



Red Energy Hardship Policy

**South Australia, New South Wales,
Queensland, Australian Capital Territory.**

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1. Introduction

Red Energy believes in being fair and going that extra mile for our customers. With our award winning customer service we are here to lend a hand. For some customers the challenge is short term – maybe just a week or two. For others it's a bit longer, and while every instance is unique, there is one thing that's the same between everyone: it's a very personal journey and one which we treat with respect and care.

This policy applies to all residential customers living in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, 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 also ask a support person to contact us, such as:

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

We will engage with your representative or support person as we would with you but we need your permission to talk to them. This is to protect your privacy and to ensure we act in a manner consistent with your consent and instruction. If you would like someone to act on your behalf, you will need to contact us in their presence or you will need to complete an Authority to Act form. This is available on our website or you contact us and we can send the form to your address via mail.

At Red Energy we commit to:

- acting fairly and reasonably when assessing your known circumstances;
- using our best endeavours to provide timely and sustainable assistance;
- giving you clear information about the available assistance in a timely manner, including when you contact us;

- providing assistance to anyone entitled to receive it as soon as practicable.

2. Are you doing it tough?

Getting in touch with us as soon as you think you might have trouble paying a bill is the best way to remain in control and to stop you from accruing arrears. Our specifically trained team can handle enquiries about this policy and our Customer Care program. They are available 8:00am - 6:00pm Monday to Friday and can be contacted on 1800 723 741 or by email at customer.carehardship@redenergy.com.au. We offer a wide range of options available to all active residential customers. You might need just a few days extension to tide you over until payday, would prefer more frequent billing, or to smooth out your bills and payments.

We have a range of systems and processes in place to ensure you are aware of and can access the assistance that you are entitled to. This includes our obligations under the National Energy Retail Law, the National Energy Retail Rules, and the Australian Energy Regulator's Hardship Guideline for retailers. At a minimum, we are able to offer you:

- **An extension to pay your bill:** we can extend your due date once per year to give you the chance to pay in full;
- **Instalment plans:** confident you will be able to pay your bill off before your next bill is issued? A short term instalment plan gives you a chance to make regular payments and clear any balance before your next bill is issued;
- **Shortening your billing cycle:** if you have a smart meter we can offer you monthly billing. A shorter billing cycle can make it easier to keep your bills in check. You are even able to decide which day of the month you'd like us to send your bill;
- **EvenPay:** EvenPay allows you to smooth out your payments over the year to help you budget;
- **Pay in advance:** would you prefer to chip away at your bills before they even arrive? Some customers like to make payments in advance, so when your bill arrives it's already partially paid off;
- **Energy Efficiency Advice:** we understand energy can be complex, so give us a call for a chat about how to reduce your energy costs. During the call we can discuss how to use your appliances more efficiently.

We will tell you about our hardship program if:

- you tell us that 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 loss of job.

You may have trouble paying your bills for different reasons. Please contact us so we can discuss your individual situation.

3. Rights and assistance for customers with specific needs

It is important that all our customers know that assistance is available. We understand at times language barriers may make it difficult for you to communicate effectively with us. If such is the case, we may use interpreter services to make interactions easier with us. The back page of your electricity or gas bill will include contact information for interpreter services and hearing or speech impaired services. At any time if you are unsure or have a special request, just ask one of our team members for assistance.

If there is a particular contact method that works best for you, let us know, and we will do our best to communicate in this manner in the first instance. In some circumstances it may be necessary to use an alternate contact method (for example, in an emergency or as a last resort). All bills, reminder notices and disconnection letters will also include details on how to access the program, and other assistance that may be available.

This policy and the details of our Customer Care Program will be available on our website. You will be able to access this policy from the homepage by visiting www.redenergy.com.au/assistance. If you do not have access to the internet, you can contact us via phone and we will provide a copy of this hardship policy in English or a common community language upon request. The policy will be provided to you at no cost and through your preferred method of communication. If you have not indicated a preference of communication, we will send you a copy of this hardship policy via mail. The details of the program will be distributed to Welfare and Financial Counsellors and other agencies upon request and as required.

4. The Payment Assist program

If your payment difficulties can't be resolved with one of our short term assistance options, you might need a longer, more affordable payment plan. Our payment plans are specifically tailored

to your needs, giving you the flexibility to repay your outstanding balance and future energy use in a way that suits your situation. The length of the plan will depend on your needs and how much you can afford. If you need a hand working this out just let us know. Up on agreeing to a mutually acceptable payment plan, you will be provided with a written schedule outlining the total number of payments, the period over which they are to be made, and the date and amount of each payment.

