
New guidance for energy companies to ensure struggling energy customers are supported

30 October 2020

Electricity and gas

The Victorian energy regulator has issued new guidance to ensure households and small businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic are protected as required by the state's energy rules.

The Essential Services Commission administers the Victorian [Energy Retail Code](#) which contains some of the strictest customer protections in the nation.

The commission's energy director Sarah McDowell says while Victoria has some of the best safeguards in Australia, a recent review identified concerns with how the rules are interpreted.

"In April, we conducted a rapid audit of how customer protections were being applied and found energy retailers are supporting affected customers with [data showing no disconnections](#) for non-payment since April.

"However, the audit also found some energy companies were interpreting their obligations differently," she said.

The commission has updated its [guidance for retailers](#) to ensure the rules are applied consistently so all customers are equally protected. Under [Victoria's payment difficulty framework](#), customers cannot be disconnected if they owe less than \$300 or are on a payment plan with their retailer.

The rules also describe the types of help retailers must offer customers who are struggling to pay their bills before they can move to disconnect.

The commission has today released [data showing while energy debt is continuing to grow](#), the rate of growth has slowed over the past month. The September data also shows:

- calls for help to retailers was at its lowest level since May
- residential customers receiving assistance has fallen steadily since April
- more small businesses are on payment assistance and average arrears grew significantly.

Get help with energy bills, visit the [Energy Info Hub](#) or join a free online event, call the [Energy Assistance Program](#) on 1800 830 029 or the [National Debt Helpline](#) on 1800 007 007 for financial counselling, and make sure you're on your company's [best offer](#) or the [Victorian Default Offer](#).

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