Aptitude

Apt Wealth Partners – Quarterly News

Summer | 2026

Live for today, plan for tomorrow

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Investment outlook 2026: Key themes and opportunities as we enter the new year

As we move into 2026, many people are feeling unsure about what the year might bring. Markets have been strong for a few years, interest rates have been rising and falling, and the news cycle has been noisy. It is no surprise that investors are wondering what they should be doing and whether their portfolios are still on the right track.

At Apt Wealth Partners, we are hearing these questions every day. What we are also seeing is an environment that, while different from the past few years, still holds plenty of opportunity. The key is cutting through the noise, understanding what is actually happening and keeping your focus on your long-term goals.

Easing cycle is emerging

After several years of rising interest rates, we are finally seeing things settle. Inflation has eased, central banks have stopped pushing rates higher and some countries have already started cutting. This shift makes it easier for businesses to plan and gives households some relief after an uncertain period.

Around the world, conditions vary. The US economy continues to grow. Parts of Europe and the UK are improving after a softer patch. Australia's economy has remained stable, driven by household and government spending, although many families are still watching their spending. None of this signals a major slowdown. Instead, it shows that different parts of the world are moving at their own pace.

Political headlines will continue to create short bursts of market movement, but they do not change the bigger picture. Most long-term trends are driven by things like population change, technology and business investment, not day-to-day politics.

Where we are seeing opportunities in 2026

A broader range of companies showing promise
Sharemarkets have been strong in recent years, but much of the growth has come from the largest companies, especially in the US. These big names are still important, but their prices now reflect years of strong results.

What this means for investors is that the best value may now sit outside the top end of town.

Smaller companies in Australia and overseas offer healthier earnings growth potential at more reasonable prices. They have not had the same surge in popularity as the big names, but many of them are well run and positioned for long-term growth.

We are also seeing improvement in regions outside the US as conditions settle and investment returns to areas like manufacturing and energy. This broadening of opportunity is helpful for diversified portfolios because it spreads growth across more parts of the market.

Some long-term themes remain important too. Healthcare is supported by an ageing population and technology that helps businesses work more efficiently continues to grow in relevance.

Fixed income is working again
For a long time, bonds and other defensive investments paid very little. That has changed. With rates now higher than they were a few years ago, fixed income is offering meaningful income again.

Fixed income is not designed to compete with shares on returns. Their job is to provide stability and help protect your portfolio when markets are unsettled. With interest rates likely to fall, the outlook for this part of the portfolio is positive and provides a helpful counterbalance to more growth-focused investments.

Property conditions improving beneath the surface
Property has been recovering at a slower pace than shares; however, conditions continue to improve. Rents are still increasing and fewer new buildings are coming through because construction is expensive. With less new stock

around, the properties already in the market are holding their value.

This does not mean every part of the property market will perform equally, but good-quality assets with reliable tenants continue to offer steady, long-term potential.

Alternatives can help when used thoughtfully
Private equity, private credit and infrastructure have become more common in portfolios because they can offer different types of returns than traditional markets. These investments can help smooth performance but they work best when used alongside shares and bonds rather than instead of them.

Private credit continues to provide attractive income, although it is important to understand the risks behind that income. Returns from private equity have been subdued due to fewer companies listing on the stock exchange, but activity is likely to pick up as conditions settle.

Long-term themes shaping the coming years

Technology and AI
Artificial intelligence is influencing almost every industry. The opportunities do not just exist for the companies creating the technology but also in the businesses using it to improve how they operate.

Demographic change
Australia, like many countries, has an ageing population. This increases the need for healthcare, seniors living and services that support older Australians. These long-term needs continue to shape opportunities across several sectors.

Energy and sustainability
While progress has been uneven, Australia's ageing coal infrastructure needs to be replaced. Renewable energy is becoming a more cost-effective option. This transition will continue to guide investment in energy and infrastructure over the next decade.

Global supply chains
Most industries still rely on global networks for manufacturing. Some critical areas may shift locally, but the broader global system is not going away. This supports the ongoing need for international diversification in portfolios.

