



August 2023

Stay ahead of energy prices

We know that rising energy prices are impacting Victorian households. See how you can take control of your energy bills and find out what support is available if you need it.

Visit www.energy.vic.gov.au/for-households

+ What's happening in the energy market?

Right now, Australia is experiencing higher prices for gas and electricity, for several reasons:

- The invasion of Ukraine triggered a global supply shock that has sent the prices of gas, black coal and fuels skyrocketing as Russia's oil and gas continue to be sanctioned
- Unplanned outages and reductions in output at Australian coal-fired power stations have driven up the need for gas-fired electricity generation
- Ongoing supply chain disruptions, including delivering coal to power plants

All of this has led to an extraordinary rise in wholesale gas and spot electricity prices, and this in turn has resulted in retail price rises.

With our nation-leading transition to renewable energy helping to insulate Victorians, our energy price increases have been less than in other states. However, rising energy bills are putting pressure on businesses and households.

Learn more at www.energy.vic.gov.au/about-energy/whats-happening-in-the-energy-market

Follow these energy savings tips to save money on your bills, and future proof your home through our energy efficiency and savings programs.

+ Quick wins to save money on your next bills

Find the best energy deal

While you're at Victorian Energy Compare, check you are on the best energy plan. The website is the only free and independent online energy price comparison service for Victorians and is always the best place to find your best energy deal.

Use an in-home display to monitor your energy use

Smart meters can help you to understand and manage your energy use and costs. In-home displays make it possible for you to monitor and check your household energy use by showing the data from your smart meter.



Practical tips to help you save energy and money

There are many ways to keep your energy costs down when spending time at home.

Use your reverse-cycle air conditioner to heat your home

The easiest and most cost-effective saving you can make is to use your electric reverse-cycle air conditioner to heat your home – it's much cheaper than your gas heater, or other forms of heating. Make sure your system is set to the sun icon and the fan icons are on. By 31 May 2023, the Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program will introduce new incentives to help replace space heating appliances with efficient electric equipment.

Manage your heating and cooling

- When using your heater this winter, only heat the rooms you are using and close doors and curtains to keep the warm air in.
- By setting your heater to between 18-20 degrees you can keep your home warm and keep costs down. Every degree higher than this can add around 15% to your gas or electricity bill.
- To stay warm and save money on your bills this winter, fit draught seals on the openings of windows and doors. (However, if you're still using an inefficient open-flued gas space heater, you'll need to ensure you have ventilation in the room.)

Switch off lights and electrical appliances when you don't use them

- Turn off your heater, cooling units, computer, and appliances when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Turning electric devices off at the power point can save more power than at the switch or using the remote control. Up to 10% of your household's electricity can be used by electronic devices on standby.
- Most computers have energy saving settings which can be activated to turn the computer and screen off after a period of inactivity.

Switch to energy-saving LED light globes

- Energy-efficient globes could save you up to 80% off your lighting costs. LED bulbs use less power and last longer. That means you spend less money and time replacing them.

Save energy in how you wash and dry clothes

- You can save around \$115 per year by washing clothes in cold water.
- Wait until your washing machine and dishwasher are full before running a cycle.
- Clothes dryers use lots of energy. Hang clothes outside and let them dry naturally or use a fan to help dry them indoors.

Save energy in the home

- Your fridge runs 24-hours a day and is one of your most expensive appliances to run. The ideal fridge temperature is between 4-5 degrees. Your ideal freezer temperature is between minus 15-18 degrees.
- Make sure the fridge door seal is tight and that no gaps or cracks let cold air escape. If you have a second fridge or freezer, only turn it on when you need it.
- Use the economy cycle on your dishwasher, and make sure it's full before running a cycle.
- Replace your old shower head with a more efficient one and save around \$160 each year on energy and water bills. Rebates are also available when you upgrade to a water-saving shower head under the Victorian Energy Upgrades program.
- Save between \$40 and \$80 each year by selecting the cold water setting on your washing machine.
- Be conscious of how often you open the oven door while cooking. This limits the amount of heat that escapes. It's also a good idea to make sure that the seal around your oven door is intact.

Make the most of your solar energy

- If you have taken the opportunity to get a solar system, make the most of your electricity by using it during the day when the sun is shining.
- Start by using your most energy-intensive appliances like your dishwasher and washing machine during the day.
- By maximising your solar electricity throughout the day, you can reduce or avoid the need to buy energy from your retailer at night.



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Lock in long-term energy savings

Upgrade and save with the Victorian Energy Upgrades program

The Victorian Energy Upgrades (VEU) program provides homes and businesses with access to discounted energy-efficient products. These include heating, water heating, lighting and draft sealing products.

An average household could expect to save \$110 a year.

Solar Homes Program

Switching to solar can save a typical household more than \$1,000 every year on energy bills.

Solar Victoria's Solar Homes Program helps Victorians make the switch by offering eligible households a rebate of up to \$1,400 to install rooftop solar (PV), plus an optional interest free loan to reduce the up-front cost of installation.

A rebate of up to \$1,000 is also available for households purchasing eligible heat pump and solar hot water systems.

Heating water accounts for more than 20% of total energy use in the home and energy efficient hot water systems are a great option to save on energy costs. On average, you can expect to save between \$140 to \$400 per year on your electricity bills with an energy efficient system installed.

