

March 2024

Developing a toolkit to help consumer-facing energy businesses identify vulnerability: consultation questions

Why we are consulting

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) is developing a toolkit to help consumer-facing energy businesses identify and engage with consumers experiencing vulnerability. This toolkit is action 2 in our *Towards energy equity – a strategy for an inclusive energy market*. We are seeking your input and feedback on the draft toolkit, including:

- the better practice principles we have identified based on research and early consultation
- the consumer stories and case studies used to illustrate the better practice principles
- what additional resources or information would be useful in helping consumer-facing energy businesses and their staff implement the better practice principles.

Your input will help us finalise the toolkit and consider other opportunities to support better practice.

About the draft toolkit

The draft toolkit has been designed to help staff at consumer-facing energy businesses better identify and engage with consumers experiencing vulnerability. The draft toolkit summarises insights into 6 better practice principles:

- Build an organisational culture focused on strong customer relationships and better consumer outcomes
- Design for all consumers
- Deliver customer service that engages effectively with vulnerability
- Collaborate with other organisations
- Use data to improve outcomes
- Commit to continuously improving consumer experiences and outcomes

These principles work together to help consumer-facing energy businesses support better outcomes for consumers through earlier identification, support and intervention.

The draft toolkit includes illustrative consumer stories, better practice insights and case studies, and summaries of how to put each principle into practice. It has been informed by research and early engagement, including:

- a review of existing research and guidance
- consumer journey mapping workshops with retailers and financial counsellors
- conversations with energy retailers and distributors within the national energy market
- workshops with consumer advocates and representatives.

This process helped us understand what is already working well and identify where there may be gaps in understanding or techniques in the identification of vulnerability. The toolkit aims to share insights that consumer-facing energy businesses (including energy retailers) can adapt to their specific context. It does not set mandatory obligations for energy businesses.

Consultation questions

We invite feedback on the consultation questions outlined below.

Question 1: How appropriate and effective are the 6 better practice principles?

- You may wish to consider the insights that inform each principle and how the principles can work together to improve outcomes for energy consumers.

Question 2: How appropriate and effective are the consumer stories used to illustrate the better practice principles in action?

- You may wish to consider how well the stories represent consumers and their experiences and how effectively the stories illustrate the potential impact of better practice on energy consumers.

Question 3: How appropriate and effective are the industry case studies used to illustrate implementation of the better practice principles?

- You may wish to consider the outcomes reflected in the case studies, how they align with the better practice findings, and whether there are other examples that illustrate each principle.

Question 4: Are any aspects of the toolkit inconsistent with the needs of consumers experiencing vulnerability? If yes, please provide details.

Question 5: Would additional information and resources help consumer-facing energy businesses and their staff implement the toolkit or better practice principles? If yes, please provide details.

Question 6: Do you have any other feedback on the draft toolkit?

How to provide feedback

Submissions can be made until 17 March 2024, either directly through the [ACCC Consultation Hub](#) or by email to ConsumerPolicy@aer.gov.au.

We prefer that all submissions are publicly available to facilitate an informed and transparent consultative process. Submissions will be treated as public documents unless marked confidential.

Parties wishing to submit confidential information are requested to:

- clearly identify the information that is the subject of the confidentiality claim
- provide a non-confidential version of the submission in a form suitable for publication.

We will publish all non-confidential submissions on the project web page. For further information on the AER's use and disclosure of information provided to it, see the [ACCC/AER Information Policy, June 2014](#).

If you have any questions about this consultation, please contact the AER's Consumer Policy team at ConsumerPolicy@aer.gov.au.