What this means for investors

A strong theme for 2026 is the importance of balance. Different parts of the world and different sectors are moving at their own pace. A well-diversified portfolio gives you access to more opportunities and helps reduce the impact of any single area slowing down.

Staying invested is also important. When markets move around, it can feel uncomfortable, but these periods often create good opportunities for long-term investments. Stepping out of the market in uncertain times can mean missing the recovery that follows.

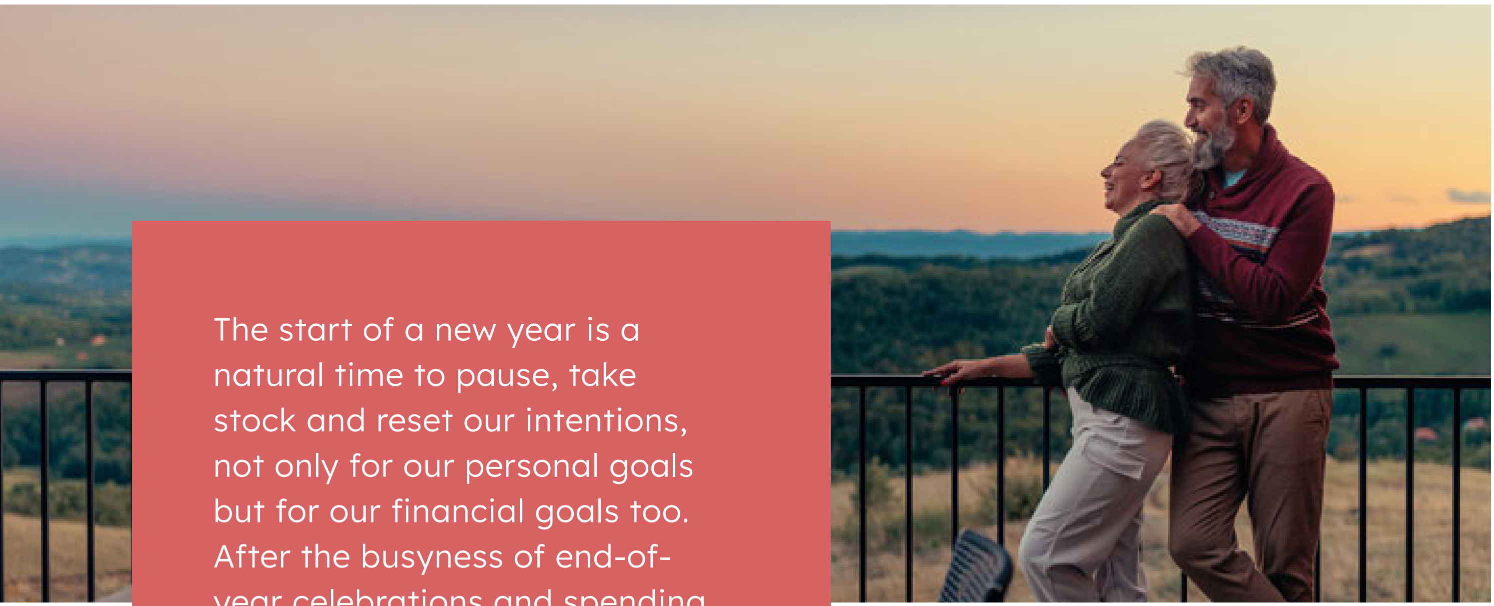
Most importantly, your investment decisions should be guided by your personal goals. Markets will always move, but a long-term plan built around your needs is what creates stability and confidence.

Moving into 2026 with clarity

The year ahead may look different from the one we have just lived through, but it still offers plenty of opportunity. With the right mix of investments and a focus on what really matters, you can approach 2026 with confidence.

If you would like to review your portfolio or talk through any of the themes in this outlook, your Apt adviser is here to help.

Financial planning for the new year: Where to start and what to review



The start of a new year is a natural time to pause, take stock and reset our intentions, not only for our personal goals but for our financial goals too. After the busyness of end-of-year celebrations and spending, January offers the perfect opportunity for a review to ensure your financial plan is still on track.

