

# Financial Hardship Policy

Energy On - Simplifying Utilities

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# Financial Hardship Policy

For QLD, NSW, ACT, SA & TAS Residential Customers

## Introduction

This policy applies to all Energy On residential customers living in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, who find it hard to pay their energy bills due to hardship.

You might experience hardship because of factors like:

- death in the family
- household illness
- family violence
- unemployment
- reduced income

This policy explains:

- what we will do to help you manage your energy bills
- how we consider your circumstances and needs
- your rights as a customer in our hardship program

You can ask a support person to contact us, such as:

- a financial counsellor, or
- someone who helps you manage your energy bills.

We will need your permission to talk to your support person.

## Overview

Energy On values its relationship with its customers and recognises that there may be instances where residential customers experience payment difficulties or financial hardship, as a result of which the customer may be unable to pay an outstanding amount as ordinarily required by Energy On.

If you are unable to pay your bills, Energy On may be able to provide you with support and options to get you through this difficult time. Our team can arrange a suitable plan and help you with ways to reduce your energy usage. We commit to treat you with respect and will take into consideration your particular circumstances.

Energy On customers experiencing difficulty in paying their bill should contact The Team at Energy On as soon as possible in order to discuss an appropriate solution to avoid the risk of disconnection.

Contact hours: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM (AEST) weekdays.

Telephone: 1300 323 263

E-mail: [TheTeam@EnergyOn.com.au](mailto:TheTeam@EnergyOn.com.au)

Website: [www.EnergyOn.com.au](http://www.EnergyOn.com.au)

Energy On strictly complies with the various rules and regulations governing hardship and disconnection, paying particular attention to the regulations regarding disconnection of your utility supply. We see disconnection for non-payment of invoices as a last resort and will make every reasonable effort to communicate with you to prevent this from occurring.

Working with Energy On to address your particular financial circumstances may halt the disconnection process and exempt you from further collection processes. However, it is important to note that without bill payment and adherence to the terms of any plan entered into the disconnection process may proceed.

This Financial Hardship Policy has been developed to assist residential customers experiencing financial hardship and is made in accordance with the requirements of the Energy Retail Code and the AER.

## What we will do to help you

We will tell you about our hardship program if:

- you tell us you are having trouble paying your bill
- you are referred to our program by a financial counsellor or other community worker
- we are concerned that you may be experiencing financial hardship.

We will recommend you speak to a staff member to help you join our hardship program if you have:

- a history of late payments
- broken payment plans
- requested payment extensions
- received a disconnection warning notice
- been disconnected for non-payment.

We can also support you to join our hardship program if you tell us:

- you are eligible for a relief grant or other emergency assistance
- you have personal circumstances where hardship support may help.

For example, death in the family or job loss. You may have trouble paying your bills for different reasons. Please contact us so we can discuss your individual situation.

Our staff are specially trained to help you with hardship. Staff will:

- ask you a few questions about your circumstances
- work out if you can join the hardship program.

We will assess your application for hardship assistance within 14 business days and we will let you know if you are accepted into our hardship program within 14 business days from receipt of the application.

If you are accepted into our hardship program, we will:

- tell you if you are on the right energy plan or if there is a better plan for you
- tell you about government concessions, relief schemes or energy rebates you may be able to receive
- give you ideas about how to reduce your energy use
- talk to you about a payment amount that suits your circumstances.

We can send you a free copy of our hardship policy.

## Payment Options

### What we will do

There are different payment options available to hardship customers, including:

- Payment Plans
- Centrepay

Where the customer enters into a payment plan or arrangement, Energy On encourages the Customer to pay via one of the following options, where applicable.

- BPay
- EFT
- Direct Debit
- Cheque
- Credit Card

When you are in our hardship program, we will offer you flexible payment options to suit your individual situation. To make your payment plan, we will consider:

- how much you can pay
- how much you owe
- how much energy we expect you will use in the next 12 months.

This will help us figure out a payment plan that is right for you. We will offer a payment plan to suit your situation. This will include payments to cover:

- what you owe
- an amount to cover your energy use.

Once we agree to a payment plan, we will send you information including:

- who you can contact for more help
- how long the payment plan will go for
- the amount you will pay each time
- how many payments you need to make
- when you need to make your payments (this is also called the frequency of the payments)
- how we worked out your payments.

You can choose to use Centrepay, if you are eligible. Centrepay is a free service you can use to help pay your bills. Centrepay can automatically take an amount of money from your Centrelink payments to go toward energy bills and expenses.

We will see if another energy plan may be better for you. If you agree, we can transfer you to a better energy plan for free.

For residential customers facing a state of immediate financial disadvantage, Energy On will temporarily suspend any disconnection and debt recovery procedures, though will not automatically waive overdue notices, reconnection or dishonour fees (where incurred) nor automatically reduce charges. However, after making an assessment Energy On may consider such options if it views this is warranted in the circumstances.

