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## Payment difficulties: new rules = more options



If you're having any difficulties paying a bill, call your energy company.



Most of us have, at some point, worried about our energy bill. The Victorian Government recognised that something needed to be done and put in place new rules on 1 January 2019.

These rules mean that every energy company must now support anyone who has difficulty paying their bill. This support is open to everybody – you do not need a concession card or anything else to get help. It's all based on the type of difficulty you are having.

Before you call, here are some things you should know.

1. If you owe money from your old bills, you have the right to:
  - a payment plan that pays off the money you owe in equal amounts over two years
  - advice from your energy company on how to lower your energy costs.

2. If you owe money on your old bills and cannot afford the energy costs on your next bills, you have the right to:
  - get a six-month freeze on paying off the money you owe
  - set your own payment plan amount to what you can afford
  - get support from your energy company to lower your costs to an amount you can afford.

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If you have any difficulty paying your bill and your energy company does not give you the support you need, contact the free energy ombudsman service on 1800 500 509.

3. Make sure all **eligible concessions** are registered to your account

It's a good idea to give your energy company your concession card details whenever you speak to them so that they can ensure you're getting all of your concessions.

4. Know your **rights around disconnection**

You cannot be disconnected if you:

- owe less than \$300 on your energy bill
- are making payments on your payment plan - it's ok if you occasionally miss a payment, pay a bit late or are unable to pay the full amount - just call your energy company to let them know
- have applied for a Utility Relief Grant to pay up to \$1,300 of unpaid electricity and gas bills (call your energy company to apply).

The new rules for energy companies in Victoria mean that disconnection for non-payment of a bill only happens when everything else has been tried. Your energy company will always try and contact you before disconnecting your home. If you get a disconnection message, it is very important to call the energy company so you can set up a new payment plan and keep the power on at your home.