Financial planning isn't a 'set and forget' exercise. It's about aligning your finances with your values, goals and the changes life inevitably brings, whether that's a career shift, growing family or a new lifestyle priority. By starting the year with a structured review, you can approach the months ahead with clarity and confidence.

Start with your goals

The new year is a great time to reflect on your progress and reassess your financial goals. What did you achieve last year and what might need to shift this year? Sometimes our goals change because life changes. A promotion, redundancy, relocation or change in family circumstances can all alter your financial priorities.

When you revisit your goals, think about what truly matters to you and why. Goals that connect to your personal values tend to be more motivating and easier to stick to.

It's also helpful to break big financial goals into smaller, achievable steps. For example, if you want to make an extra $20,000 repayment on your mortgage, calculate how much that means per month or pay cycle. Incremental progress feels achievable and creates momentum throughout the year.

Revisit your budget and cash flow

After the festive season, most of us have spent a little more than usual. Reassessing your budget is a simple but powerful way to regain control. Start by reviewing where your money went last year, not to judge, but to understand your spending patterns. Many people avoid this step because they worry about what they'll find, but awareness is key to creating change.

Look at where you can tighten up without feeling restricted. It's not about being frugal. It's about being intentional. Are there subscriptions you no longer use? Can you redirect some discretionary spending toward your long-term goals?

This is also the right time to review your mortgage and savings structure. With interest rates shifting, make sure your loan is still competitive and structured in a way that works for you. Depending on your circumstances, an offset account or a high-interest savings account for surplus cash might offer greater flexibility and return.

You can also contact your insurance and utility companies to ensure you are paying the most competitive rates. Oftentimes, people accept rate increases instead of taking the time to review these expenses on an annual basis.

Stay ahead of lifestyle creep

When your income increases, it's tempting to let your lifestyle expand in line with it. This 'lifestyle creep' is incredibly common, but it can quietly erode the financial benefits of higher earnings.

Instead, take a moment to ask: 'Is my lifestyle comfortable as it is?' If so, consider directing that additional income toward your bigger goals, such as investing, extra super contributions or paying down debt faster. Consciously choosing where that extra money goes helps you make measurable progress rather than letting it disappear unnoticed.

Build good financial habits

Financial success often comes down to habits rather than big one-off decisions. Just as with health or fitness goals, consistency matters. Create a routine around reviewing your finances, whether it's a monthly check-in to see if your savings are on track or a quarterly review of your budget and spending.

Set reminders in your calendar and treat those check-ins like any other important meeting. Over time, these small actions compound to create long-term financial wellbeing.

Don't overlook your broader financial picture

Beyond your budget and day-to-day cash flow, it's important to take a holistic look at your financial plan. This includes reviewing your investment portfolio to ensure it's still appropriately diversified and aligned with your risk tolerance, checking your superannuation balance, contributions and the fees within your account, and reviewing your personal insurances.

If you haven't revisited your will or estate planning documents in a while, this is also a good time to ensure they still reflect your current wishes. These reviews don't have to be daunting; they're about making sure your plan continues to support your life as it evolves.

Plan ahead for tax time

While June may feel a long way off, starting your tax planning early in the year can make a big difference. By identifying opportunities now – such as making additional super contributions, managing capital gains or maximising eligible deductions – you can smooth your cash flow and make more strategic decisions.

Early planning helps you stay proactive rather than reactive when it comes to strengthening your financial position.

Partner with your adviser

If it's been a while since you last reviewed your financial plan or if you don't have one in place, now is the time to prioritise it. We all make time for the things that matter most and your financial wellbeing should be one of them.

Working with a financial adviser gives you a trusted partner to help you make informed decisions and stay accountable. At Apt Wealth Partners, our approach goes beyond the numbers. We conduct an annual review with every client to ensure your financial plan continues to align with your lifestyle and long-term aspirations.

Start the year with confidence

The year ahead may look different from the one we have just lived through, but it still offers plenty of opportunity. With the right mix of investments and a focus on what really matters, you can approach 2026 with confidence.

