

Regulator urges energy companies to keep eye on vulnerable customers

The state's energy regulator says power companies need to watch out for customers who are in danger of slipping through the payment difficulty safety net, as the impact of the coronavirus pandemic continues to be felt.

Meeting with the heads of power companies last week, Essential Services Commission chair Kate Symons, said the [latest data](#) shows more signs of energy stress are emerging.

"Average debt for residential customers who can't pay for their ongoing usage has increased to \$1,588, 13 per cent higher than in April.

"For small businesses, average electricity arrears have increased 24 per cent since April (from \$1241 to \$1534)," she said.

However, Ms Symons says there are some positive signs with the number of calls for help to energy retailers at their lowest since May.

"The average number of calls for assistance was over 7,000 in May but fell to just over 3,200 in October," she said.

Ms Symons told the industry roundtable she has been heartened to hear energy businesses making promises to put their customers at the forefront of their thinking.

"This tells me they are as committed as we are to supporting our community in these difficult times," she said.

This week the commission launched a [new campaign](#) encouraging customers to call their retailer if they're worried about energy bills.

The campaign highlights the protections embedded in the state's [payment difficulty framework](#) which requires retailers to offer a range of flexible payment options, as well as putting debt on hold for six months for customers who can't pay for their ongoing usage.

Get help with energy bills, visit the [Energy Info Hub](#) or join a free online event, call the [Energy Assistance Program](#) on 1800 830 029 or the [National Debt Helpline](#) on 1800 007 007 for financial counselling, and make sure you're on your company's best offer or the [Victorian Default Offer](#).

For further information call: Michelle Bryne, Head of Strategic Communication 0437 677 385

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