

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:

- **Electricity Rebate** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, a Queensland Seniors Card, or a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card. The amount is \$320.97 per year and is rebated in instalments on your electricity bill.
- **Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, a Queensland Seniors Card, or a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card. The amount is \$67.60 per year and is rebated as a daily rate on your gas bill.
- **Home Energy Assistance Scheme** - You may be eligible if you hold a concession card and are part of your energy provider's hardship program, or have an income less than the Australian Government's maximum income rate for part-age pensioners. The amount is a one-off emergency payment of up to \$720 in any 12 month period for a maximum of two consecutive years.
- **Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Scheme** – This is available if you have a chronic medical condition, which is aggravated by changes in temperature. To be eligible, you must have a qualifying medical condition, hold a current Pensioner Concession or Health Care card and live at your principal place of residence, which has an air-conditioning unit. The amount is \$320.97 per year, paid in instalments.
- **Electricity Life Support** – If you need certain medical equipment in your home to sustain your life, such as a respirator or dialysis machine, you may be eligible. The amount ranges from \$109-164



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

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per quarter, depending on the type of equipment you need.

- **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.

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 Queensland Government on 13 74 68.

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.

Types of vouchers you can apply for include:

- **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. For more information, visit yourenergysavings.gov.au.

The following program may help:

- **Telstra InContact** – People who hold a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or Department of Veterans' Affairs 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.

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 Queensland, 1800 662 837
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, 1800 062 058.

Note to reader

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

Cancer Council Queensland

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Cancer Council 13 11 20 for Information and Support

Facsimile (07) 3257 1306

Website cancerqld.org.au



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