

Water industry embraces family violence challenge

20 February 2017

Water

Victoria's water businesses will be required to implement family violence policies to better protect victims of economic abuse under changes being considered by the Essential Services Commission.

Responding to one of 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Commission, along with water businesses and family violence experts, has developed [proposed changes](#) to the sector's mandated customer service codes.

Commission chairman Dr Ron Ben-David says the sector has demonstrated a commitment to addressing the issue of economic abuse highlighted by the royal commission.

"The royal commission heard considerable evidence about economic abuse where utility bills were used as a form of control often to deter or prevent victims from leaving abusive relationships.

"The sector, along with community groups, provided valuable insight into the need to provide timely, consistent and targeted assistance to customers affected by family violence," he said.

The proposed code changes would require water businesses to develop and implement family violence policies which, as a minimum, provide for:

- training and support for frontline staff dealing with customers affected by family violence
- ensuring against the disclosure of private and confidential customer information to perpetrators
- access to existing payment difficulty programs provided by businesses

- minimising the need for customers to repeatedly tell their story to different staff, and
- referring customers to appropriate support services.

Dr Ben-David says it's the first time an entire utility sector in Australia has taken on the issue of developing an integrated response to family violence.

"Working collaboratively with the water businesses in developing a response to the royal commission has been rewarding and instructive.

"The businesses brought their extensive experience and insight to the table to ensure the solution would be both workable and meaningful," he said.

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Useful resources

[Customer service code review 2017 \(Royal Commission into Family Violence\)](#)

Changes to customer service codes for water businesses were part of our response to one of 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

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[Water customer service codes](#)

We have three customer service codes: two for urban water businesses, and another for rural ones. These codes specify the standards and conditions that water businesses must comply with when they provide water or wastewater services to customers.

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