

## Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

### Update – covering data up to 26 July 2020

The commission sent voluntary data requests to all retailers to monitor the number of energy customers on payment plans and those who are now enquiring about assistance with paying bills. The following provides our observations on the data reported to the commission to date.

This information should be treated as confidential until it is publicly released by the commission.

### Key observations in July

- No disconnections for non-payment in the month of July.

#### Residential customers:

- There was a reduction in customers who called their retailer in July, with the weekly average electricity residential customers that enquired about payment assistance decreasing by 11 per cent since June.<sup>1</sup>
- Compared to 28 June, there were more electricity residential customers receiving payment assistance who can pay for ongoing usage but fewer customers receiving assistance who cannot pay for ongoing usage. Of customers receiving assistance:
  - 30,974 who can pay for their ongoing usage, a three per cent increase
  - 16,861 who cannot pay for their ongoing usage, a six per cent reduction
- The corresponding average arrears of electricity residential customers receiving payment assistance increased for those who can pay for ongoing usage but decreased for customers who cannot pay for ongoing usage. These figures can show some minor fluctuation between weeks and are impacted by billing cycles:
  - \$648 for those who can pay for their ongoing usage, a two per cent increase

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<sup>1</sup> The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating the methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.

- \$1,506 for those who cannot pay for their ongoing usage, a two per cent reduction
- Compared to 28 June, the average arrears have increased for gas residential customers receiving payment assistance:
  - \$490 who can pay for their ongoing usage, a four per cent increase
  - \$1,166 who cannot pay for their ongoing usage, a two per cent increase
- The weekly average residential customers missing paying their bill on time in July decreased by seven per cent for electricity and five per cent for gas compared to June. But we note that these figures show fluctuations between weeks depending on the billing cycles.
- Retailers reported that an estimated 0.3 per cent of electricity and gas residential customers have chosen to defer their payments as at 26 July. There was an increase in the number of customers since June:
  - 8,729 electricity customers, a two per cent increase
  - 7,506 gas customers, a six per cent increase.
- The corresponding average amount outstanding for residential customers who chose to defer their payments also increased for electricity and gas customers:
  - \$620 for electricity customers, a two per cent increase
  - \$486 for gas customers, a ten per cent increase

**Small business customers:**

- There was an estimated 55 per cent reduction in the weekly average number of small business electricity customers enquiring about assistance since June.
- An estimated one per cent of Victorian small business energy customers are receiving assistance from their retailers, a total of:
  - 2,414 electricity customers, an eight per cent decrease
  - 741 gas customers, a six per cent increase
- The average arrears of small business customers receiving assistance for increased for electricity but decreased for gas compared to 28 June:
  - \$1,413 for electricity, a six per cent increase
  - \$1,486 for gas, a ten per cent reduction
- The weekly average small business customers missing paying their bill on time in July increased by two per cent for electricity and gas.

- As at 26 July, an estimated 0.8 per cent of Victorian small business customers had deferred their payments. The number of customers who deferred payments decreased for electricity but increased for gas compared to June. Retailers reported:
  - 2,264 electricity customers, a two per cent reduction
  - 933 gas customers, a three per cent increase
- The corresponding average amount outstanding for small business customers who deferred their payments increased compared to 28 June:
  - \$2,590 for electricity customers, a five per cent increase
  - \$1,813 for gas customers, a 12 per cent increase

**About the data:** During the week ending 26 July 2020, we received submissions from 15 retailers covering 92 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Weekly data is reported by retailers on a voluntary basis and is not audited by the commission. This data consists of a small subset of the measures that are included in our annual performance report. This data does not yet allow us to draw specific conclusions on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic. We also note that some of these figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data – this can impact comparisons to other time periods.

## Victorian-wide data summary<sup>2</sup>

Indicator	Electricity				Gas			
	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul
<b>Residential customers – assistance and arrears</b>								
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	31,911 1.2%	30,921 1.2%	30,174 1.1%	30,974 1.2%	22,125 1.1%	20,542 1.0%	20,819 1.0%	22,918 1.1%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	21,017 0.8%	19,268 0.7%	17,997 0.7%	16,861 0.6%	15,606 0.8%	14,108 0.7%	13,181 0.6%	12,964 0.6%
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$618	\$652	\$636	\$648	\$498	\$489	\$471	\$490
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,385	\$1,547	\$1,533	\$1,506	\$1,092	\$1,141	\$1,141	\$1,166
<b>Small business customers – assistance and arrears</b>								
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,471 0.9%	2,618 0.9%	2,614 0.9%	2,414 0.9%	696 1.1%	687 1.1%	700 1.1%	741 1.2%
Average arrears – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,180	\$1,141	\$1,327	\$1,413	\$1,139	\$1,436	\$1,648	\$1,486
<b>Customers who deferred payments</b>								
Number of residential customers	-	-	8,577	8,729	-	-	7,072	7,506

<sup>2</sup> These figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data. Some weeks have missing data from retailers. This can impact monthly totals as well as comparisons to other time periods. Note that average arrears are calculated by estimating total arrears divided by the number of customers receiving assistance across the market (reported data only).

Indicator	Electricity				Gas			
	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul
Average amount deferred by residential customers	-	-	\$610	\$620	-	-	\$442	\$486
Number of small business customers	-	-	2,310	2,264	-	-	908	933
Average amount deferred by small business customers	-	-	\$2,461	\$2,590	-	-	\$1,623	\$1,813

Indicator	Electricity				Gas			
	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)
<b>Calls waiting times</b>								
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	111	75	90	52	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
<b>Calls and enquiries</b> (market-wide) <sup>3</sup>								
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	84,766	93,085	98,660	93,526	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	6,298	7,134	5,715	5,112	4,064	4,656	4,204	3,912
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	1,738	2,332	1,371	620	265	257	189	121

<sup>3</sup> The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating the methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.

Indicator	Electricity				Gas			
	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)
<b>Missed bills (market-wide)</b>								
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	38,535	42,344	45,827	42,510	27,432	27,423	31,655	30,088
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,192	9,436	8,164	8,332	1,876	1,874	1,703	1,739