

Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

Update – observations up to 31 March 2022

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

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.

For the March 2022 quarter, we requested monthly data to be reported to us and received submissions from 19 retailers covering 98 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Key findings

- There were 6,921 completed electricity and 2,176 gas disconnections for non-payment between 1 January 2022 and 31 March 2022 (residential and small-business customers), as reported by 14 retailers.

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

- November 2021: 358 electricity and 59 gas residential customers
- December 2021: 919 electricity and 170 gas residential customers
- January 2022: 1,894 electricity and 361 gas residential customers
- February 2022: 2,616 electricity and 931 gas residential customers
- March 2022: 1,791 electricity and 836 gas residential customers

- Fewer electricity and gas residential customers received tailored assistance in the most recent months between January and March 2022 period compared to late 2021. We note that:
 - Fewer electricity and gas customers were receiving tailored assistance who could pay for their on-going usage in the months between January and March 2022 compared to late 2021. The average arrears increased slightly for electricity and gas between January and March 2022. It was at its highest for gas in March 2022.
 - Fewer electricity and gas customers were receiving tailored assistance and could not pay for their on-going usage between January and March 2022 period. As the number of people who cannot pay their on-going use decreases, the average arrears for those in the cohort has been increasing and was at the highest in March 2022 for electricity and gas, the highest since the payment difficulty framework began (January 2019).
- The number of small business customers receiving payment assistance increased from January 2022. The average arrears steadily decreased for electricity and gas from December 2021 to March 2022 compared to late in 2021. The average arrears for electricity and gas small business customers in March 2022 was the lowest since April 2020.
- Fewer electricity and gas residential customers missed paying their bills by the due date in the months from January to March 2022 period. There was an increase in small business customers that missed paying their bills in January 2022, but the number reduced in the later months of the quarter.

Victorian-wide data summary¹

Disconnections for non-payment²

Indicator	Period													
	Monthly average 2018	Monthly average 2019	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 31 Jan)	Feb-22 (1 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-22 (1 Mar to 31 Mar)
Residential														
Electricity residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	2,765	1,820	1,745	1,739	956	822	238	-	22	358	919	1,894	2,616	1,791
Gas residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	1,553	922	370	833	198	251	102	-	3	59	170	361	931	836
Small business														
Electricity small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	372	335	235	222	130	142	36	-	-	73	78	139	306	174
Gas small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	50	39	8	12	3	11	3	-	-	4	7	8	24	16

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 (date ending)											
	25 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	31 Jan 2022	28 Feb 2022	31 Mar 2022
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	35,886 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%	36,537 1.4%	37,073 1.4%	36,573 1.4%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	18,845 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%	16,274 0.6%	16,745 0.6%	16,513 0.6%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$805 -	\$755 -6%	\$738 -2%	\$734 -1%	\$744 +1%	\$736 -1%	\$731 -1%	\$748 +2%	\$777 +4%	\$792 +2%	\$799 +1%	\$803 +0%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,927 -	\$1,930 +0%	\$1,910 -1%	\$1,919 +0%	\$1,883 -2%	\$1,876 -0%	\$1,860 -1%	\$1,904 +2%	\$1,916 +1%	\$1,992 +4%	\$2,049 +3%	\$2,056 +0%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,546 0.9%	2,474 0.9%	2,680 1.0%	2,597 0.9%	2,698 1.0%	2,480 0.9%	2,401 0.9%	2,335 0.8%	2,152 0.8%	2,428 0.9%	2,490 0.9%	2,496 0.9%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,507 -	\$1,449 -4%	\$1,438 -1%	\$1,349 -6%	\$1,303 -3%	\$1,347 +3%	\$1,188 -12%	\$1,305 +10%	\$1,153 -12%	\$1,195 +4%	\$1,187 -1%	\$1,129 -5%

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	Period (date ending)											
	25 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	31 Jan 2022	28 Feb 2022	31 Mar 2022
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)^{3 4}												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	283,597	294,405	287,360	290,516	286,839	292,687	294,389	295,580	248,302	240,544	237,334	245,832
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$494	\$471	\$482	\$473	\$499	\$510	\$511	\$529	\$590	\$589	\$584	\$558
	-	-5%	+2%	-2%	+5%	+2%	+0%	+4%	+12%	-0%	-1%	-4%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	52,169	54,272	50,323	43,012	51,133	50,916	46,239	40,409	43,794	54,534	47,809	45,201
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$844	\$822	\$849	\$865	\$816	\$823	\$838	\$932	\$843	\$765	\$794	\$852
	-	-3%	+3%	+2%	-6%	+1%	+2%	+11%	-10%	-9%	+4%	+7%
Submissions rates for report												
Percentage of residential customer count covered in report	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%

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

⁴ Two retailers 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.

