

Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

Update – observations up to week ending 26 December 2021

The commission sent voluntary data requests to all retailers to monitor the number of energy customers receiving assistance to pay their bills. The following provides our observations on the data reported to the commission to date.

About the data

Weekly data is reported by retailers on a voluntary basis and is not audited by the commission. This data consists of a subset of the measures included in our annual performance report.

During the week ending 26 December 2021, we received submissions from 19 retailers covering 98 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Key findings

- There were 997 completed electricity and 177 gas disconnections for non-payment between 1 and 16 December 2021 (residential and small-business customers), as reported by nine retailers. There were no completed disconnections for non-payment between 17 December 2021 and 5 Jan 2022. Between 6 and 23 January 2022, there were 1,690 completed electricity and 321 gas disconnections for non-payment.

We note that in recent months, the following number of residential customers have been disconnected for non-payment:

- in July 2021: 822 electricity and 251 gas residential customers¹
- in August 2021: 238 electricity and 102 gas residential customers¹
- in Septemeber 2021: 0 electricity and 0 gas residential customers¹
- in October 2021: 22 electricity and 3 gas residential customers¹
- in November 2021: 358 electricity and 59 gas residential customers
- in December 2021: 919 electricity and 170 gas residential customers
- in January 2022 (up to 23 January): 1,573 electricity and 314 gas residential customers

¹ Disconnections stopped between 16-27 July and 5 August to 21 October in response to government announcements of movement restrictions in Victoria. One disconnection for non-payment was completed after 5 August 2021 due to a service order being raised before the movement restrictions were announced but was immediately reconnected.

- Fewer residential customers received tailored assistance for electricity and gas in December 2021 compared to the previous month. We note that:
 - Fewer electricity and gas customers were receiving tailored assistance and could not pay for their on-going usage in December compared to November 2021. The average arrears for these customers increased for electricity and slightly decreased for gas in December 2021, with average arrears for gas in November 2021 was at its highest since the payment difficulty framework began (January 2019).
 - Fewer electricity and gas customers were receiving tailored assistance who could pay for their on-going usage in December compared to peak in November 2021. The average arrears increased for electricity and gas compared to the previous month.
- The number of small business customers receiving payment assistance decreased in December 2021. This peaked in September 2020 for both electricity and gas small business customers. The average arrears decreased for electricity and gas customers in December 2021 compared to November 2021.
- More electricity and gas residential customers missed paying their bills by the due date in December 2021, the highest level of missed bills for both electricity and gas residential customers.
- More small business customers missed paying their electricity bill by the due date in December 2021 compared to November 2021. However, fewer small business customers missed paying their gas bills in December 2021.

Victorian-wide data summary²

Disconnections for non-payment³

Indicator	Period														
	Monthly average 2018	Monthly average 2019	Jan-21 (1 Jan to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (1 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (1 Mar to 31 Mar)	Apr-21 (1 Apr to 30 Apr)	May-21 (1 May to 31 May)	Jun-21 (1 Jun to 30 Jun)	Jul-21 (1 Jul to 31 Jul)	Aug-21 (1 Aug to 31 Aug)	Sep-21 (1 Sep to 30 Sep)	Oct-21 (1 Oct to 31 Oct)	Nov-21 (1 Nov to 30 Nov)	Dec-21 (1 Dec to 31 Dec)	Jan-22 (1 Jan to 23 Jan)
Residential															
Electricity residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	2,765	1,820	119	281	2,055	1,745	1,739	956	822	238	-	22	358	919	1,573
Gas residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	1,553	922	109	175	219	370	833	198	251	102	-	3	59	170	314
Small business															
Electricity small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	372	335	4	24	228	235	222	130	142	36	-	-	73	78	117
Gas small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	50	39	2	1	4	8	12	3	11	3	-	-	4	7	7

² These figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data. Some weeks have missing data from retailers. This can affect 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).

³ The number of disconnections for non-payment in 2020 was based on the Compliance and Performance Reporting Guideline (CPRG) data from retailers. The 2021 disconnections figures are from the voluntary submission from retailers.