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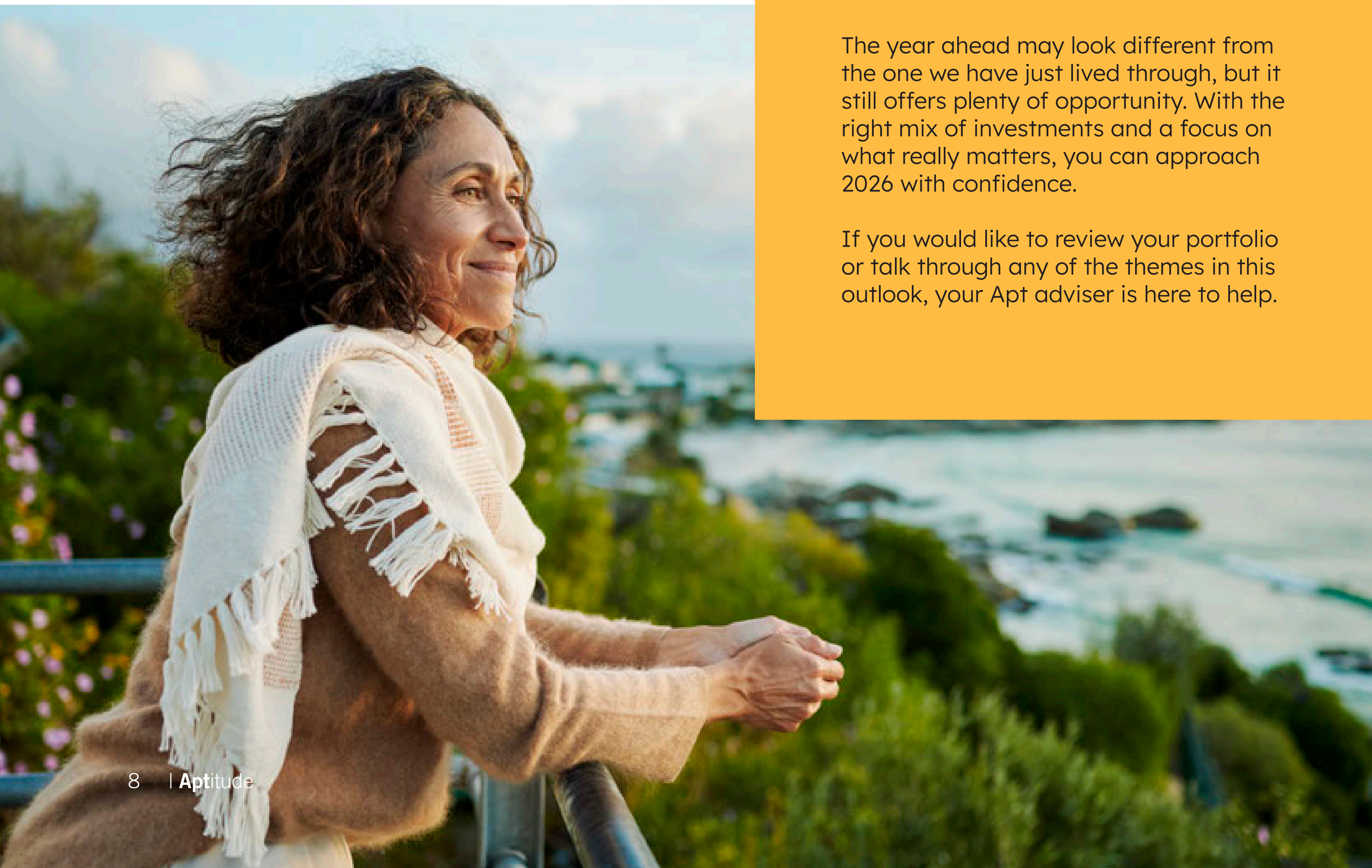
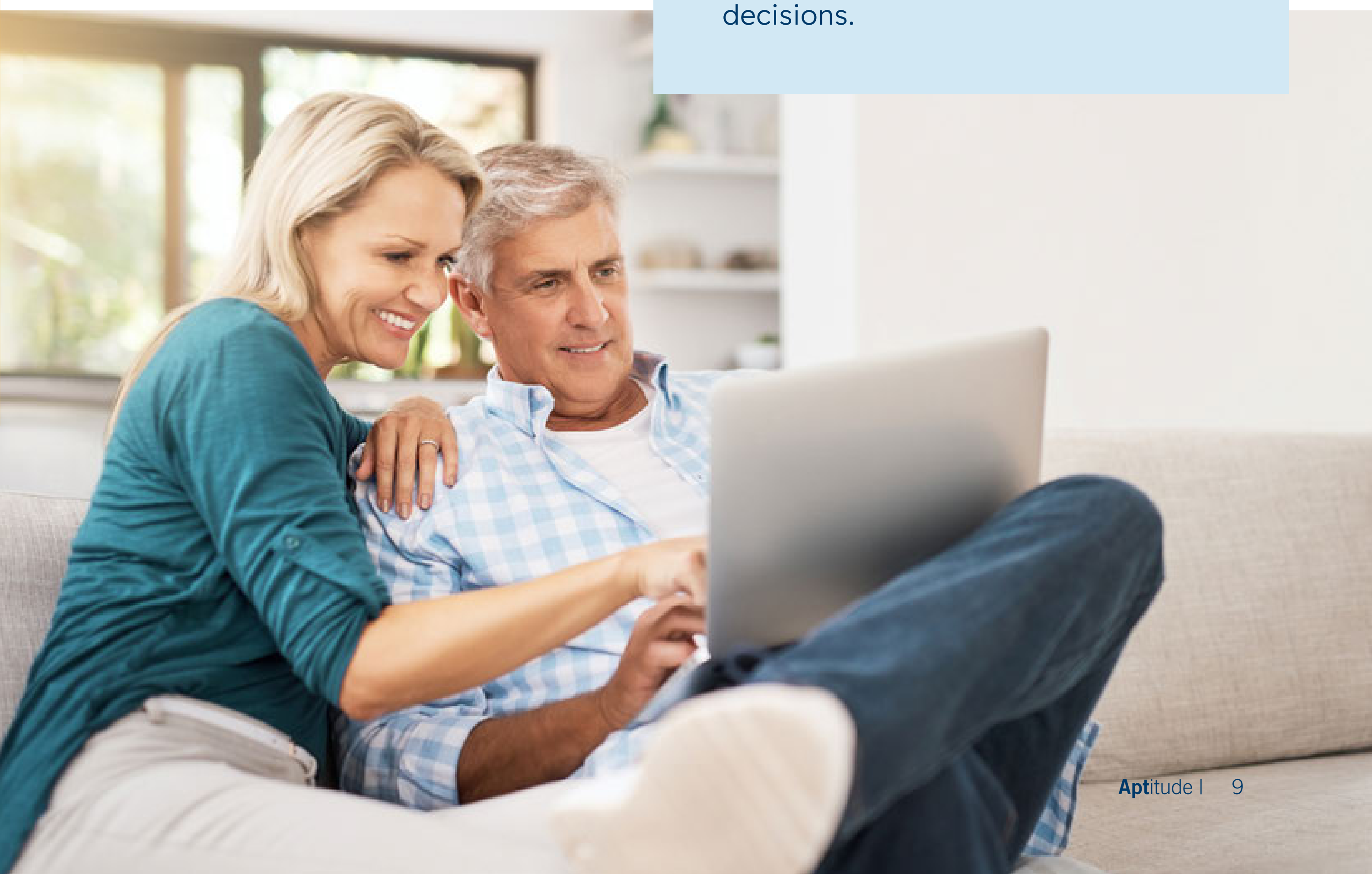


