

Making it easier for customers to understand their energy rights

21 December 2018

Electricity and gas

From 1 January 2019, Victorians experiencing payment difficulties will have a better understanding of their rights, and the support available to them when dealing with energy companies.

The state's energy regulator has strengthened the protections customers must receive from their energy retailer with a new payment difficulty framework now coming into effect.

The Essential Services Commission developed the new rules after being given additional powers by the Victorian Government in 2016 to address growing energy debt and disconnections.

Energy director Sarah McDowell says the commission has worked with electricity retailers throughout 2018 to ensure they are ready to implement the new rules.

"In particular, we've worked with retailers to ensure they have updated hardship policies in line with the new framework.

"These policies can be a tool to help customers, and customer advocates, understand what assistance is available.

"The new framework requires energy companies to help customers avoid getting into debt and, where that is not possible, help lower their energy costs and put in place affordable payment arrangements," she said.

The updated rules establish new minimum standards for assistance, including:

- **standard assistance** – available to all Victorians – includes flexible payment options such as changing how the amounts and how often customers pay, the ability to delay payment of pay in advance.
- **tailored assistance** – for customers who have missed a bill – requires retailers to work with customers to look at affordable payment options, advise on ways to reduce energy use and assistance available. Additional help for customers experiencing more severe payment difficulty is also available.

New **disconnection safeguards** have also been introduced to prevent a customer being disconnected unless a retailer has met all their obligations.

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