

Energy industry helps customers stay connected but more customers are putting bills on hold

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Electricity and gas

Energy companies are keeping customers connected to power during the coronavirus pandemic, but thousands of households are putting off paying their energy bills according to [new data](#) obtained by the state's energy regulator.

The latest data from the Essential Services Commission shows there were no disconnections for non-payment of bills in June, but indicates customers are struggling to meet bill payments.

The number of residential electricity customers missing paying bills in June increased by 4 per cent for electricity and 13 per cent for gas compared to May, while over 8,000 customers deferred paying their bills by several months.

Commission chairperson Kate Symons has acknowledged the efforts of industry to support Victorians at this important time but says now is not the time to be complacent.

“Electricity companies have acted to keep the power on during the pandemic but with more customers missing bills, we must not reduce our efforts to help Victorians manage their energy costs.

“This includes giving customers access to a suite of energy protections, including flexible payment options and energy price checks,” she said.

Under Victorian's payment difficulties framework, households are entitled to help including:

- flexible payments plans and a hold on debt repayments for six months for households who cannot pay for ongoing usage
- no disconnection for customers receiving bill assistance or participating in payment plans
- a ban on debt collection for households receiving receive bill assistance
- energy price checks.

The commission is [collecting data](#) from energy retailers on a regular basis to keep track of how the pandemic is affecting customers. The latest data was collected before the reintroduction of restrictions across metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire.

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