

Recap: our family violence workshop for the energy retail sector on 30 August 2018

12 September 2018

Electricity and gas

We are developing resources for energy retailers outlining how they can support customers experiencing economic abuse associated with family violence.

We held our first family violence workshop for energy retailers on 30 August 2018. The workshop brought together more than 100 people from retail energy, the community sector, family violence specialist services, government, and a range of service industries working to provide family violence provisions in their sector. The workshop enabled attendees to hear from speakers including victim advocate and survivor Lisa McAdams, the Hon Robin Scott, Minister for Finance, commissioner chair Ron Ben-David and David Ackland, Executive Customer Experience, Energy Australia.

The next session will be held on 18 September, with others to follow later in the year. [Find out more about how we are working with energy retailers to help protect vulnerable electricity and gas customers.](#)



Our conference brought together energy industry and family violence leaders, including speaker Lisa McAdams. Photo: Paul Jeffers

Our launch was attended by key stakeholders and victim survivor advocate Lisa McAdams

The Hon. Robin Scott, Minister for Finance, launched the event, highlighting the importance of this work through a story about a constituent who struggled to have her service connected when trying to re-establish her life after family violence.

'This resulted in having a system that neither recognised or acknowledged the ways in which it could be used to harm. It's a system that further inflamed an already dangerous situation.'

- The Honourable Robin Scott, Minister for Finance

Our commission chair Ron Ben-David spoke about the profound change he has experienced in the two years since the royal commission handed down its recommendations requiring us to work on this issue.

'The most important thing I have learned, the lesson above all others, the one I will never forget, is that when it comes to something as catastrophic as family violence, we all have a responsibility to act. We all have a responsibility to do whatever we can; to do whatever we can, within whatever spheres of influence we have.'

- Dr Ron Ben-David, Chair of the Essential Services Commission



Attendees at our family violence conference heard from speakers including the Hon. Robin Scott MP. Photo: Paul Jeffers

Our keynote speaker Lisa McAdams spoke about her experiences living with and escaping domestic violence. She spoke about the impact this had on her family and her manager, who supported her through this period. She also spoke about her difficulties finding accommodation and services and the appeal of returning to an abuser, when confronted with the complexity of setting up a new life with no personal documents or money.

'If I had not gone to a refuge no one would have given me a lease, an electricity bill or a phone or gas or water because I didn't exist. What would have been my options without a refuge, without the support?

'Who would have saved me? He would have.

'That's one of the reasons people like me go back time and time again - because your abuser becomes your saviour. And that's where essential services really can step in because if you empower someone to not need saving by their abuser then they are less likely to go back.'

- Lisa McAdams, family violence speaker

Melisa Reynolds, AGL's Chief Customer Officer spoke about their programs to support customers and staff who are experiencing family violence. She spoke about how their programs recognise that employees can be both victims and perpetrators of abuse. These programs include partnerships with community services providers, a champions and employee network to foster a safe supportive workplace, and a family violence training program for all employees to build awareness on how to recognise and respond in a caring and inclusive way.

'Summing it up for me was feedback shared by one employee who attended one of these sessions. I only wish this training was available for my mum when I was a little girl. My childhood

would have been very different.'

- Melissa Reynolds, Chief Customer Officer, AGL



The workshop brought together over 100 people from energy businesses and family violence services. Photo: Paul Jeffers

After morning tea we heard from Carolyn Bond who spoke about the history of economic abuse and the specialist service providers who have come together, under the banner [Economic Abuse Reference Group](#) to provide expert advice and guidance to organisations and sectors embarking on this work for the first time.

Carolyn walked us through the [the group's good practice guide](#) to organisations seeking to develop, or enhancing, policies to respond to customers at financial risk due to family violence.

'We recognise this is complex, this it is an ongoing process. I think anyone who has done this will tell you to take it step by step, to take it slowly and do it properly. But start somewhere.'

- Carolyn Bond, Convenor, Economic Abuse Reference Group

Annabelle Butler, Executive Manager of Accessibility at Suncorp shared her insights about how the insurance sector has come to grips with changing community expectations requiring financial services to develop better approaches to issues of family violence and mental health. She also walked through the new family violence proposals as part of the 2017 [review of the General Insurance Code of Practice](#).

'It is a very complicated process. The way we are managing family violence claims at the moment is one by one by one. You can't create a generic set of rules. Perpetrators have rights too. That's the reality.'

- Annabelle Butler, Executive Manager of Accessibility, Suncorp

David Ackland, EnergyAustralia's Executive for Customer Experience, gave a raw account of Energy Australia's experiences supporting customers who are experiencing family violence, and how these are behind their efforts to improve processes and systems. He spoke about how EnergyAustralia's is working with other sectors and community organisations to ensure their responses are well informed.

'Imagine having to tell your story of family violence over and over again as you seek to recover your circumstances - to banks, utilities or other service providers - in order for you to get more time to pay bills or in establishing your new services at your new address.'

- David Ackland, Executive for Customer Experience, Energy Australia



Attendees at our family violence conference on 30 August 2018. Photo: Paul Jeffers

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Useful resources

[Family violence resources review 2018](#)

We are developing resources for energy retailers outlining how they can support customers experiencing economic abuse associated with family violence.

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15 August 2018

[What can organisations do to address family violence?](#)

Addressing family violence is an extraordinarily complex challenge that requires the combined efforts of government, regulatory and family violence support services. Our work in this area has focused on engaging key industries in the process and developing effective, practical ways for regulated businesses to support customers experiencing family violence.

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

In 2017, we worked with the water industry to develop changes to water customer service codes as part of our response to one of 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

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10 April 2017

[Changes to water code to help victims of family violence](#)

In 2017, Victoria's water businesses praised efforts to improve protection for family violence victims, saying changes to the water code will help them deliver better outcomes for their customers and communities.

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