In all situations, we will clearly explain the details of the assistance you are receiving, any actions you need to take and any timeframes for those actions.

If your needs are more severe, the Payment Assist team may refer customers to the Customer Care team. Payment Assist Specialists can also flag a possible hardship customer proactively, based on any information you are willing to provide and refer to the Care team for further assessment.

5. Customer Care Program

Red Energy has established a hardship policy designed to provide assistance and ongoing support to customers who are experiencing financial difficulties. Known as the Customer Care Program, we offer a range of services to help customers manage their accounts by providing practical assistance to alleviate both short and long term financial hardship. The aim is to assist customers to manage the repayment of both arrears and ongoing consumption while providing an environment where customers can regain control of their energy bills

Role of the Customer Solutions Team: Our Customer Solutions Consultants will refer customers who might need assistance to a member of the Payment Assist team whenever possible. Should a call back be required at a more suitable time, we will arrange this with you.

Role of the Customer Care Team: Our Customer Care Specialists are available to provide immediate tailored support to hardship customers. This policy has been designed to address these responsibilities, and provides a flexible framework within which Red Energy's Customer Care team can operate.

The Customer Care Program is available to customers who might have difficulty keeping to standard payment plans. Referrals to the program can be initiated from within areas of the business or at the request of the customer, a Financial Counsellor or other representative. The Customer Solutions Team and Payment Assist teams are trained to identify triggers of financial hardship.

The Customer Care team has been established to provide specialist support and management of vulnerable customers that have been identified as requiring additional assistance. The program provides options including tailored payment plans, practical energy assistance measures, and ongoing support.

We commit that:

- All customers referred to the Customer Care Program will be treated with courtesy, respect and decency;
- All information that you provide will be treated as confidential and handled with the utmost care;
- Any residential customer who is willing to pay their account but is unable to meet the minimum requirements will be considered for the program;
- Any payment plans agreed with the customer will take into account their current and future requirements;
- The account will be protected from disconnection and standard collection activity while the customer is on the program;
- We will clearly outline all the steps you must take to continue to receive assistance, including required timeframes for your actions. These are guided by minimum standards under regulation but we can offer additional flexibility when you work with us and allow us to better understand how we can assist.

Our programs to assist customers experiencing payment difficulties are part of all induction and refresher training for front line staff and management. Refresher training modules are incorporated into the training programme to ensure ongoing learning. Given our robust training programme, our team is provided with the necessary understanding and abilities to respond to your queries, and identify and inform customers who are experiencing payment difficulties of the existence of our hardship policy and the Customer Care Program.

In addition, our Customer Care and Payment Assist Specialists are given specific training on identifying and managing customers in hardship. This training may also include the utilisation of external agencies to assist in the sensitive management of customers in the program. This training is frequently updated and refreshers are provided periodically to ensure ongoing learning so our team can continue to effectively assist customers in need. Our processes are regularly reviewed to ensure we continue to identify hardship as soon as possible and to deliver effective assistance.

6. Identifying Customers for the Care Program

Red Energy actively identifies customers who may be vulnerable and experiencing financial hardship to ensure they are offered a range of options to assist them in managing their energy bills. Our staff are specially trained to help you with your hardship. When you contact us, our staff will:

- Ask you a few questions about your circumstances;

- Work out if you can join the hardship program.

In providing assistance to you, we will have regard to your circumstances that we are aware of. They may include, but are not limited to:

- customers who let us know they are in financial hardship and are unable to pay their bill by the due date;
- customers advising of recent events that place them in a vulnerable financial position such as job loss, illness, family violence, or a sudden change in living circumstances;
- customers receiving assistance from a financial counsellor or other advocates;
- customers with limited or no english skills;
- customers that have a history of late payments or failed payment plans;
- a high bill;
- temporary loss of income or variable income;
- history of broken payment plans;
- low literacy or numeracy;
- a death in the family;
- an unexpected essential cost of living expenses;
- receiving several bills at once.

The above list are indicators of possible hardship and is not exhaustive. We don't require you to provide this information to receive assistance but it may help us to tailor a solution to your individual circumstances. We will not impose unreasonable conditions on entry or re-entry to our hardship program. All bills, reminder notices and disconnection warnings contain information advising customers to let us know if they are experiencing difficulties and that options are available to assist them with payments. This includes clear information about key dates and any next steps, such as dates by which you need to make a payment or contact us. Remember, it is critical that you keep us informed if your circumstances change, or you think you might have difficulties making your agreed payments.

