

# 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:

- **Low Income Household Rebate** – To be eligible, you must have a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card, or Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold Card. The amount is \$215 per year. The amount is rebated in instalments on your electricity bill.
- **Dependent Child Rebate** – You may be eligible for a rebate to help meet the cost of your electricity bills if you have dependent children and have a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or DVA Gold Card.
- **Thermoregulatory Dysfunction Energy Subsidy Scheme** – This is available if you are medically unable to regulate your body temperature. The amount is \$545 per year.
- **Life Support Equipment Electricity Subsidy Scheme** – If you need certain medical equipment in your home to sustain your life, such as a respirator or dialysis machine, you may be eligible for this subsidy. You must also have a Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card or a Health Care Interim Voucher.
- **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 State Revenue's Other Schemes Enquiries on (08) 9262 1373.



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

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### 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:

- **Hardship Utilities Grant Scheme (HUGS)**
  - The State Government provides financial assistance to customers in financial hardship. You may be eligible for HUGS if you are unable to pay your water, gas or electricity bills, have been restricted from supply or are already disconnected.
- **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.

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.

- **Synergy My Account -** Record your energy usage to see how you compare to similar sized households in your suburb and to get a better understanding of your usage history.

### 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, 1800 754 004
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, 1800 062 058.

#### Note to reader

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

#### Cancer Council WA

420 Bagot Road, Subiaco WA 6008  
 Cancer Council 13 11 20 for Information and Support  
**Facsimile** (08) 9212 4334  
**Website** cancerwa.asn.au



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