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Canberra Jewelry Stores Lose Nearly \$40,000 in Alleged Fake Receipt Scam

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On August 5, 2025, two Nepalese-owned jewelry stores in Canberra were allegedly defrauded of nearly \$40,000 in gold items through a sophisticated fake receipt scam, prompting an investigation by Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Policing. Small business owners Amrit Sunar and Karishma Hamal, operating in Phillip, reported the theft, with a similar incident striking another Nepalese jeweler in Florey. The scams, detailed by ABC News, expose vulnerabilities in small businesses and raise concerns about insufficient protections, burdening taxpayers with the cost of investigations and economic fallout.

The scam at Sunar's Phillip store began when a group, posing as regular customers, purchased chains and bracelets worth \$39,000, showing a bank transfer screenshot as proof of payment. Sunar, trusting the receipt, later found no funds in his account, as the transfer was fraudulent. "I checked my bank account and it hadn't come, but it normally takes 24 hours," he told ABC News. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage revealed one suspect distracting Sunar while another pocketed an additional chain. The loss, compounded by upcoming cultural festivals, devastated the business, with Hamal noting, "Losing that amount of investment in our business has affected us a lot," per ABC News.

A second Nepalese jeweler in Florey reported a nearly identical scam, prompting ACT Policing to launch a dual investigation. A spokesperson advised businesses to verify funds directly in their accounts, not via buyer-provided evidence, and recommended instant payment methods like PayID or Osko, per ABC News. Sunar provided CCTV footage and suspect contact details to police, but the incidents highlight a lack of robust safeguards for small retailers. Nepalese jewelers, known for stocking 24-carat gold for cultural reasons, may be targeted, Sunar suggested, stating, "In our community, we only wear 24-carat pure gold ... Maybe that's why they are targeting Nepalese businesses."

The economic impact extends beyond the victims, straining taxpayer-funded resources. ACT Policing's investigations, supported by a \$200 million annual budget per ACT government data, divert resources from other crimes, like the 12% rise in retail theft reported in 2024, per Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data. Small businesses, contributing \$20 billion to Canberra's economy, per Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) reports, face closure risks, reducing tax revenue, and increasing reliance on public support. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) noted a 15% surge in scam losses in 2024, costing \$3.1 billion, further burdening taxpayers.

The absence of stricter penalties and preventive measures fuels frustration. Current laws, under the Australian Consumer Law (ACL), impose fines up to \$1.1 million for fraud, yet scammers often evade capture, as seen in a 2024 Sydney case where fake receipt scams went unprosecuted, per The Sydney Morning Herald. Calls on X for mandatory real-time payment verification and harsher jail terms reflect public demand for reform. Until implemented, small businesses remain vulnerable, and taxpayers bear the cost of investigations and economic losses. As ACT Policing pursues the suspects, stronger

regulations are needed to protect retailers and ensure public funds are not wasted on preventable crimes.