

Coronavirus financial hardship continues to hit Victoria

The coronavirus pandemic continues to have significant financial impact on Victorian households and small businesses, according to the state's independent economic regulator.

However, the Essential Services Commission says it is too early to tell whether the staged reduction of the JobSeeker and JobKeeper allowances is further affecting the situation.

The commission has released new data that gives valuable insight into the impact the pandemic is having on households and small businesses in relation to energy and water.

The latest monthly data shows energy and water businesses increased support to customers during November.

The reports show:

- the number of metropolitan customers on water business hardship programs continues to steadily increase, rising by 2.5 per cent in November (up 457 to 18,964).
- The debt of residential energy customers receiving payment assistance increased by four per cent for electricity and three per cent for gas
- the number of households receiving payment assistance for energy has remained stable (53,742 electricity and 46,465 gas customers at the end of November).

Commission chair Kate Symons says energy and water businesses have worked cooperatively with the commission throughout the pandemic.

"The water and energy industries have supported customers through the coronavirus pandemic to date and we hope this continues into the new year," she said.

Ms Symons says the commission will continue collecting the data as well as talking to consumer groups and community service providers to keep an eye out for any increase in hardship.

During the pandemic the commission has been reporting monthly on indicators of the level of hardship among Victoria's energy and water customers.

About the data: the data is based on weekly reports from the businesses and is not audited. We are collecting a small subset of data included in annual performance reports.

The [water data](#) and [energy data](#) are available on the commission's website.

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