

# Supporting local consumer administration

## Supporting the frontline of consumer affairs administration

Consumer affairs centers located in municipalities and prefectures across the nation are the points of contact for consumers seeking consultation services.

The number of consultation cases brought to consumer affair centers across the nation was approximately 900,000 per year. They operate as the frontline of consumer affairs administration by offering services such as providing information/advice to consumers and working as a liaison between consumers and business operators handling problems requiring conflict resolution. The Consumer Affairs Agency supports local governments with its financial assistance such as a grant to strengthen local consumer administration in order to improve consumer affairs centers in their municipalities and prefectures, address the existing consumer problems in their local communities, and handle new consumer problems in an appropriate manner. Through these measures, consumers have access to high quality consultation wherever they live.

As online transactions continue to expand and damage from increasingly sophisticated fraudulent practices grows, consultations received by consumer affairs centers and similar organizations are becoming more complex and diverse. In light of this situation, the Consumer Affairs Agency is promoting the digitalization of consumer consultation services to enhance convenience for consumers, improve service quality, maintain regional consultation functions, reduce the burden on counselors, and create an environment in which they can fully demonstrate their expertise.

### First step to cope with problems: Consumer Hotline - 188

Even when consumers face problems with transactions, many do not know where to seek advice. To ensure that consumers are not left without support, the Consumer Affairs Agency has established the three-digit telephone number Consumer Hotline 188 ("iya-ya"), which connects callers to nearby consumer affairs centers and other consultation services operated by local governments.

We are also working to raise awareness of "188" so that more people know about the service and make use of it.



### Preventing harm to vulnerable consumers such as elderly consumers

To effectively prevent harm to consumers who are more prone to consumer troubles, it is important to provide "watchful support" in their local communities that is tailored to each person's circumstances.

As for the elderly suffering dementia and people with disabilities, those who are around them must notice the signs of consumer problems to prevent the occurrence of such problems and stop the expansion of damage. Not only their families but also various community members need to cooperate with each other to strengthen "watch over" in their communities.

The Consumer Safety Act provides for the establishment of Regional Councils for Securing Consumer Safety (Watch Over Network). It is expected that initial indications of consumer harm identified in the community ("trigger information") will help lead to consultations with consumer affairs centers. In addition to providing support through the Local Consumer Administration Strengthening Grant and other programs, the Consumer Affairs Agency works to prevent consumer harm by promoting the establishment and activities of Regional Councils for Ensuring Consumer Safety. This includes collecting and sharing good practices in community watch activities and organizing training courses to develop personnel who can play key roles in these efforts.