



Red Energy Hardship Policy

Victoria

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1. Our Assistance Programs

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 payment difficulty 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 for everyone: payment difficulty is a very personal journey and one which we treat with respect and care.

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 stopping you from accruing arrears. We offer a wide range of options available to all active residential customers, no questions asked. 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 are also able to help you out with flexible payment options, information about government support and concessions you might be eligible for, and advice on how to reduce your energy costs.

At a minimum, we are able to offer you:

- **An extension to pay your bill:** We can extend your due date at least once per year to give you the chance to pay in full.
- **Instalment plan:** 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, and conduct an over the phone energy audit to assist with identifying key areas of energy usage within the household. Our handy hints and tips can help you get the most out of the changes you make.

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

3. Payment Assist Program

If your payment difficulties can't be resolved with one of our standard 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. Upon 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.

The assistance we can offer is managed on a case by case basis, depending on your specific needs. We will discuss the minimum assistance that consumer protection regulation entitles you to, what extra steps we need to do to get you on the path to sustainability, and what you need to do to maintain the assistance, including all relevant dates and next steps.

4. Customer Care Program

Red Energy has established a hardship policy designed to provide assistance and ongoing support to customers that 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

The following policy has been designed to address these responsibilities, and provides a flexible framework within which Red Energy's Customer Care team can operate.

Our policy builds on regulatory protections and aims to:

- Encourage early identification of potential hardship and provide timely assistance to minimise accumulation of arrears;
- develop a business wide appreciation of the importance of identifying customers in potential hardship;
- provide a guide to assessing, assisting and managing customers who are willing but unable to pay their bills;
- outline a range of options available to assist customers experiencing difficulties and provide ongoing support;
- Ensure the Customer Care Program is open and transparent, and accessible to all residential customers who are willing to work with us.

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.

If you fail to keep to the agreed payments and don't engage with the Customer Care team to discuss an alternative payment plan, normal credit activity may be commenced. However, you should always contact us so we can determine if there is a more suitable option for you.

5. Identifying Customers for the Customer 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. In providing assistance to you, we will have regard to your circumstances that we are aware of. These circumstances 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 expense;
- Receiving several bills at once.

The above list includes 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.

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.

- **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 Payment Assist Team:** Our Payment Assist Specialists have a suite of assistance measures available and are empowered to provide customers with the support they need to get out of financial difficulty. 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 investigation.
- **Role of the Customer Care Team:** Our Customer Care Specialists are available to provide immediate tailored support to hardship customers.

6. Assessment Process

When you get in touch with us, we will have a discussion regarding what you can afford to pay. This is a very individual conversation, and aims to set up 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 will ask you some 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. This includes concessions, rebates, emergency relief applications, and other grants that might be available. If it would help you in your circumstances, we are able to refer you to see a financial counsellor or a community welfare organisation.

Red Energy commits to act fairly and reasonably when assessing our customer's known circumstances, and will use our best endeavours to provide timely and sustainable assistance.

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 dependent on our customer fully engaging in the process and meeting the agreed solutions (or letting us know if something goes wrong).

7. Flexible Assistance

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

- **Credit EvenPay**

Credit EvenPay is a tailored payment plan that extends to a maximum of 24 months covering both consumption and arrears, and can be offered at varied frequencies. Red Energy will accept payment proposals of equal payments at a frequency of weekly, fortnightly or monthly, which will result in the arrears being paid within two years. These payment proposals will include the current arrears, and future payments based on a reasonable forecast of your energy use over the next twelve months.

Red Energy's Customer Care Hardship Team can also provide tailored plans that extend the normal repayment plan, including an agreed period where repayment may be equal to or lower than the customer's ongoing usage costs.

- **Temporary payment suspension** - there is an option to suspend payments for short term financial assistance.
- **Temporary suspension of arrears** - there is an option to suspend arrears for at least six months. During this period you can pay us less than the cost of your energy use while working to lower that cost, and the difference will be added to the amount you owe.;
- **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.

