

Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

Update – observations up to week ending 28 March 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 28 March 2021, we received submissions from 23 retailers covering 98 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Key findings

- There were 2,273 completed electricity and 114 gas disconnections for non-payment between 1 and 31 March 2021 (residential and small-business customers), as reported by ten retailers.

We note that in 2021, the following number of residential customers have been disconnected for non-payment:

- in January 2021, 119 electricity and 13 gas residential customers
 - in February 2021, 273 electricity and 44 gas residential customers
 - in March 2021, 2,046 electricity and 110 gas residential customers
- There are fewer residential customers enquiring about assistance in March, compared to the figures in February.
 - The overall number of residential customers receiving tailored assistance has continued to increase in March. We note that:
 - the number of customers on tailored assistance who cannot pay for their on-going usage has increased in March from the previous month. The average arrears of these customers is currently at its highest level in March for both electricity and gas.
 - the number of customers on tailored assistance who can pay for their on-going usage is currently the highest in March 2021. The average arrears of these customers is also currently at its highest level in March for both electricity and gas.
 - The number of small business customers on payment assistance increased in March and is the highest since October 2020. The average arrears for small business customers

decreased in March but is lower compared to the peak in late November, for electricity and gas.

- The number of customers who deferred their payments and their average amount outstanding decreased from the week ending 23 August due to significant decreases by one retailer. The number of customers deferring payments and their average amount outstanding have been lower since the peaks in August for residential and September for small business. In March, the number of residential electricity customers deferring payments and their arrears have increased compared to the previous month.
- The number of other residential customers with arrears (excluding those receiving payment assistance and deferrals) was the highest in January 2021 for electricity and in December 2020 for gas. In March, the number of customers has increased compared to the previous month but is lower compared to the peaks. For small business, the monthly average number of customers for electricity increased in March, but the average number of gas customers is currently at its lowest. The average arrears for residential and small business also decreased but continue to be higher than in July 2020.
- The weekly average number of missed bills for residential customers is currently the highest in March 2021 for electricity and in December 2020 for gas. For small business, the average number of missed bill payments has been lower since the peaks in May and September.

Victorian-wide data summary¹

Disconnections for non-payment²

Indicator	Electricity											
	Apr-20 (1 Apr to 30 Apr)	May-20 (1 May to 31 May)	Jun-20 (1 Jun to 30 Jun)	Jul-20 (1 Jul to 31 Jul)	Aug-20 (1 Aug to 31 Aug)	Sep-20 (1 Sep to 30 Sep)	Oct-20 (1 Oct to 31 Oct)	Nov-20 (1 Nov to 30 Nov)	Dec-20 (1 Dec to 31 Dec)	Jan-21 (1 Jan to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (1 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (1 Mar to 31 Mar)
Residential												
Electricity residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	396	119	273	2,046
Gas residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	172	13	44	110
Small business												
Electricity small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	-	-	-	-	-	1	3	-	21	4	24	227
Gas small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	4

¹ 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).