7. Assessment Process

When you get in touch with us, we will discuss what you can afford to pay. This is a very individual conversation and based on the outcome of that discussion, we will establish a sustainable payment plan that allows you to cover your ongoing consumption costs, and chip away at your arrears over time.

If you don't know what you can afford, we can help or refer you to an independent third party for advice. We may ask you some additional questions to ensure the most appropriate payment options are provided, and work with you to make sure you understand your regulatory entitlements and are receiving all the government and non-government assistance you are eligible for.

The aim of this assessment is to establish open communication with you and to alleviate any immediate concerns regarding the arrears and ongoing management of your account. By maintaining a respectful and considered approach, the Customer Care Specialist will provide personalised assistance that sets you on the path towards sustainability. The success of the program is dependant on our customer fully engaging in the process and meeting the agreed solutions (or letting us know if something goes wrong).

We will assess your application for hardship assistance by five business days. We will let you know if you are accepted into our hardship program within five business days from receipt of the application. Following an assessment of your 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.

If for some reason, we do not believe you are eligible to receive assistance under our hardship program, we will clearly explain our reason to you.

8. Flexible assistance

The Customer Care team has a wide range of options to offer customers in hardship, starting with your minimum entitlements under regulation. On a case by case basis, the Customer Care Specialist will provide assistance that may include:

Long Term Instalment Plan

(i) A tailored payment plan that extends the normal repayment plan to a maximum of 24 months covering both consumption and arrears and can be offered at varied frequencies;

(ii) A tailored plan that extends the normal repayment plan, including an agreed period where repayment may be equal to or lower than your ongoing usage costs.

Examples include:

- **Temporary suspension of arrears** - assessed on a case by case basis, there may be an option to suspend arrears for short term financial assistance;
- **Temporary suspension of payments** - assessed on a case by case basis, there may be an option to suspend payments for short term financial assistance;
- **Arrears waiver and incentive plans** - assessed on a case by case basis, there may be an option to waive a portion of the arrears and offer incentive payments.

9. Payment options

What we will do

In addition to the options outlined in section two and section eight, there are different payment options available to hardship customers, including:

- **Long term payment plans** - you have the flexibility to make equal payments, based on your forecasted energy use, on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis for up to 24 months;
- **Centrepay** - customers who receive Centrelink benefits are encouraged to use CentrePay deductions. This service is free and ensures that customer payments are made on a regular basis.

If customers in the program are not eligible for Centrelink payments, customers are encouraged to set up direct debit making it easier to keep on top of ongoing payments.

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.

Depending on the rules in our hardship policy, we may be able to remove some debt, fees or charges you owe.

We understand that sometimes it can be tough to keep on track with all your payments. But, it is critical that in order to maintain assistance in our programs, you must make the payments as set out in the payment schedule we send you, or give us a call before you miss one. We have flexible options available to help you get back on track, such as extending the plan slightly to account for the missed payment or increasing your payments to cover it. In some circumstances it may be necessary to set up a completely new payment plan that allows you to stick to it in the future.

If you miss a payment, we will contact you to see if you need help. We will contact you by phone, in writing or SMS. If you do not respond, your plan may be broken. If this is the case we will let you know and tell you what you should do to continue to receive assistance and by when. However, if we don't hear from you to discuss a new payment plan, your account will be returned to our normal collection processes.

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.

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.

10. Ongoing Management

We want to make it as easy as possible to keep in touch. When participating in the Customer Care Program, you can contact our specially trained team from 8:00am to 6:00pm on Monday to Friday on 1800 723 741 or by email at customer.carehardship@redenergy.com.au. You can contact them to discuss any changes to your circumstances or difficulties in meeting the agreed payments.

Our Programs and Services

As a hardship customer, you can access a range of programs and services to help you: we have outlined these below.

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

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. 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. The Customer Care team will provide assistance with energy audits and recommendations to assist customers at home. At a convenient time, our Customer Care Specialists will conduct over the phone detailed audit of appliances and usage patterns to help identify if there are any cost effective options available to help you reduce your energy bill.

We may also discuss options to assist where it is identified that an appliance is no longer working efficiently and needs to be repaired or replaced. This could include referrals to a relevant community program, advice on alternative measures to alleviate the issue, or other assistance as required.

If you have received a high bill, a comprehensive high bill investigation will be conducted before determining if an onsite energy audit is required. The onsite energy audit will be provided free of charge. We will also provide referrals to relevant government and non-government programs that provide information on energy efficiency. It's important to note that not everyone's circumstances are the same, so every assistance package will be tailored to achieve the

maximum benefits. We are also able to refer you to see a financial counsellor or a community welfare organisation if it would help you in your circumstances.