The $3 million question: How Division 296 changes super

Division 296 has been one of the most talked about shifts in superannuation policy in recent years. The latest updates to the proposed Division 296 tax represent one of the biggest changes we've seen for high-balance members in some time. While these changes only affect a small percentage of Australians, they matter deeply for those who are approaching, or already above, the new thresholds.

At Apt Wealth Partners, our focus is always on helping clients make confident, informed decisions, because great advice should make life simpler, not more stressful. With the updated Division 296 rules now clearer, this is a good time to step back and understand what's changing, who may be affected and how to plan ahead without making rushed decisions.



What's actually changing?

The government has reshaped Division 296 to make it more practical and fair. The biggest shift is that the tax will now apply only to realised earnings, not movements in asset values. That means if your investments rise in value but you don't sell them, you won't be taxed on that increase. This change alone removes one of the major concerns from the original proposal.

The introduction date has also been pushed back. Division 296 will now start on 1 July 2026, giving individuals and SMSF trustees more time to plan.

There's also a new tiered tax structure, which applies differently depending on your total super balance at the end of the financial year. The tax applies to earnings linked to the portion of your balance:

- **Above $3 million but below $10 million, taxed at 30%**
- **Above $10 million, taxed at 40%**

These thresholds will both rise over time, as they are now indexed to inflation, meaning fewer people will be dragged into the net simply because markets have performed well.

Together, these updates make Division 296 more measured and easier to navigate.

Who is most likely to be affected?

In practice, there are three groups who should be paying particular attention.

The first group is individuals already above the $3 million threshold. For these clients, the focus now shifts to how all forms of realised earnings – including capital gains, investment income and rebalancing activity – may influence Division 296 tax in a given year. Because the tax applies to realised gains and income linked to the portion of the balance above the threshold, decisions about selling assets, taking profits or generating additional income become more consequential.

The second group is SMSF trustees. Many SMSFs hold property or other longer-term assets that aren't sold often but also generate rental income, interest or other ongoing earnings captured under the new rules. While the move to realised earnings provides more predictability than taxing unrealised gains, it also means timing becomes more important. Selling an asset, crystallising gains, switching investments or even managing income flows can change the tax impact, so planning ahead is crucial.

The final group includes those approaching retirement with strong super balances. For many Australians in their 50s and 60s, the combination of peak earnings, concessional contributions and positive market conditions can push balances upward quickly. Even if you are not yet near $3 million, it's worthwhile to understand how the threshold fits into your long-term planning.

What this means for your strategy

The most important thing to understand is that Division 296 doesn't make super unattractive. Super remains one of the most tax-effective structures available in Australia. What's changing is how we think about balance size, asset location and the role super plays in your broader wealth plan.

For some clients, this may be a prompt to think more deliberately about where future growth should occur. Super may still be the right home for long-term wealth, but alternatives such as family trusts or investment companies may complement your strategy in a way that gives you more control over timing and taxation of realised gains.

Your investment mix inside super may also evolve. If your balance is well above the threshold, you may choose to slow the pace of growth within super and allow more growth to occur outside it. This isn't about reducing ambition; it's about matching the structure to your goals, while still keeping your long-term retirement income secure.

Contribution planning is another area worth revisiting. In the past, the focus was often on maximising contributions wherever possible. Under Division 296, the question becomes more personal: does adding more to super still support the life you want to build, or would additional savings be better placed elsewhere? There isn't a one-size-fits-all answer, but it's an important conversation.

Don't forget the bigger picture

Division 296 also interacts with estate planning and intergenerational wealth. Large super balances often form a substantial part of what families pass to the next generation. Thinking ahead about where assets sit, who they pass to and how they are taxed helps ensure your wealth supports your family in the way you intend.

For younger generations, indexation is a positive step, keeping the thresholds aligned with rising incomes and asset values over time. But family wealth planning increasingly involves thinking across structures, not just piling as much as possible into super.

Planning with confidence

The updated rules have brought more clarity and fairness to Division 296, but they also highlight the value of good advice. This isn't a change that should prompt sudden action. Instead, it's an opportunity to review your strategy, understand your likely trajectory and make adjustments steadily and thoughtfully.

At Apt Wealth Partners, our role is to simplify complexity and help you make confident, informed choices. With the new rules not taking effect until later in 2026, now is the ideal time to explore what these changes mean for you and how to position your super – and the rest of your wealth – in a way that supports the life you want to live.

If you'd like to talk through how the updated Division 296 rules may affect your retirement planning or your SMSF, we're here to help. You can reach us on **1800 801 277** or email **info@aptwealth.com.au.**

More than money: Aligning your wealth with the life you want

If you ask most people what financial planning is for, the answer usually comes back to money – a better return, a higher balance, a stronger position. And yes, those things matter. But money alone doesn't give you a clear sense of direction. The questions that are hardest to answer are the ones that have nothing to do with the numbers:

How do you want life to feel?

