

Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

Update – observations up to week ending 31 October 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 31 October 2021, we received submissions from 20 retailers covering 98 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Key findings

- There were 22 completed electricity and 3 gas disconnections for non-payment between 1 and 31 October 2021 (residential and small-business customers), as reported by two retailers. Disconnections stopped from 5 August to 21 October in response to government announcements of movement restrictions in Victoria.

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 September 2021: 0 electricity and 0 gas residential customers¹
- in October 2021: 22 electricity and 3 gas residential customers¹

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 gas and electricity in October 2021 compared to the previous month. We note that:
 - Fewer electricity customers and gas customers were receiving tailored assistance and could not pay for their on-going usage in October compared to September 2021. The average arrears for these customers slightly decreased for electricity but increased for gas in October 2021, with average arrears for gas now at its highest since the payment difficulty framework began (January 2019).
 - Fewer electricity customers but more gas customers were receiving tailored assistance who could pay for their on-going electricity usage in October compared to September 2021. The average arrears slightly decreased for electricity and remain relatively stable for gas compared to the previous month.
- The number of small business customers received payment assistance decreased in October 2021 for electricity and gas. The average arrears for electricity and gas small business customers also decreased compared to September 2021.
- More residential customers in October 2021 missed paying their bills by the due date compared to September 2021. This peaked in May 2021 for electricity customers and is currently at the highest level for gas customers.
- Fewer small business customers missed paying their bill by the due date in October compared to September 2021. This peaked in May 2021 for electricity customers and September 2020 for gas customers.

Victorian-wide data summary²

Disconnections for non-payment³

Indicator	Period													
	Monthly average 2018	Monthly average 2019	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)	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)
Residential														
Electricity residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	2,765	1,820	-	396	119	281	2,055	1,745	1,739	956	822	238	-	22
Gas residential disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	1,553	922	-	172	109	175	219	370	833	198	251	102	-	3
Small business														
Electricity small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	372	335	-	21	4	24	228	235	222	130	142	36	-	-
Gas small business disconnections for non-payment (DNP)	50	39	-	-	2	1	4	8	12	3	11	3	-	-

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)											
	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	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
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	37,115 1.4%	35,608 1.3%	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%	37,672 1.4%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	19,052 0.7%	18,543 0.7%	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%	17,230 0.6%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$708 -	\$725 +2%	\$733 +1%	\$792 +8%	\$819 +3%	\$809 -1%	\$755 -7%	\$738 -2%	\$734 -1%	\$744 +1%	\$736 -1%	\$732 -1%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,665 -	\$1,664 -0%	\$1,700 +2%	\$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%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,391 0.9%	2,146 0.8%	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%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,515 -	\$1,503 -1%	\$1,552 +3%	\$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%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	3,341	2,350	2,690	2,384	2,892	2,483	2,686	2,794	2,942	2,583	2,353	2,549
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	\$509 -	\$492 -3%	\$435 -12%	\$507 +17%	\$516 +2%	\$455 -12%	\$420 -8%	\$460 +10%	\$449 -2%	\$421 -6%	\$484 +15%	\$572 +18%
Number of small business customers	372	237	381	267	275	509	264	305	289	328	222	243

Indicator	Electricity											
	Period (week ending)											
	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	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
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	\$944 -	\$978 +4%	\$1,159 +19%	\$1,203 +4%	\$1,377 +14%	\$898 -35%	\$1,451 +62%	\$1,412 -3%	\$1,619 +15%	\$1,293 -20%	\$1,241 -4%	\$1,084 -13%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)⁴												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	283,791	287,119	286,753	278,712	288,868	280,240	294,405	287,360	290,516	286,839	292,687	294,912
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$528 -	\$544 +3%	\$562 +3%	\$531 -5%	\$495 -7%	\$503 +2%	\$471 -6%	\$482 +2%	\$473 -2%	\$499 +5%	\$510 +2%	\$510 -0%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	53,424	51,154	52,940	52,107	56,285	48,507	54,272	50,323	43,012	51,133	50,916	46,215
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$931 -	\$907 -3%	\$874 -4%	\$861 -1%	\$820 -5%	\$887 +8%	\$822 -7%	\$849 +3%	\$865 +2%	\$816 -6%	\$823 +1%	\$842 +2%
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.