Electricity

Indicator	Electricity											
	Period (week ending)											
	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021	11 Apr 2021	30 May 2021	27 Jun 2021	25 Jul 2021	29 Aug 2021	26 Sep 2021	31 Oct 2021	28 Nov 2021	26 Dec 2021
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	34,511 1.3%	36,923 1.4%	37,221 1.4%	35,921 1.4%	35,345 1.3%	34,256 1.3%	36,079 1.4%	37,297 1.4%	37,949 1.4%	37,667 1.4%	39,037 1.5%	37,813 1.4%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	17,658 0.7%	18,971 0.7%	19,389 0.7%	18,825 0.7%	18,719 0.7%	18,440 0.7%	18,499 0.7%	18,115 0.7%	18,043 0.7%	17,193 0.6%	16,929 0.6%	16,495 0.6%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$733 -	\$792 +8%	\$819 +3%	\$809 -1%	\$755 -7%	\$738 -2%	\$734 -1%	\$744 +1%	\$736 -1%	\$731 -1%	\$748 +2%	\$777 +4%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,700 -	\$1,826 +7%	\$1,923 +5%	\$1,921 -0%	\$1,930 +0%	\$1,910 -1%	\$1,919 +0%	\$1,883 -2%	\$1,876 -0%	\$1,860 -1%	\$1,904 +2%	\$1,916 +1%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,053 0.7%	2,118 0.8%	2,593 0.9%	2,443 0.9%	2,471 0.9%	2,676 1.0%	2,593 0.9%	2,693 1.0%	2,474 0.9%	2,397 0.9%	2,334 0.8%	2,150 0.8%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,552 -	\$1,442 -7%	\$1,430 -1%	\$1,393 -3%	\$1,431 +3%	\$1,423 -1%	\$1,334 -6%	\$1,294 -3%	\$1,337 +3%	\$1,182 -12%	\$1,298 +10%	\$1,145 -12%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	2,690	2,384	2,892	2,483	2,686	2,794	2,942	2,583	2,353	2,549	2,892	2,176
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	\$435 -	\$507 +17%	\$516 +2%	\$455 -12%	\$420 -8%	\$460 +10%	\$449 -2%	\$421 -6%	\$484 +15%	\$572 +18%	\$489 -15%	\$456 -7%

Indicator	Electricity											
	Period (week ending)											
	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021	11 Apr 2021	30 May 2021	27 Jun 2021	25 Jul 2021	29 Aug 2021	26 Sep 2021	31 Oct 2021	28 Nov 2021	26 Dec 2021
Number of small business customers	381	267	275	509	264	305	289	328	222	243	321	216
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	\$1,159	\$1,203	\$1,377	\$898	\$1,451	\$1,412	\$1,619	\$1,293	\$1,241	\$1,084	\$1,147	\$1,077
	-	+4%	+14%	-35%	+62%	-3%	+15%	-20%	-4%	-13%	+6%	-6%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)^{4 5}												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	286,753	278,712	288,868	280,240	294,405	287,360	290,516	286,839	292,687	294,389	295,580	248,302
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$562	\$531	\$495	\$503	\$471	\$482	\$473	\$499	\$510	\$511	\$529	\$590
	-	-5%	-7%	+2%	-6%	+2%	-2%	+5%	+2%	+0%	+4%	+12%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	52,940	52,107	56,285	48,507	54,272	50,323	43,012	51,133	50,916	46,239	40,409	43,794
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$874	\$861	\$820	\$887	\$822	\$849	\$865	\$816	\$823	\$838	\$932	\$843
	-	-1%	-5%	+8%	-7%	+3%	+2%	-6%	+1%	+2%	+11%	-10%
Submissions rates for report												
Percentage of residential customer count covered in report	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%

⁴ This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

⁵ AGL and Powerdirect revised their methodology on other customers with arrears indicators from December 2021. This leads to an increase in their average arrears and a decrease in the number of other customers with arrears.

Indicator	Electricity											
	Jan-21 (28 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (01 Mar to 28 Mar)	Apr-21 (29 Mar to 25 Apr)	May-21 (26 Apr to 30 May)	Jun-21 (31 May to 27 Jun)	Jul-21 (28 Jun to 25 Jul)	Aug-21 (26 Jul to 29 Aug)	Sep-21 (30 Aug to 26 Sep)	Oct-21 (27 Sep to 31 Oct)	Nov-21 (01 Nov to 28 Nov)	Dec-21 (29 Nov to 26 Dec)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	80 seconds	98 seconds	85 seconds	170 seconds	105 seconds	126 seconds	366 seconds					
Calls and enquiries (market-wide) ⁶												
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	73,685	89,627	81,250	76,763	83,115	88,218	22,559					
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	3,668	4,996	4,123	3,768	4,520	4,238	1,677					
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance												
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	48,346	50,854	52,341	49,347	55,498	50,719	55,349	51,835	49,316	53,296	56,257	56,610
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,993	8,858	8,770	8,414	9,992	8,307	8,579	9,763	9,146	8,764	7,949	9,569

⁶ The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating its methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.

