

26 March 2020

Retailers Confirm Support For Electricity Customers

The Australian Energy Council and its members understand that maintaining connection to energy is critical, and is making sure help is available for customers impacted by COVID-19.

Energy retailers stand ready to provide scalable, accessible, and tailored assistance to all affected customers.

1. In the first instance, customers should contact their retailer if they are worried about their ability to pay their bill as usual over the coming months. Retailers have a number of proactive assistance measures that will be available to any residential customer on request.
 - a. Proactive assistance measures will differ between retailers, but will include:
 - i. Payment extensions
 - ii. Payment plans
 - iii. Bill smoothing and other options to help customers avoid large bills
 - iv. Assistance with accessing grants and concessions
 - v. Advice on how to manage your usage, including tips to lower your bills
2. For impacted residential customers who cannot pay their bills as they fall due, retailers will ensure there are no barriers to entering hardship programs, and ensure long term assistance is readily available on request. Impacted customers receiving hardship assistance will not be disconnected if they are unable to afford their energy bills.
3. For customers in the hardship program, AEC members will pause any external debt collection and bankruptcy proceedings, and will not charge any late fees if these customers cannot pay on time.

It is critical that customers work with their retailer if they are able, to help minimise their costs and discuss sustainable long-term payment options. Given the varied nature of small businesses, retailers commit to working with any impacted customer to deliver sustainable solutions that will assist them at this time.

The AEC consider that this crisis requires a whole of sector response. In addition to these key commitments above, the AEC will be working with Networks, Governments, and other stakeholders to ensure emergency relief payments and other concessions are readily available and sufficient, as well as to work on developing other support measures as will no doubt be necessary over the next 6 months. As we enter winter and consumption increases, these challenges will only escalate – a collaborative response from all parties will ensure retailers continue to be able to assist their customers both now and into the future.

About the Australian Energy Council

The Council represents 23 major electricity and downstream natural gas businesses operating in competitive wholesale and retail energy markets. These businesses collectively generate the overwhelming majority of electricity in Australia and sell gas and electricity to over 10 million homes and businesses.

Media contact

Carl Kitchen

0401 691 342