

## Energy customers urged to connect

Hundreds of customers have had their gas and electricity disconnected over the past two months, as the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic continues.

The latest figures from the state's independent economic regulator show some energy retailers have recommenced disconnections for non-payment, which is a worrying sign for 2021 even though the figures are low compared to historical averages.

Essential Services Commission chair Kate Symons says it is pleasing that Victorian retailers did not disconnect energy customers for non-payment during the height of the pandemic, and she had hoped this support would continue.

"The economic and social impact of the pandemic is far from finished.

"Our data shows that thousands of customers are doing it tough, and this pressure is expected to worsen with the banks due to end mortgage deferrals in March and JobKeeper and JobSeeker being progressively reduced," she said.

In December one retailer disconnected 417 electricity and 172 gas customers and in January, 123 electricity and 14 gas customers were disconnected by various retailers.

Ms Symons says customers who are experiencing any difficulty paying their bills should contact their energy provider and ask about options to help pay their energy bill or lower their costs.

"Disconnections should be a last resort and retailers should work with customers to offer a range of payment options for customers," she said.

The latest data shows:

- 48,744 electricity and 37,272 gas residential customers were on tailored assistance plans at the end of January
- The average arrears for small business is almost the highest since the pandemic began.

**About the data:** the data is based on weekly reports from the businesses and is not audited. We are collecting a small subset of data included in annual performance reports.

The [latest energy data](#) is available on the commission's website.

**For further information call: David Jarwood, Senior Media Adviser, 0492 805 003**

To keep up to date, visit us at [esc.vic.gov.au](http://esc.vic.gov.au) or follow us on LinkedIn and Twitter