Gas

Indicator	Gas											
	Period (week ending)											
	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021	11 Apr 2021	30 May 2021	27 Jun 2021	25 Jul 2021	29 Aug 2021	26 Sep 2021	31 Oct 2021	28 Nov 2021	26 Dec 2021
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	26,237 1.3%	26,331 1.3%	24,557 1.2%	23,076 1.1%	22,116 1.1%	22,409 1.1%	24,552 1.2%	30,277 1.5%	32,488 1.6%	33,909 1.7%	34,476 1.7%	33,208 1.6%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	12,828 0.6%	13,907 0.7%	13,763 0.7%	13,503 0.7%	13,375 0.7%	13,635 0.7%	13,720 0.7%	14,281 0.7%	13,884 0.7%	13,741 0.7%	13,510 0.7%	13,204 0.6%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$567 -	\$608 +7%	\$625 +3%	\$624 -0%	\$574 -8%	\$551 -4%	\$549 -0%	\$562 +2%	\$575 +2%	\$577 +0%	\$594 +3%	\$609 +3%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,307 -	\$1,404 +7%	\$1,442 +3%	\$1,417 -2%	\$1,434 +1%	\$1,429 -0%	\$1,449 +1%	\$1,472 +2%	\$1,496 +2%	\$1,509 +1%	\$1,526 +1%	\$1,519 -0%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	569 0.9%	568 0.9%	732 1.1%	705 1.1%	709 1.1%	739 1.1%	768 1.2%	775 1.2%	794 1.2%	691 1.1%	672 1.0%	600 0.9%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,770 -	\$1,534 -13%	\$1,438 -6%	\$1,386 -4%	\$1,436 +4%	\$1,550 +8%	\$1,523 -2%	\$1,725 +13%	\$1,806 +5%	\$1,747 -3%	\$1,705 -2%	\$1,461 -14%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	1,613	1,571	1,716	1,471	1,892	2,217	2,622	2,514	1,951	2,074	2,171	1,547

Indicator	Gas											
	Period (week ending)											
	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021	11 Apr 2021	30 May 2021	27 Jun 2021	25 Jul 2021	29 Aug 2021	26 Sep 2021	31 Oct 2021	28 Nov 2021	26 Dec 2021
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	\$421 -	\$383 -9%	\$344 -10%	\$304 -12%	\$281 -7%	\$318 +13%	\$340 +7%	\$403 +18%	\$451 +12%	\$397 -12%	\$409 +3%	\$406 -1%
Number of small business customers	116	75	93	172	75	93	145	94	65	111	118	74
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	\$926 -	\$1,349 +46%	\$882 -35%	\$791 -10%	\$2,150 +172%	\$2,592 +21%	\$946 -63%	\$1,883 +99%	\$1,206 -36%	\$2,656 +120%	\$2,227 -16%	\$1,865 -16%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)^{7 8}												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	229,681	215,246	221,406	227,289	226,758	230,148	224,947	229,453	247,391	242,382	248,877	207,459
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$425 -	\$406 -4%	\$367 -10%	\$363 -1%	\$354 -2%	\$374 +6%	\$385 +3%	\$434 +13%	\$429 -1%	\$434 +1%	\$425 -2%	\$491 +15%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	9,553	8,690	8,931	8,663	8,918	8,619	12,086	11,656	8,797	13,202	12,898	12,347
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$1,451 -	\$1,389 -4%	\$1,300 -6%	\$1,310 +1%	\$1,209 -8%	\$1,261 +4%	\$995 -21%	\$1,129 +14%	\$1,447 +28%	\$1,027 -29%	\$1,092 +6%	\$1,061 -3%

⁷ This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

⁸ AGL and Powerdirect revised their methodology on calculating the other customers with arrears indicators from December 2021. This leads to an increase in their average arrears and a decrease in the number of other customers with arrears.

Indicator	Gas											
	Jan-21 (28 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (01 Mar to 28 Mar)	Apr-21 (29 Mar to 25 Apr)	May-21 (26 Apr to 30 May)	Jun-21 (31 May to 27 Jun)	Jul-21 (28 Jun to 25 Jul)	Aug-21 (26 Jul to 29 Aug)	Sep-21 (30 Aug to 26 Sep)	Oct-21 (27 Sep to 31 Oct)	Nov-21 (01 Nov to 28 Nov)	Dec-21 (29 Nov to 26 Dec)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	<i>Refer to electricity</i>											
Calls and enquiries (market-wide) ⁹												
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>											
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	2,562	3,296	2,714	2,446	2,953	3,037	1,498					
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	90	61	57	62	73	73	25					
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	31,201	35,240	34,663	34,100	37,996	37,889	38,137	37,140	36,569	38,848	38,308	39,716
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	1,672	1,733	1,659	1,604	1,762	1,708	1,723	1,650	1,787	1,647	1,654	1,522

⁹ The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating its methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.