8. Payment Methods

Our preferred payment methods are:

- **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;
- **Direct Debit** - 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.

You are welcome to get in touch with us at any time to discuss whether other payment methods are available that better suit your needs.

9. Ongoing Management

When participating in the Customer Care Program, you will be given a dedicated phone number to contact us directly to discuss any changes to your circumstances or difficulties in meeting the agreed payments. We want to make it as easy as possible to keep in touch.

The Customer Care team will also 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 Utility Relief Grant Scheme (URGS - VIC);
- Referrals to Financial Counsellors and Community Welfare Organisations where we think it might be beneficial;
- 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.

Moving Premises with Red Energy while in the Customer Care Program

If you are an active member of our hardship program and you move to new premises (where you continue to purchase energy from us), your status as a hardship customer will not change. In these circumstances, we will work with you to review and adjust your existing payment plan for your old premises, and establish another payment plan that takes into account the expected energy use at your new premises.

10. Customer responsibilities, rights and obligations

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.

Other customers are recommended to get in touch with us if their circumstances change or they think they 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;
- Accepting that the payment plan amount will be reviewed periodically and that we may need to get in touch with you to discuss increasing 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.

Once a customer has been assessed as being in hardship and eligible to enter into the Customer Care Program, the team shall 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; including a summary of the terms and conditions of the program.

11. What happens if you miss a payment?

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 a payment is missed, we will contact you to discuss putting forward a revised payment proposal.

However, if we don't hear from you to discuss a revised payment proposal, your account may be returned to our normal collection processes.

12. Energy Audits and Practical Assistance

The Customer Care team will provide further assistance with energy audits and recommendations to assist customers at home.

Our Customer Care Specialists will conduct a 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.

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.

Other Practical Assistance:

- Advice regarding energy offers and tariffs based on our knowledge of your energy use, payment history and known circumstances, that might help lower the cost of your ongoing energy use;
- Ongoing monitoring of your energy consumption and advice on how you are progressing towards lowering your energy costs;
- Appliance Replacement - There is a range of government policies and initiatives available, including loans and rebates concerning household appliances. Where it is identified that an appliance is no longer working efficiently and needs to be repaired or replaced in your home, we will discuss flexible options with you or refer you to the relevant government or community program initiative to assist. This may include providing you with information about the Victorian Energy Upgrades program.

13. Communication

The Customer Care Team will communicate with its customers using the following methods:

- SMS (text message);
- Letters;
- Phone calls;
- Emails.

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).

We will issue a written notice within 21 business days after the due date of your bill outlining the assistance to which you are entitled, and how to access that assistance. All bills, reminder notices and disconnection letters will also include details on how to access the program, and other assistance that may be available. Details of the Customer Care Program will be available on our website along with a copy of this hardship policy that can be provided on request, at no cost. The details of the program will be distributed to Welfare and Financial Counsellors and other agencies as required. The Customer Care team is available Monday - Friday between 8 am and 6 pm to assist you.

14. Employee Training and Awareness

Our programs to assist customers experiencing payment difficulties, including the Customer Care Program, is included in all induction and refresher training for front line staff and management. Refresher training modules are incorporated into the training programme to ensure our team is provided with the necessary understanding and abilities to identify and refer customers identified as possibly experiencing payment difficulties.

In addition, our Customer Care and Payment Assist Specialists are given specific training on identifying and managing customers in hardship. This training includes 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 our team is able to assist customers in need. Our processes are regularly reviewed to ensure the customer outcomes we seek are being met. These processes are maintained in our advanced knowledge management tools.

15. Disconnection Policy

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 their arrears, which may result in disconnection.

Customers in the Customer Care program will not be disconnected for non-payment; however,

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 dependent 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 revised payment options, or no longer need hardship assistance, you will be advised in writing of your removal from the hardship program.

16. 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 Energy Retail Code of Practice, which sets out retailers obligations and minimum customer entitlements, takes precedence over this hardship policy in all circumstances. The policy and processes will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as part of Red Energy's internal Compliance Program.

Effective Date - 13 April 2026