

Help with bills

Information for people affected by cancer

Electricity, gas, water and phone bills can cause financial difficulty. This fact sheet explains options to help you pay your utility bills.

If you are having trouble paying your electricity, gas, water or telephone bills, you have several options:

- Contact your provider immediately to discuss your situation
- Check whether you are eligible to claim a rebate or concession
- Find out if you are eligible to receive a voucher or grant to assist with the cost of utility bills
- Try to lower future costs by reducing your usage.

Payment arrangements

Most electricity, gas and water providers are legally obliged to help you if you are having difficulty paying your bills by offering flexible payment arrangements. These are called hardship programs.

To register, tell your provider that you are having trouble paying. They will try to help you by deferring the payment or agreeing that you can pay by instalments.

Once you are registered and actively participating in a hardship program (that is, making payments), your electricity and gas supply cannot be disconnected.

Each company operates its own hardship program. Contact your electricity, gas or water provider for more information.

Rebates, discounts and concessions

Rebates, discounts and concessions can help reduce the amount you pay on your utility bills.

You can apply for the following rebates:

- **Annual Electricity Concession** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, a Health Care Card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card. If eligible, you will receive a 17.5% discount on the eligible portion of your electricity bill.
- **Winter Gas Concession** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, a Health Care Card or a DVA Gold Card. If eligible, you will receive a 17.5% discount on the eligible portion of your gas bill from 1 May to 31 October each year.
- **Medical Cooling Concession** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, a Health Care Card or a DVA Gold Card and be medically unable to regulate your body temperature. If eligible, you will receive a 17.5% discount off electricity costs from 1 November to 30 April each year
- **Life Support Rebate** – If you need certain medical equipment in your home to sustain your life, such as a respirator or dialysis machine, you may be eligible for the Life Support Rebate. This provides a quarterly discount on electricity and/or waste bills, depending on the equipment used and its usage.
- **Telstra Pensioner Discount** – If you receive a Centrelink or DVA pension, you may be eligible for a discount on connection charges and a monthly call discount on certain Telstra plans. Call Telstra to discuss your options.



Don't wait until you are disconnected, as you will then incur disconnection and connection fees.

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Water and Sewerage Concession - If you hold a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or DVA Gold Card, you may be eligible for a 50% discount on water and sewerage per year, up to an annual maximum of \$291.

To find out more or to apply for a rebate, discount or concession on your electricity or telephone bill, contact your provider or call the Victorian Concessions Information Line on 1800 658 521.

Vouchers and grants

Customers in financial hardship can apply for payment vouchers or grants to put towards their utility bills. These are available through community welfare organisations, such as St Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, The Smith Family, Anglicare, some migrant centres, community centres, Indigenous services, or directly from government departments. For further information about which organisations may be able to help, call Cancer Council 13 11 20 or Service NSW on 13 77 88.

Types of vouchers you can apply for include:

- **Utility Relief Grant** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or DVA Gold Card, or be registered with your provider's hardship program and unable to pay your utility bills due to a temporary financial crisis.
- **Telstra Bill Assistance Certificates** – Community welfare agencies issue certificates for a fixed amount, which can be put towards your Telstra bill. Each community organisation will use its own guidelines to decide whether a voucher will be issued.

Reduce your usage

To help reduce your utility bills, you can lower your usage or switch to a free or low-cost service.

The following program may help:

- **Telstra InContact** – People who hold a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or DVA Concession Card may be eligible for a limited free home phone service for up to 12 months. This can be used to receive incoming calls (except reverse charge calls) and to call some emergency service numbers.
- **Sustainability Victoria** - You can learn about how to reduce your usage and lower your energy bills at sustainability.vic.gov.au.

Make a complaint

If you have contacted your utility provider and they won't help you, you can complain to one of the following ombudsman schemes:

- Energy and Water Ombudsman, 1800 246 545
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, 1800 062 058.

Note to reader

This fact sheet provides general information relevant to Victoria only and is not a substitute for legal advice. You should talk to a lawyer about your specific situation.

Cancer Council Victoria
615 St Kilda Road, Melbourne VIC 3004
Cancer Council 13 11 20 for Information and Support
Facsimile (03) 9514 6800
Email enquiries@cancervic.org.au
Website cancervic.org.au



For information and support on cancer-related issues, call Cancer Council **13 11 20**. This is a confidential service.