Indicator	Electricity											
	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)	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)
Calls waiting times												
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	67 seconds	59 seconds	80 seconds	98 seconds	85 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>	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677		
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677	1,677		
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	232	391	491	463	398	413	493	436	74			
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	51,464	47,385	48,346	50,854	52,341	49,347	55,498	50,719	55,349	51,835	49,316	53,391
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,990	8,111	8,993	8,858	8,770	8,414	9,992	8,307	8,579	9,763	9,146	8,769

⁵ 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)											
	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	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
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	33,631 1.6%	31,378 1.5%	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%	33,903 1.7%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	14,417 0.7%	13,855 0.7%	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%	13,753 0.7%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$558 -	\$566 +1%	\$567 +0%	\$608 +7%	\$625 +3%	\$624 -0%	\$574 -8%	\$551 -4%	\$549 -0%	\$562 +2%	\$575 +2%	\$577 +0%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,319 -	\$1,314 -0%	\$1,307 -1%	\$1,404 +7%	\$1,442 +3%	\$1,417 -2%	\$1,434 +1%	\$1,429 -0%	\$1,449 +1%	\$1,472 +2%	\$1,496 +2%	\$1,507 +1%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	691 1.1%	601 0.9%	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%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,898 -	\$1,939 +2%	\$1,770 -9%	\$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%
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	2,686	1,763	1,613	1,571	1,716	1,471	1,892	2,217	2,622	2,514	1,951	2,074
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	\$380 -	\$389 +2%	\$421 +8%	\$383 -9%	\$344 -10%	\$304 -12%	\$281 -7%	\$318 +13%	\$340 +7%	\$403 +18%	\$451 +12%	\$397 -12%

Indicator	Gas											
	Period (week ending)											
	29 Nov 2020	27 Dec 2020	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
Number of small business customers	153	77	116	75	93	172	75	93	145	94	65	111
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	\$1,373	\$1,005	\$926	\$1,349	\$882	\$791	\$2,150	\$2,592	\$946	\$1,883	\$1,206	\$2,656
	-	-27%	-8%	+46%	-35%	-10%	+172%	+21%	-63%	+99%	-36%	+120%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)⁶												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	228,390	236,286	229,681	215,246	221,406	227,289	226,758	230,148	224,947	229,453	247,391	245,257
Average arrears – other residential customers	\$436	\$424	\$425	\$406	\$367	\$363	\$354	\$374	\$385	\$434	\$429	\$432
	-	-3%	+0%	-4%	-10%	-1%	-2%	+6%	+3%	+13%	-1%	+1%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	10,001	9,242	9,553	8,690	8,931	8,663	8,918	8,619	12,086	11,656	8,797	9,966
Average arrears – other small business customers	\$1,475	\$1,505	\$1,451	\$1,389	\$1,300	\$1,310	\$1,209	\$1,261	\$995	\$1,129	\$1,447	\$1,186
	-	+2%	-4%	-4%	-6%	+1%	-8%	+4%	-21%	+14%	+28%	-18%

⁶ This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

Indicator	Gas											
	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)	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)
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) ⁷												
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	2,476	3,171	2,562	3,296	2,714	2,446	2,953	3,037	1,498			
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	43	69	90	61	57	62	73	73	25			
Missed bills (market-wide)												
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	34,876	36,138	31,201	35,240	34,663	34,100	37,996	37,889	38,137	37,140	36,569	38,850
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	1,757	1,651	1,672	1,733	1,659	1,604	1,762	1,708	1,723	1,650	1,787	1,647

⁷ The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating its methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.