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Indicator	Electricity											
	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)	Jan-22 (27 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-22 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-22 (01 Mar to 31 Mar)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	170 seconds	105 seconds	126 seconds	366 seconds								
Calls and enquiries (market-wide) ⁵												
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	76,763	83,115	88,218	22,559								
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	3,768	4,520	4,238	1,677								
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance												
Missed bills (market-wide) ⁶												
Total residential customers who missed bills	197,388	277,490	202,877	221,397	259,176	197,263	266,481	225,028	225,958	234,622	208,282	214,942
Total small business customers who missed bills	33,656	49,961	33,228	34,315	48,814	36,582	43,820	31,794	38,235	45,353	37,621	34,397

⁵ The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating its methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.

⁶ Previously this section was calculated as weekly average. In the January-March 2022 brief, we are reporting the total missed bills for each month due to the change in period for the data request.

Gas

Indicator	Gas											
	Period (date ending)											
	25 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	31 Jan 2022	28 Feb 2022	31 Mar 2022
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	22,571	22,116	22,409	24,552	30,277	32,488	33,909	34,476	33,208	29,191	27,544	25,249
	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.5%	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	13,385	13,375	13,635	13,720	14,281	13,884	13,741	13,510	13,204	12,933	13,151	12,795
	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$614	\$574	\$551	\$549	\$562	\$575	\$577	\$594	\$609	\$615	\$622	\$635
	-	-6%	-4%	-0%	+2%	+2%	+0%	+3%	+3%	+1%	+1%	+2%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,428	\$1,434	\$1,429	\$1,449	\$1,472	\$1,496	\$1,509	\$1,526	\$1,519	\$1,566	\$1,587	\$1,595
	-	+0%	-0%	+1%	+2%	+2%	+1%	+1%	-0%	+3%	+1%	+0%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	711	709	740	769	775	794	691	672	600	629	653	663
	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,389	\$1,436	\$1,548	\$1,522	\$1,725	\$1,806	\$1,747	\$1,705	\$1,461	\$1,524	\$1,436	\$1,356
	-	+3%	+8%	-2%	+13%	+5%	-3%	-2%	-14%	+4%	-6%	-6%

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Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)^{7 8}												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	220,165	226,758	230,148	228,651	232,895	247,391	246,964	253,150	211,905	184,850	190,426	192,590
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$364	\$354	\$374	\$385	\$435	\$429	\$434	\$425	\$489	\$516	\$471	\$446
	-	-3%	+6%	+3%	+13%	-1%	+1%	-2%	+15%	+5%	-9%	-5%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	8,683	8,918	8,619	8,382	8,214	8,797	8,620	8,625	7,901	8,686	8,512	8,615
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$1,270	\$1,209	\$1,261	\$1,265	\$1,409	\$1,447	\$1,347	\$1,429	\$1,438	\$1,425	\$1,297	\$1,274
	-	-5%	+4%	+0%	+11%	+3%	-7%	+6%	+1%	-1%	-9%	-2%

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

⁸ Two retailers 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											
	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)	Jan-22 (27 Dec to 31 Jan)	Feb-22 (01 Feb to 28 Feb)	Mar-22 (01 Mar to 31 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) ⁹												
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	2,446	2,953	3,037	1,498								
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	62	73	73	25								
Missed bills (market-wide) ¹⁰												
Total residential customers who missed bills	136,401	189,982	151,556	152,546	185,700	146,275	194,239	153,230	158,810	150,760	158,016	154,483
Total small business customers who missed bills	6,415	8,809	6,831	6,890	8,252	7,146	8,236	6,617	6,086	7,722	7,089	5,995

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

¹⁰ Previously this section was calculated as weekly average. In the January-March 2022 brief, we are reporting the total missed bills for each month due to the change in period for the data request.