² 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)											
	26 Apr 2020	31 May 2020	28 Jun 2020	26 Jul 2020	30 Aug 2020	27 Sep 2020	25 Oct 2020	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	31,911 1.2%	30,921 1.2%	30,495 1.1%	31,591 1.2%	33,515 1.3%	35,669 1.3%	36,482 1.4%	36,955 1.4%	35,591 1.3%	34,378 1.3%	36,795 1.4%	37,194 1.4%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	21,017 0.8%	19,268 0.7%	18,612 0.7%	18,357 0.7%	17,896 0.7%	17,781 0.7%	17,290 0.7%	18,303 0.7%	18,248 0.7%	17,236 0.6%	18,547 0.7%	19,363 0.7%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$618 -	\$652 +6%	\$641 -2%	\$660 +3%	\$687 +4%	\$682 -1%	\$697 +2%	\$703 +1%	\$725 +3%	\$735 +1%	\$794 +8%	\$819 +3%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,385 -	\$1,547 +12%	\$1,529 -1%	\$1,515 -1%	\$1,509 -0%	\$1,524 +1%	\$1,577 +4%	\$1,646 +4%	\$1,665 +1%	\$1,703 +2%	\$1,831 +7%	\$1,924 +5%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,471 0.9%	2,618 0.9%	2,614 0.9%	2,547 0.9%	2,527 0.9%	2,631 0.9%	2,535 0.9%	2,301 0.8%	2,114 0.8%	2,025 0.7%	2,084 0.7%	2,554 0.9%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,180 -	\$1,141 -3%	\$1,327 +16%	\$1,463 +10%	\$1,542 +5%	\$1,570 +2%	\$1,515 -3%	\$1,469 -3%	\$1,503 +2%	\$1,553 +3%	\$1,435 -8%	\$1,429 -0%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	-	-	8,577	8,848	5,105	3,762	2,968	3,245	2,350	2,688	2,384	2,892
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	- -	- -	\$610 -	\$639 +5%	\$628 -2%	\$530 -16%	\$477 -10%	\$451 -5%	\$492 +9%	\$435 -11%	\$507 +17%	\$516 +2%
Number of small business customers	-	-	2,310	2,269	1,364	439	334	370	237	381	261	275

Indicator	Electricity											
	Period (week ending)											
	26 Apr 2020	31 May 2020	28 Jun 2020	26 Jul 2020	30 Aug 2020	27 Sep 2020	25 Oct 2020	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	-	-	\$2,461	\$2,604	\$2,118	\$1,150	\$1,483	\$938	\$978	\$1,159	\$1,088	\$1,377
	-	-	-	+6%	-19%	-46%	+29%	-37%	+4%	+19%	-6%	+27%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)³												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	-	-	-	268,021	271,930	275,652	283,595	283,788	286,539	286,156	277,934	288,751
Average arrears – other residential customers	-	-		\$455	\$485	\$507	\$512	\$528	\$544	\$562	\$531	\$495
	-	-	-	-	+6%	+5%	+1%	+3%	+3%	+3%	-6%	-7%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	-	-	-	50,787	52,833	54,774	54,548	53,353	50,772	52,756	51,864	56,119
Average arrears – other small business customers	-	-		\$885	\$969	\$980	\$885	\$930	\$907	\$873	\$859	\$818
	-	-	-	-	+10%	+1%	-10%	+5%	-3%	-4%	-2%	-5%

³ This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

Indicator	Electricity											
	Apr-20 (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May-20 (27 Apr to 31 May)	Jun-20 (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	Jul-20 (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	Aug-20 (27 Jul to 30 Aug)	Sep-20 (31 Aug to 27 Sep)	Oct-20 (28 Sep to 25 Oct)	Nov-20 (26 Oct to 29 Nov)	Dec-20 (30 Nov to 27 Dec)	Jan-21 (28 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (01 Mar to 28 Mar)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas (seconds)</i>	107 seconds	75 seconds	89 seconds	80 seconds	95 seconds	76 seconds	66 seconds	70 seconds	60 seconds	75 seconds	70 seconds	64 seconds
Calls and enquiries (market-wide)⁴												
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	90,765	98,783	104,794	103,367	98,573	99,110	83,426	83,375	75,738	73,353	89,066	79,991
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	6,298	7,134	5,762	5,298	5,022	3,930	3,251	3,396	3,834	3,659	4,979	4,112
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	1,738	2,332	1,371	633	623	326	200	225	388	489	453	390
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	38,535	43,768	46,797	47,137	44,067	44,773	44,262	49,027	47,273	48,199	50,391	51,959
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,192	9,548	8,173	8,576	8,923	8,336	8,267	8,707	7,970	8,865	8,638	8,627