What do you want more of?

What do you want less of?

Where do you want your time and energy to go?

Once you understand the answers to those questions, the financial decisions become clearer. Without them, even the best strategies can feel disconnected from the life you're actually trying to build.

This is why aligning wealth with life goals isn't a nice-to-have. It's the foundation of meaningful financial planning.

A clearer definition of wealth

For a long time, wealth was defined by accumulation. But more Australians today are thinking differently about what ‘being financially successful’ really means. It’s no longer just about having enough. It’s about having the freedom and flexibility to use what you’ve built in a way that feels meaningful.

You might picture mornings without rushing. The freedom to travel regularly. The confidence to explore a different career path. The ability to dedicate more resources to health and wellbeing. Or the joy of contributing to community causes and seeing the impact first-hand.

One of the most valuable steps in planning is taking the time to understand what genuinely matters to you. This isn’t about drafting an idealistic future. It’s about being honest about what gives your life rhythm and meaning.

If you picture your life with complete financial confidence, what changes? What would your week look like? How would you spend your time? What would shift in five years? And how would you like retirement to feel?

Turning financial goals into life goals

When clients come to us at Apt Wealth Partners, we begin with their values, priorities and non-negotiables. Once there’s clarity about what matters, financial goals become far more relevant and far easier to connect with.

This is where financial goals turn into life goals. Saving isn’t just saving; it’s protecting flexibility. Investing isn’t just investing; it’s creating opportunity. Planning isn’t a task; it’s a way of shaping your future.

Building a plan that reflects your life

A strong financial plan considers the whole picture. It accounts for lifestyle, family, relationships, health, career shifts, risk tolerance and the future you want to create. When all these elements are understood, decisions about structures – superannuation, investments, insurance, estate planning – make far more sense. They become the mechanics that support your vision, not the main event.

Importantly, life changes. Careers move in new directions, children grow, priorities shift and unexpected events occur. A life-centred plan has the flexibility to adapt. Regular reviews help ensure the plan evolves with you.

One of the most common concerns people have is finding the balance between enjoying life now and being responsible for the future. When you have a clear sense of your life goals and the financial structures in place to support them, that balance becomes much easier to achieve.

You’re not forced to choose. Instead, you gain the confidence that comes from having a plan designed to support both – today’s experiences and tomorrow’s security

For example, planning might involve:

- structuring cashflow so you can enjoy life today without compromising tomorrow
- investing with intention, so your wealth supports future choices such as a career change
- allocating resources for family experiences, rather than letting savings simply accumulate
- making wellbeing a planned, supported part of your financial life
- incorporating philanthropy or legacy goals into long-term strategy.

The impact of alignment

When your finances are aligned with your life goals, there are some noticeable shifts that happen.

The first is clarity. You can articulate what matters and you can see a path that reflects it. Your plan becomes less about chasing opportunities and more about choosing the right ones.

The second is consistency. Day-to-day decisions – spending, saving, investing – start to echo your values. If family time is a priority, your cashflow plan will reflect that. If wellbeing matters, your budget will make room for it. The plan becomes an extension of the life you want to live.

And the third is confidence. People who are aligned feel more comfortable enjoying what they have today because they understand how it fits into the long-term picture. The plan has direction and that removes a lot of the second-guessing and financial stress.

A more meaningful approach to advice

Aligning your wealth with the life you want isn't abstract or idealistic — it's practical, grounding and deeply effective. When your plan reflects your values, your decisions become clearer and your finances become easier to navigate.

It's worth taking a moment to consider: are your finances set up to support the life you want to live?

If not, a conversation with an Apt adviser can help bring that alignment into focus and translate it into a plan you can feel confident about today and into the future.

Power of attorney: The legal tool every estate plan needs

When most people think about estate planning, they focus on their will. While a will is vital, it only becomes effective after you pass away. A power of attorney, however, protects you during your lifetime. It ensures that if something prevents you from making decisions for yourself, someone you trust can step in and act according to your wishes. For many families, this document becomes just as important as the will itself, yet it is often one of the most overlooked elements of an estate plan.