Residential Efficiency Scorecard

Getting a Scorecard rating from a government-accredited assessor provides tailored information to ensure that money you spend on upgrades leads to a cheaper to run, cosy home. There are a range of energy upgrades available, from insulation and draught-proofing to heating and cooling. Your assessor can guide you through the options and suggest which government rebates may be available to you.

There are many reasons why you may be struggling to pay your energy bills – higher energy prices, using more energy than usual, increased mortgage repayments or rental prices, or you're already experiencing financial distress.



Your right to get help

There are measures in place to make sure you are always getting a fair deal when it comes to energy. If you are having trouble paying your energy bill, there are rules which mean your energy company must let you know what help is available.

Contact your energy company first and ask to speak to their Hardship Team to discuss your assistance options. This includes paying smaller amounts more often or delaying payment of a bill.

Payment Difficulty Framework

Victoria's Payment Difficulty Framework (PDF) is the nation's strongest, protection regime for households that are having trouble paying their bills.

Under this framework, energy companies **must** work with you to help you manage your energy costs and avoid disconnection. While receiving assistance from your energy company you cannot have your electricity or gas disconnected for non-payment or be pursued for debt, however it's important that you stay in contact with your energy company and meet your agreed payment plan terms.

If you have less than \$55 owing on your bill, you can call your energy company to set up:

- an extension of the due date
- a payment plan – with regular/irregular instalments
- partial payment before the bill is due.

If you have \$55 or more owing on your bill, the following payment options become available to you:

- you can repay the amount owed over 2 years (while also paying for usage)
- the amount owed can be put on hold for at least six months, while you pay for less than you use.

Your energy company must also tell you about the following help available:

- government grants and concessions
- potential reviews of your contract to reduce ongoing costs and provide you with the best energy offer available
- practical advice to reduce your energy usage.

The Essential Services Commission can help you understand your energy consumer rights and rights to assistance under the PDF.



Concessions and grants for eligible cardholders and low-income households

Concessions

If you're an eligible concession card holder, you can apply for a range of discounts and rebates to help reduce your bills. These include:

- **Annual electricity concession** – a 17.5% discount off your annual electricity bill.
- **Controlled load electricity concession** – a 13% discount off your controlled load electricity bills.
- **Electricity transfer fee waiver** – have your electricity service connected for free when moving into a new house.
- **Excess electricity concession** – for domestic mains electricity usage and service costs above \$2,973.
- **Excess gas concession** – if your winter gas bill is more than you expected.
- **Winter gas concession** – a 17.5% discount on your gas bill to help ease the cost of living during the winter months (1 May to 31 October each year).
- **Life support concession** – if you use a life support machine at home you could be eligible for concessions on your electricity and water bills.
- **Medical cooling concession** – a concession on electricity bills related to medically-required cooling. Your medical condition must be confirmed by your doctor.
- **Non-mains energy concession** – help to cover yearly energy costs if you live in an embedded network or source non-mains energy for your heating, cooking and hot water.
- **Service to property charge concession** – if your electricity usage bill is lower than the service charge, you could have the service charge reduced to the usage cost.

Check your energy and gas bills to make sure your concession has been applied. If you've missed out on claiming any concessions, call your energy company and provide your concession card number and ask that they back-date your concessions for the last 12 months, or from your concession card start date, if that is more recent.

To talk to someone, call the Victorian Concessions Information Line on 1800 658 521.

Energy Assistance Program

The Victorian Government's Energy Assistance Program is a free service designed to support you if you are having trouble paying your energy bills. It will help you to save money and receive help connecting with your energy retailer.

The program aims to:

- provide you with one-on-one help to navigate the energy market
- help you manage the rising cost of living by saving money on energy bills
- help you understand the energy affordability support and help you take part in the energy market more often.

To access the program, you should:

- hold a Commonwealth Government Concession card; or
- be struggling or expecting to struggle to pay their energy bill.

For over the phone and in-person support, contact our community outreach partner Anglicare Victoria on 1800 161 215. For in-person support only, contact Community Information & Support Victoria on (03) 9571 7644.

Utility Relief Grant Scheme

If you live in a low-income household and are experiencing unexpected hardship, relief grants are available for eligible households to help pay overdue energy bills due to a temporary financial crisis.

You can apply for a grant if you are an account holder who has one of the following eligible concession cards:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Health Care Card
- Veterans' Affairs Gold Card

If you don't have one of these cards but are part of a low-income household, you may also be able to apply. The grant is available to renters and homeowners.

Talk to your energy company to check your eligibility. They will provide you with an application form and help you to fill it out if you need assistance.



To be eligible to apply, you must meet one of these criteria:

- you have had a recent decrease in income, for example, lost your job
- you have had high unexpected costs for essential items
- the cost of your housing is more than 30% of your household income.

You can receive up to \$650 on each utility type in a two-year period, or \$1,300 for households with a single source of energy (e.g. electricity only). You can apply for separate grants for each utility (electricity, gas and water). The grant amount will depend on what you owe at the time of application and the reasons in your application form.

To talk to someone, call the Victorian Concessions Information Line on 1800 658 521.

What happens if my energy retailer goes out of business?

Arrangements are in place to ensure your electricity and gas supply continues even if your current retailer can no longer provide it.

Energy and Water Ombudsman

If you've complained to your energy company about the service they're offering you and nothing has been resolved, you can lodge a complaint with the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) and they'll investigate.

To talk to someone, call 1800 500 509.

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