

# Hardship fact sheet

EnergyAustralia has a range of ways to assist customers who may be struggling with their energy bills.

## Helping people in need

Energy is vital to the wellbeing of people. We can't live without it, yet each year more of us are having to make tough decisions about keeping the lights on, cooling and warming our homes and cooking meals.

Financial hardship can happen to anyone, as we have seen from the impact of COVID-19. That's why we've taken steps to make things easier for customers doing it tough to get back on track.

## What we do – EnergyAssist

There are no easy answers to solving energy hardship.

And the truth is, we can't do it alone. Our *EnergyAssist* program was developed in partnership with social support services like Uniting (formerly Kildonan UnitingCare) and state and federal governments. This program is reviewed frequently.

Since it was created in 2005, *EnergyAssist* has helped thousands of people get back in control of their energy usage and bills. Tailored payment solutions, payment matching, debt waiving, home energy audits and appliance swaps are some of the ways we might help.

Regardless of the form of support, *EnergyAssist* is most effective when customers get in touch early.

## How EnergyAssist works

The program aims to help our most vulnerable customers become financially independent to manage their energy bills.

When someone joins and providing they agree, we review their existing electricity and gas plans and make appropriate changes to ensure they're receiving our best-in-market offer and any government concessions or grants to which they're entitled.

We can also work out a payment plan based on a customer's financial capacity.

Here's more information on some of the ways we might help:

**Tailored payment solutions** – any plan must be realistic, with manageable instalments based on a person's specific circumstances. We help customers apply for any relevant government grants or assistance, provide energy efficiency advice, and most importantly, ensure the power stays on.

**Payment matching** – may be applicable for customers dependent on a person's specific circumstances.

**Debt relief** – in extreme cases, eligible customers might have portions or all of their debt waived.

**Energy efficiency visits** – through our community partnership with Uniting, customers can arrange a phone call or in-home visit to check their household appliances and ways to reduce usage costs and make sure that they aren't using more energy than they should.

**Appliance swaps** – when we find an essential appliance like a fridge, freezer, washing machine, heater or air conditioner, is old and inefficient we might replace the item at no cost.

**Referrals to external services** – often when a customer is struggling with their energy bills, they're also having problems with other expenses. We will provide these customers information relating to social services agencies offering specialist support like financial counselling, family and community services.

Call us to find out more about *EnergyAssist* on **133 466**.

From March to December 2020, our COVID-19 response have helped with:



**225,000+**

Residential customer payment plans



**185,000+**

Residential customer payment extensions



**1000+**

Businesses supported through our hardship program, Rapid Business Assist



**15,000+**

Business customer payment extensions



**1800+**

Business customer payment plans

## How Rapid Business Assist Works

Anyone can find themselves in financial hardship. There's no "average" or "typical" profile for someone in our hardship programs.

In response to COVID-19, EnergyAustralia implemented a specialised program to support businesses, called Rapid Business Assist.

Our specialist business advisors have devised more than 15,000 payment extensions, more than 1800 payment plans, helped over 1000 businesses with cash flow and provided advice on lowering energy consumption and guidance on government relief subsidies.



Call us to find out more about Rapid Business Assist for business customers on **1800 709 985**.

## Improving customer outcomes

We're doing the right thing by our customers and leading change as the only major retailer who is a signatory to the Energy Charter.

The Energy Charter is an industry led initiative focused on embedding customer-centric culture and conduct in energy businesses to create real improvements in service delivery.

Through the Energy Charter, we share best practices and collaborate on #BetterTogether initiatives that aim to solve customer problems.

## We can't do it alone

Minimising or, where we can, avoiding financial hardship is part of a broader challenge. It's about making sure everyone – no matter where they live or what they earn – has access to energy as we transition to cleaner forms of generation.

In 2014, we had Uniting evaluate our hardship program and we've been working together ever since.

## Other support available

State governments provide assistance for people having difficulty paying energy bills due to a short-term financial crisis.

The following list is not exhaustive and is intended as a guide only.

**South Australia** – Emergency Electricity Payment Scheme. Call the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion's concession hotline on **1800 307 758** or visit [sa.gov.au/concessions](http://sa.gov.au/concessions).

**New South Wales** – Energy Accounts Payment Assistance. Visit [service.nsw.gov.au](http://service.nsw.gov.au).

**Queensland** – Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme. Visit [qld.gov.au/community](http://qld.gov.au/community).

**Victoria** – Utility Relief Grant Scheme. Visit [services.dhhs.vic.gov.au](http://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au).

**Money Smart** - for additional support to pay your utility bills, visit [moneysmart.gov.au/managing-debt/problems-paying-your-bills-and-fines](http://moneysmart.gov.au/managing-debt/problems-paying-your-bills-and-fines).

Many community organisations, community legal centres and government agencies offer free financial advice. Visit [moneysmart.gov.au](http://moneysmart.gov.au) for more information.



# 23,000+

Residential customers supported by our EnergyAssist program



## Energy Charter

The only major retailer who is a signatory to the Energy Charter.



# 2014

Since 2014, we have been working with Uniting to evaluate our hardship program

