

## Household energy debt rising despite improving economy

The amount of household debt has escalated since the start of the pandemic, according to the latest data from Victoria's independent economic regulator.

While the number of customers in debt to gas and electricity companies has slowly, but steadily increased, the amount owed has risen sharply and now stands at more than \$103 million.

Essential Services Commission chair Kate Symons says the number of customers requiring assistance with their bills is at its highest level since the pandemic began, with average debt jumping over the past few months.

"What is really worrying is that most of the indicators of harm are pointing in the wrong direction.

"While broad economic conditions have improved, more than 55,000 residential customers are receiving payment assistance and the number of disconnections is on the rise," she said.

Areas of major concern include –

- Average arrears for residential customers is at its highest level since April 2020
- The average number of households missing bill payments is at its highest level since April 2020
- The number of disconnections has risen sharply since the beginning of the year

Ms Symons says while the total number of customers in debt has only increased seven per cent, the amount owing has gone up 35 per cent since April 2020.

"This shows the pain is intensifying for those who are in financial difficulty and I'm concerned some sections of the community are getting left behind, she said.

Customers who are concerned about paying their bills should contact their energy provider and ask about payment options or whether concessions or grants may be available to them.

They can also go to the state government's [Victorian Energy Compare](#) website to see if they're on a good deal, register for an [online webinar](#) for independent advice on managing your energy bills or contact the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007.

The [latest energy data](#) is available on the commission's website.

**About the data:** the data is based on weekly reports from the businesses and is not audited.

**For further information call: David Jarwood, Senior Media Adviser, 0492 805 003**

To keep up to date, visit us at [esc.vic.gov.au](http://esc.vic.gov.au) or follow us on LinkedIn and Twitter