If you miss a payment, we will contact you to see if you need help. We will contact you by phone and by email or post.

### **What you must do**

Tell us if your situation changes and you can no longer make the payments in your plan. We can then review your payment arrangements. Tell us if your contact details change.

We may stop helping you if you:

- stop making payments under your plan
- do not tell us when your contact details change.

If you have had two payment plans cancelled in the last 12 months because you did not follow your plan:

- we do not have to offer you another plan
- we might disconnect your energy.

### **Other supports to help you pay your energy bill**

Depending on the state or territory you live in, there are other supports to help you pay your energy bills.

### **What we will do**

We will tell you about other ways you can get help to pay your energy bill, such as:

- government relief schemes
- energy rebates
- concession programs
- financial counselling services.

### **Concession Information**

#### **Non-Mains Energy Concession**

You may also be eligible for a grant through the Non-Mains Energy Concession. This grant assists concession cardholders who access non-mains electricity via an embedded network.

All non-mains energy costs are covered from 1 January to 31 December each year. The amount of the rebate depends on the amount of energy purchased during that period from a non-mains energy source.

To be eligible for this concession you must hold at least one of the following concession cards:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Health Care Card
- DVA Gold Card

#### **NSW Concession Information**

The NSW Government Department of Industry – Resources & Energy has a range of rebates and concession schemes available for customers experiencing hardship. More information on the available schemes can be found here: <http://www.resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au/energy-consumers/financial-assistance/rebates>

#### **Queensland Concession Information**

The Queensland Government has a range of rebates and concession schemes available for customers experiencing hardship. More information on the available schemes can be found here: <https://www.qld.gov.au/community/cost-of-living-support/energy-concessions/>

### **South Australian Concessions:**

The South Australian Government has a range of rebates and concession schemes available for customers experiencing hardship. More information on the available schemes can be found here: <https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/employment-money-taxes/financial-support/concessions-and-benefits/concessions/energy-bill-concessions>

### **What we need you to do**

If you find out you are eligible for these programs, let us know as soon as possible so we can help you.

## **Our programs and services**

As a hardship customer, you can access a range of programs and services to help you:

### **Reduction and/or waiver of fees, charges and debt**

Energy On will review each customer's circumstances on a case by case basis when considering whether to reduce and/or waive an outstanding debt. However, generally Energy On will waive debt only in cases of:

- Death
- Spousal separation
- Domestic Violence

However, debt reduction and/or waiver may also be considered in other extenuating circumstances and will be considered by senior Energy On staff on a case-by-case basis on information provided to Energy On.

### **Temporary Suspension of Disconnection and Debt Recovery Procedures (Moratorium)**

Energy On will temporarily suspend any disconnection and debt recovery procedures where a customer is assessed as experiencing payment difficulties or financial hardship.

The length of the temporary suspension will be for a period of 14 business days, but may be extended if requested by the customer, where a consumer representative organisation requires more time to assess the customer's capacity to pay.

### **What we will do**

We will consider your individual situation to find the right programs (e.g. concession programs) or services that meet your needs.

## **We want to check you have the right energy plan**

### **What we will do**

When you join our hardship program, we will talk to you about your energy use and whether you are on the right plan. If we think there is a better energy plan for you, we will:

- explain why the plan is better
- ask if you'd like to transfer to the new plan for free.

We will only talk to you about energy plans we can offer.

## We can help you save energy

Using less energy can save you money.

### What we will do

When you join our hardship program, we can give you tips to use less energy. This can be different depending on the state or territory you live in.

## We will work with you

If you have joined our hardship program, we will not:

- charge late payment fees
- require a security deposit
- make changes to your plan without your agreement.

For example, we will not put you on a shortened collection cycle unless you agree first.

## Definitions

### Payment Difficulties

Payment difficulties are where a residential customer experiences immediate financial disadvantage due to a change in personal circumstances such that they cannot pay an outstanding amount due for power usage.

A change in personal circumstances is defined in the Energy Retail Code to include:

- Sudden and unexpected disability, illness of or injury to the residential customer or a dependant of the residential customer;
- Loss of or damage to property of the residential customer; or
- Other similar unforeseeable circumstances arising as a result of events beyond the control of the residential customer.

### Financial Hardship

Financial hardship is a more serious situation where payment of an amount for power usage would affect the residential customer's ability to meet their basic living needs or those of a dependant.

The criteria for determining financial hardship may be caused by (but is not limited to) sustained incidence of one or more of the factors listed below:

- Loss of the customer's or family member's primary income;
- Spousal separation or divorce;
- Physical and mental health issues;
- Loss of a spouse or a loved one;
- Chronically ill child;
- Domestic violence;
- Budget management issues associated with a low income; and

Other unforeseen factors resulting in a customer's incapacity to pay, such as a reduction in income or an increase in non-discretionary expenditure.