Taking the time to prepare a power of attorney is not about expecting the worst. It is about giving yourself and your loved ones clarity and confidence if the unexpected occurs. No matter your age or stage of life, having the right structures in place can make an enormous difference.

Understanding the different types of powers of attorney

A power of attorney is a legal document that authorises someone else to make decisions on your behalf. Different forms exist to cover different needs. Understanding how they work helps you choose the right protections.

General Power of Attorney
A General Power of Attorney allows someone to manage your financial and legal affairs, but only while you still have capacity. It is often used for a specific purpose such as bidding at an auction while you are interstate, or if you need help managing your business or financial commitments while you are away overseas. If you lose capacity, this authority automatically ends.

Enduring Power of Attorney
An Enduring Power of Attorney continues even if you are no longer able to make decisions independently (it 'endures' through the incapacity). This makes it essential for long-term planning as people live longer, often with more complex personal and financial needs. The appointed person can manage tasks such as banking, investments, property transactions, where you live and how you are cared for.

Medical Power of Attorney or Appointment of Enduring Guardian
This document gives someone authority to make medical decisions on your behalf if you cannot communicate your wishes. Depending on your state or territory, it may have different names, but the intent is similar. It covers decisions such as consent to treatment, surgical procedures, living arrangements and general care preferences. It ensures someone who understands your values can advocate for you.

In Victoria, the document can be uploaded to VicHealth by your doctor so it is available to hospitals in the event of an emergency.

Choosing the right person to act on your behalf

Selecting an attorney is one of the most important decisions in the entire estate planning process. You are placing significant trust in the person or people you appoint, so careful consideration is key.

It is important to choose someone who is reliable, capable and comfortable making decisions under pressure. For financial and legal matters, they should be confident handling money and understanding the implications of complex decisions. For medical or lifestyle decisions, they should have a clear understanding of your personal values and what matters most to you.

You can appoint more than one attorney, specify whether they must act together or independently, and designate if they are appointed for all powers or not (for example, attorney A for financial and attorney B for personal matters). This can provide balance and oversight, but it also requires clear instructions to avoid disagreement. Open conversations with your preferred decision-makers before finalising documents can help ensure everyone understands your expectations.

Responsibilities and reducing potential risks

Acting as an attorney carries significant legal responsibility. An attorney must always act in your best interests, manage conflicts appropriately, keep accurate records and operate within the limits of the authority you have provided. This duty exists to protect you, but it also means the role should only be given to someone prepared to take on the full responsibility.

While most attorneys act with integrity, there is potential for misuse, particularly where financial vulnerability or diminished capacity is involved. Clear documentation, good communication and proper legal guidance can significantly reduce risks. Ensuring the documents are drafted and executed correctly is also essential, as formal requirements vary between states and territories.

How powers of attorney fit into your broader estate plan

A complete estate plan brings several elements together: your will, superannuation nominations, beneficiary structures and your powers of attorney. Each plays a role at different times, but they need to work cohesively.

Powers of attorney operate while you are alive, often during periods of vulnerability. Your will takes effect afterwards. Ensuring that these documents align helps your family and advisers manage your affairs smoothly, reducing the potential for confusion or conflict.

Regular reviews are important. Major life events – such as marriage or divorce, a change in health, moving interstate or changes in family circumstances – may require updates. Your financial adviser can help coordinate this process and work with legal professionals to ensure your documents continue to reflect your goals.

Preparation creates confidence

Establishing powers of attorney ensures that your financial, personal and medical affairs will be managed in line with your wishes, even if you cannot advocate for yourself. It also alleviates stress and uncertainty for the people closest to you.

When an unforeseen event occurs and there are no documents in place, the stress on a family on seeking a tribunal to appoint someone for the affairs is immeasurable.

Speaking with your adviser can help you understand your options and ensure your estate plan is clear, complete and built around your goals. Taking this step today will give you and your family greater peace of mind for the future.

Disclaimer

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