



**Having trouble paying
your energy bills?**



There are many reasons why you may be struggling to pay your energy bills – you could be using more energy than usual, your income has been recently impacted or you're already experiencing financial distress.

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that energy, as an essential service, remains available and affordable to all Victorian households and small businesses

Your right to get help

If you are having trouble paying your energy bill, there are rules which mean your energy company must let you know what help is available.

You should contact your energy company first and ask to speak to their Hardship Team to discuss your assistance options. This includes paying smaller amounts more often or delaying payment of a bill.

Payment Difficulty Framework

Victoria's Payment Difficulty Framework (PDF) is the nation's strongest, most comprehensive hardship scheme.

Under this framework, energy companies **must** work with you to help you manage your energy costs and avoid disconnection. While receiving assistance from your energy company you cannot have your electricity or gas disconnected or be pursued for debt, however it's important that you stay in contact with your energy company and meet your agreed payment plan terms.

A range of assistance options are available to you depending on your circumstances:

If you have less than \$55 owing on your bill, you can call your energy company to set up:

- an extension of the due date
- a payment plan – with regular/irregular instalments
- payment before the bill is due.

If you have \$55 or more owing on your bill, the following payment options become available to you:

- you can repay the amount owed over 2 years (while also paying for usage)
- the amount owed can be put on hold for at least six months, while you pay for less than you use.

If you have \$55 or more owing on your bill, your energy company must provide you with the above assistance and tell you about the following help available:

- government grants and concessions
- potential reviews of your contract to reduce ongoing costs and provide you with the best energy offer available
- practical advice to reduce your energy usage.

The Essential Services Commission can help you understand your energy consumer rights and rights to assistance under the PDF. Find out more at www.esc.vic.gov.au/its-your-energy

Further information and fact sheets about payment difficulties are also available on the Energy Info Hub website at www.energyinfohub.org.au/payment-difficulties

Take control of your energy bills

The Victorian Government has put in place measures to make sure Victorians are always getting a fair deal when it comes to energy.

There are four simple steps to get on the path to cheaper energy:

- check your energy **concessions**
- make sure you are on your company's **best offer** or the **Victorian Default Offer**
- apply simple energy saving tips to **keep warm and stay cool**
- ask **your energy company for help** if you're having trouble paying your bills.

Find out more below or visit the Energy Info Hub at www.energyinfohub.org.au



Concessions and grants for eligible cardholders and low-income households

Concessions

If you're an eligible concession card holder, you can apply for a range of discounts and rebates to help reduce your bills. These include:

- **Annual electricity concession** – a 17.5% discount off your annual electricity bill
- **Controlled load electricity concession** – a 13% discount off your controlled load electricity bills
- **Electricity transfer fee waiver** – have your electricity service connected for free when moving into a new house
- **Excess electricity concession** – for domestic mains electricity usage and service costs above \$2,890.45
- **Excess gas concession** – if your winter gas bill is more than you expected
- **Winter gas concession** – a 17.5% discount on your gas bill to help ease the cost of living during the winter months (1 May to 31 October each year)
- **Life support concession** – if you use a life support machine at home you could be eligible for concessions on your electricity and water bills
- **Medical cooling concession** – a concession on electricity bills related to medically-required cooling. Your medical condition must be confirmed by your doctor.
- **Non-mains energy concession** – help to cover yearly energy costs if you source non-mains energy for your heating, cooking and hot water
- **Service to property charge concession** – if your electricity usage bill is lower than the service charge, you could have the service charge reduced to the usage cost

Check your energy and gas bills to make sure your concession has been applied. If you've missed out on claiming any concessions, call your energy company and provide your concession card number and ask that they back-date your concessions for the last 12 months, or for as long as you have been eligible.

An overview of the Victorian Government's energy concessions can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services' website at services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/energy. You can also call the Victorian Concessions Information Line on **1800 658 521**.

For a fact sheet about claiming your energy concessions go to www.energyinfohub.org.au/energy-concessions

Eligible concession card holders are also entitled to a discount on their water and sewerage bills. For more information visit services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/water or contact your local water corporation as shown on your bill.