⁴ 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)											
	26 Apr 2020	31 May 2020	28 Jun 2020	26 Jul 2020	30 Aug 2020	27 Sep 2020	25 Oct 2020	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	22,125 1.1%	20,542 1.0%	21,030 1.0%	23,315 1.1%	28,133 1.4%	31,682 1.5%	34,134 1.7%	33,489 1.6%	31,378 1.5%	26,237 1.3%	26,331 1.3%	24,606 1.2%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	15,606 0.8%	14,108 0.7%	13,588 0.7%	13,893 0.7%	13,706 0.7%	14,060 0.7%	13,702 0.7%	13,935 0.7%	13,855 0.7%	12,828 0.6%	13,907 0.7%	14,094 0.7%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$498 -	\$489 -2%	\$474 -3%	\$496 +5%	\$532 +7%	\$541 +2%	\$559 +3%	\$555 -1%	\$566 +2%	\$567 +0%	\$608 +7%	\$623 +3%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,092 -	\$1,141 +4%	\$1,138 -0%	\$1,157 +2%	\$1,215 +5%	\$1,243 +2%	\$1,303 +5%	\$1,324 +2%	\$1,314 -1%	\$1,307 -1%	\$1,404 +7%	\$1,438 +2%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	696 1.1%	687 1.1%	700 1.1%	746 1.2%	723 1.1%	821 1.3%	778 1.2%	691 1.1%	601 0.9%	569 0.9%	568 0.9%	732 1.1%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,139 -	\$1,436 +26%	\$1,648 +15%	\$1,478 -10%	\$1,681 +14%	\$1,815 +8%	\$2,104 +16%	\$1,898 -10%	\$1,939 +2%	\$1,770 -9%	\$1,534 -13%	\$1,438 -6%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	-	-	7,072	7,594	4,919	3,147	2,497	2,604	1,763	1,613	1,571	1,716
	-	-	\$442	\$497	\$507	\$459	\$415	\$342	\$389	\$421	\$383	\$344

Indicator	Gas											
	Period (week ending)											
	26 Apr 2020	31 May 2020	28 Jun 2020	26 Jul 2020	30 Aug 2020	27 Sep 2020	25 Oct 2020	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	31 Jan 2021	28 Feb 2021	28 Mar 2021
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	-	-	-	+12%	+2%	-9%	-10%	-18%	+14%	+8%	-9%	-10%
Number of small business customers	-	-	908	933	515	236	129	153	77	116	75	93
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	-	-	\$1,623	\$1,813	\$1,962	\$2,659	\$1,393	\$1,373	\$1,005	\$926	\$1,349	\$882
	-	-	-	+12%	+8%	+36%	-48%	-1%	-27%	-8%	+46%	-35%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)⁵												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	-	-	-	208,688	220,345	224,481	229,475	228,390	236,286	229,681	215,246	221,509
Average arrears – other residential customers	-	-	-	\$368	\$420	\$436	\$435	\$436	\$424	\$425	\$406	\$366
	-	-	-	-	+14%	+4%	-0%	+0%	-3%	+0%	-4%	-10%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	-	-	-	9,657	10,105	9,798	9,380	10,001	9,242	9,553	8,690	8,931
Average arrears – other small business customers	-	-	-	\$1,237	\$1,388	\$1,540	\$1,555	\$1,475	\$1,505	\$1,451	\$1,389	\$1,300
	-	-	-	-	+12%	+11%	+1%	-5%	+2%	-4%	-4%	-6%

⁵ This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

Indicator	Gas											
	Apr-20 (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May-20 (27 Apr to 31 May)	Jun-20 (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	Jul-20 (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	Aug-20 (27 Jul to 30 Aug)	Sep-20 (31 Aug to 27 Sep)	Oct-20 (28 Sep to 25 Oct)	Nov-20 (26 Oct to 29 Nov)	Dec-20 (30 Nov to 27 Dec)	Jan-21 (28 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-21 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-21 (01 Mar to 28 Mar)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	Refer to electricity											
Calls and enquiries (market-wide) ⁶												
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	Refer to electricity											
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	4,064	4,656	4,224	4,035	3,763	2,983	2,503	2,373	3,171	2,562	3,296	2,717
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	265	257	189	121	96	62	52	43	69	90	61	57
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	27,432	28,085	32,264	32,244	32,603	33,302	33,412	34,048	36,092	31,079	35,135	34,645
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	1,876	1,905	1,703	1,740	1,822	1,968	1,770	1,757	1,651	1,672	1,733	1,659

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