The Customer Care team will monitor your account and assist with:

- providing regular updates about how you are progressing towards reducing your energy costs;
- ensuring all relevant concessions are applied on the account;
- applications and referrals for emergency relief such as the Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme (HEEAS - QLD), Energy Accounts Payment Assistance vouchers (EAPA vouchers - NSW only), and the Emergency Electricity Payment Scheme (EEPS - South Australia);
- referrals to Financial Counsellors and Community Welfare Organisations;
- reviewing payment plans and payment amounts regularly;
- arranging additional flexible energy management assistance;
- providing ongoing assessment of the success of payment plan to ensure it is suited; to the customer's immediate financial capabilities;
- monitoring payments and balances to avoid accumulation of arrears.

11. Customer responsibilities, rights and obligations

We commit to working with customers in hardship to assist them complete the program and to help them manage their energy bills into the future. While you are maintaining an agreed assistance program with us, you can be assured that all standard collection action will be suspended and disconnection will not occur. Customers in the Customer Care program are encouraged to maintain frequent contact with us so that the full benefits of the program can be realised.

Our Customer Care Program team will advise customers of their rights and obligations in respect of their agreement to enter into the Program. Customers will receive written confirmation of the agreed payment plan within ten business days of an agreement being reached and this will include a summary of the terms and conditions of the program.

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.

We recommend that you contact us if your circumstances change or you think you might not be able to make a payment as agreed. We can then discuss more suitable alternative payment plans. To remain in the program, we encourage customers to consider how the following reasonable actions might contribute to the ongoing management of their account:

- Budgeting, as much as reasonably possible, to meet the cost of their energy needs and arrears;
- Making the agreed payments as outlined in the payment plan;
- Maintaining reasonable contact with us and letting us know if there are any changes that may impact the payment plan;
- Completing any forms required, in particular applications for emergency financial relief, and returning them by the due date.
- Attending appointments with Financial Counsellors or other external agencies as agreed;
- Responding to letters or phone calls when we try and get in touch with you;
- Acknowledging that the payment plan amount will be reviewed periodically and that we may need to get in touch with you to discuss amending your payments to ensure you don't fall into further arrears;
- Renegotiate the amount of their payment plan if there is a change in their circumstances;
- Taking practical steps to keep energy use to responsible levels and within their financial means.

We encourage you to contact us on 131 806 if you have any concerns or wish to make a complaint about the way we are handling your situation, or you think you are not receiving the support you are entitled to. We have a complaint handling process and your concerns will be handled in accordance with our dispute resolution policy which can be found on our website.

You are also entitled to raise complaints with the energy ombudsman or alternative dispute resolution body in your jurisdiction. The contact details for these schemes are listed below:

- Energy and Water Ombudsman New South Wales:
 - 1800 246 545 or <https://www.ewon.com.au/>
- Energy and Water Ombudsman Queensland:
 - 1800 662 837 or <https://www.ewoq.com.au/>
- Energy and Water Ombudsman SA:
 - 1800 665 565 or <https://ewosa.com.au/>
- ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal:
 - (02) 62071740 or <https://www.acat.act.gov.au/>

12. Disconnection policy

Customers in the Customer Care program will not be disconnected for non payment. While every effort is made to assist customers experiencing payment difficulty to maintain energy supply to their household, there are circumstances where you may be returned to regular management of arrears, which may result in disconnection.

A customer that does not fulfil their obligations may be returned to regular credit management and can potentially be disconnected as a last resort. For example, if you miss a payment and we let you know your plan has been broken, you must get in touch with us immediately to avoid further action being taken. We will clearly explain what you need to do and when.

The success of the program is dependant on the cooperation of both parties and this includes a willingness to keep to the payment plan as agreed with the Customer Care Specialist. Should you fail to participate in the program, not show intent to keep minimum payments, fail to contact us to discuss alternative payment options, or no longer need hardship assistance, you will be advised in writing of your removal from the program.

13. Review of Policy

Red Energy has an established hardship program that has been modified and expanded to ensure the best outcome for the customer and the business. The National Energy Retail Law and Retail Rules, and the Australian Energy Regulator's Hardship Guideline, which set out retailers obligations and minimum customer entitlements, take precedence over this hardship policy in all circumstances. The policy and processes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as part of Red's internal compliance program.

Date - 15 September 2019

Red Energy