're asking for trouble!
- **Lock it out:** Keep the windows closed in your house and car and use air-conditioning instead. (Be sure to keep the filters clean!)
- **Spice up your life:** Add spices with anti-allergenic properties to your diet, such as tumeric, sage and coriander.
- **Get moving:** Exercising is a great way to clear your body's channels and boost your immune system - but best keep it to the gym rather than a grassy oval.



Is your joy of spring being dampened by allergies?

- **Eat well:** By keeping healthy your body will be best placed to tackle hay fever head on, so up your intake of fruit and veg and avoid sluggish foods such as takeaways, cakes and pastries.
- Be proactive: While medication can be a great help in combating the symptoms of hay fever it won't fix the underlying causes.
- Try your best to ensure your lifestyle is less susceptible to hay fever through being fit, active and healthy and if you're really suffering go and see an allergy specialist. (Source: Plan Australia newsletter).



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