

Report shows pandemic has amplified vulnerability

A new report has found the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant economic, mental and emotional impact on people, especially among those who were already vulnerable.

The Essential Services Commission has released [the report with a new strategy](#) designed to break down the barriers people face in accessing essential services like clean drinking water, affordable lighting and heating, sustainable council rates and energy efficient products.

Commission chairperson Kate Symons says working on the strategy during the first global pandemic in more than a century highlighted a need to better understand vulnerability and its relationship to accessing essential services.

“We spent 18 months talking to Victorians, consumer advocates and community service providers as well as the sectors we regulate to identify how to remove the barriers to essential services.

“We learned that people experiencing vulnerability are more like to perceive barriers as insurmountable, cumulative and repeated across multiple sectors,” she said.

The resulting strategy, **Getting to fair: breaking down barriers to essential services** contains a three-year roadmap with actions aimed at:

- improving how essential services communicate with customers so they understand their rights
- empowering consumers to make choices and seek help when they need it
- identifying consumers who need help early, and ensuring support is flexible and tailored.

The ACIL Allen report released with the strategy analysed data from April to October 2020 found:

- the number of Australians unable to pay their mortgage or rent more than doubled from 6.9 per cent to 15.1 per cent
- many of the most affected industries employ more women, young people and part-time workers, increasing vulnerability among people who have historically had less stable incomes
- a significant increase in family incidents attended by police.

It also found while the pandemic created the potential for more people to become vulnerable, those already experiencing vulnerability were harder hit.

Getting to fair: breaking down barriers to essential services and the ACIL Allen report are available on [the commission's website](#).

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