

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, the Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes



Monday, 24 August 2020

NEW HELP FOR VICTORIANS WITH THEIR ENERGY BILLS

The Victorian Government is rolling out a team of financial counsellors and community workers in partnership with community organisations to give targeted advice and support to Victorians who need help with their energy bills.

The Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio today launched key components of the \$3.7 million support package, which will help thousands of Victorian households struggling to pay their energy bills.

Debt to energy companies is one of the top three most common sources of financial difficulty raised with financial counsellors and, with many Victorians seeing high bills this winter, it's vital that support can be accessed.

The suite of programs involves webinars delivered by the Consumer Policy Research Centre and a tailored Energy Assistance and Brokerage Program to help people get the best value energy deal, run by a consortium which includes the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Australian Energy Foundation and Uniting Vic.

The support is available online and over-the-phone, so Victorians can access this support from home. Financial counselling is available in languages including Arabic, Mandarin, Hindi and Vietnamese. For support call 1800 830 029, and live webinars to help households manage their energy costs can be accessed at energyinfohub.org.au

The launch coincides with the Government announcing new support measures by the Essential Services Commission to strengthen protections for residential and small business energy customers impacted by coronavirus.

These include requiring energy companies to offer assistance to small businesses experiencing financial stress, conducting tariff checks for residential customers receiving payment assistance, and helping eligible customers complete Utility Relief Grant applications over the phone, so they can have access to \$1,300 in energy bill support.

Data from the Essential Services Commission shows that each week in July, around 9,000 households called their energy company seeking assistance with managing their bills.

The Government has launched a new advertising campaign, encouraging customers doing it tough to reach out to their energy company and know their rights. The campaign will be translated into 20 languages.

Under the Government's nation-leading Payment Difficulty Framework, energy companies must assist any household that engages with them, preventing them from being disconnected.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio

"We know that staying at home is putting more pressure on household bills. These programs make sure that anyone who needs extra help with their energy bills, gets it."

"If you're doing it tough, we want you to know that there is one-on-one support available."

Quote attributed to Minister for Consumer Affairs Melissa Horne

"Expanding our Financial Counselling Program is another way the government is helping Victorians experiencing financial hardship."

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