Utilities Relief Grant Scheme

If you live in a low-income household and are experiencing unexpected hardship, relief grants are available to help pay overdue energy bills due to a temporary financial crisis.

You can apply for a grant if you are an account holder who has one of the following eligible concession cards:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Health Care Card
- Veterans' Affairs Gold Card

If you don't have one of these cards but are part of a low-income household, you may also be able to apply. Your energy company will ask you some questions to check if you are eligible before issuing a form. The grant is available to renters and homeowners.

To be eligible to apply, you must meet one of the three following criteria:

- you have had a recent decrease in income, for example, lost your job
- you have had high unexpected costs for essential items
- the cost of your housing is more than 30% of your household income.

You can receive up to \$650 on each utility type in a two-year period, or \$1,300 for households with a single source of energy (e.g. electricity only). You can apply for separate grants for each utility (electricity, gas and water). The grant amount will depend on what you owe at the time of application and the reasons in your application form.

Apply for a grant by phoning your electricity, gas or water company and requesting an application form.

Further details about the grants are available at services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/utility-relief-grant-scheme. You can also call the Victorian Concessions Information Line on **1800 658 521**.



Practical tips to help you save energy and money

There are many ways to keep your energy costs down when spending time at home.

Switch off lights and electrical appliances when you don't use them

- Turn off your heater, cooling units and appliances when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Turning things off at the power point can save even more power than at the switch or using the remote control.
- Switch off your computer and equipment such as printers or wi-fi routers overnight, or while you're away. Most computers have energy saving settings which can be activated to turn the computer and screen off after a period of inactivity.

Switch to energy-saving LED light globes

- Energy-efficient globes could save you up to 80% off your lighting costs. LED bulbs use less power and last longer. That means you spend less money and time replacing them.

Shut doors and close curtains

- Shut doors to areas you're not using, and only cool or heat the rooms where you spend the most time.
- In cooler periods, make sure your curtains or blinds seal your windows properly.
- In warmer periods, keep your curtains closed during the day. By keeping the sun off your windows with external shadings such as external blinds or canvas awnings, your house will remain cooler.
- Stop cool air leaking out by blocking draughts around doors and windows.

Save energy in how you wash and dry clothes

- You can save around \$115 per year by washing clothes in cold water.
- You can also save by making sure you select the shortest appropriate washing cycle. Wait until your machine is full before starting a washing cycle.
- Clothes dryers use lots of energy. Hang clothes outside and let them dry naturally or use a fan to help dry them indoors.

Save energy in the kitchen

- Your fridge runs 24-hours a day and is one of your most expensive appliances to run.
- The ideal fridge temperature is between 4-5 degrees. Your ideal freezer temperature is between minus 15-18 degrees.
- Make sure the fridge door seal is tight and that no gaps or cracks let cold air escape. If you have a second fridge or freezer, only turn it on when you need it.
- Put frozen food in your fridge in the morning to thaw out and reduce cooking time in the evening. When you're cooking, use the microwave when you can. Microwaves use much less energy than an electric oven.
- If you use a stove, keep lids on pots to reduce cooking time. Plan to cook more and have leftover meals for the next day or the whole week. Keep leftover meals in the freezer.
- Use the economy cycle on your dishwasher, and only run it when it's full.

Manage your heating and cooling

- Every degree above 20 degrees can add 10% to your heating bill. In winter, heating can account for over 30% of your bill.
- In cooler periods, set your thermostat between 18-20 degrees. When it's warmer, set your thermostat to 26 degrees or above.
- Some ducted heating and cooling systems allow you to turn off the heating or cooling in unoccupied rooms.
- If you are a solar customer, save money with solar energy
- Using solar energy can help your household save money on energy bills.
- By using the solar electricity that you generate, you can avoid buying energy from your energy company. Additionally, solar hot water systems can also help you avoid gas charges often associated with a gas-fired water heater.

For more energy saving ideas, visit the Victorian Energy Saver website at www.victorianenergysaver.vic.gov.au

You can also download a fact sheet about saving energy from the Energy Info Hub at www.energyinfohub.org.au/saving-energy