

Energy customers during the coronavirus pandemic

Update – observations up to week ending 30 August 2020

The commission sent voluntary data requests to all retailers to monitor the number of energy customers receiving assistance to pay their bills. The following provides our observations on the data reported to the commission to date.

About the data

Weekly data is reported by retailers on a voluntary basis and is not audited by the commission. This data consists of a subset of the measures that are included in our annual performance report.

During the week ending 30 August 2020, we received submissions from 21 retailers covering 97 per cent of electricity residential customers.

Key findings

- There have been no disconnections because of non-payment since April.
- The average number of residential and small business customers who contacted their retailers for assistance peaked in May and has been steadily decreasing in recent months – and the weekly average during August has been the lowest recorded to date.
- The number of residential customers receiving tailored assistance, and their average arrears, have increased since April. However, we note that customers receiving tailored assistance, but cannot pay their on-going usage, continues to steadily decrease since April.
- There are more small business customers on payment assistance in August compared to April and their average arrears have been much higher.
- There are fewer residential and small business customers who deferred their payments starting from week ending 23 August due to one retailer ending its payment deferral scheme. Their average amount outstanding increased due to this, before decreasing at the end of August.
- The number of other residential and small business customers with arrears (excluding those receiving payment assistance and deferrals) have been steady since mid-July. Their average arrears have been gradually increasing in the recent weeks.
- The average number of residential and small business customers who missed paying their bills on time peaked in May and again in July and has been lower since then.

Victorian-wide data summary¹

Indicator	Electricity						Gas					
	Week ending 05 Apr	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 30 Aug	Week ending 05 Apr	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 30 Aug
Residential customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who can pay on-going usage	34,517 1.3%	31,911 1.2%	30,921 1.2%	30,495 1.1%	31,591 1.2%	33,515 1.3%	24,547 1.2%	22,125 1.1%	20,542 1.0%	21,030 1.0%	23,315 1.1%	28,133 1.4%
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving tailored assistance – who cannot pay on-going usage	21,817 0.8%	21,017 0.8%	19,268 0.7%	18,612 0.7%	18,357 0.7%	17,896 0.7%	16,346 0.8%	15,606 0.8%	14,108 0.7%	13,588 0.7%	13,893 0.7%	13,706 0.7%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and can pay on-going usage	\$625 -	\$618 -1%	\$652 +6%	\$641 -2%	\$660 +3%	\$687 +4%	\$512 -	\$498 -3%	\$489 -2%	\$474 -3%	\$496 +5%	\$532 +7%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance, and cannot pay on-going usage	\$1,402 -	\$1,385 -1%	\$1,547 +12%	\$1,529 -1%	\$1,515 -1%	\$1,509 -0%	\$1,108 -	\$1,092 -1%	\$1,141 +4%	\$1,138 -0%	\$1,157 +2%	\$1,215 +5%
Small business customers – assistance and arrears												
Number and proportion of Victorian customers receiving payment assistance	2,278 0.8%	2,471 0.9%	2,618 0.9%	2,614 0.9%	2,547 0.9%	2,500 0.9%	656 1.0%	696 1.1%	687 1.1%	700 1.1%	746 1.2%	723 1.1%
Average arrears and change from previous month (%) – customers receiving payment assistance	\$1,241 -	\$1,180 -5%	\$1,141 -3%	\$1,327 +16%	\$1,463 +10%	\$1,528 +5%	\$1,164 -	\$1,139 -2%	\$1,436 +26%	\$1,648 +15%	\$1,478 -10%	\$1,681 +14%

¹ These figures can change over time as retailers submit updated data. Some weeks have missing data from retailers. This can impact monthly totals as well as comparisons to other time periods. Note that average arrears are calculated by estimating total arrears divided by the number of customers receiving assistance across the market (reported data only).

Indicator	Electricity						Gas					
	Week ending 05 Apr	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 30 Aug	Week ending 05 Apr	Week ending 26 Apr	Week ending 31 May	Week ending 28 Jun	Week ending 26 Jul	Week ending 30 Aug
Customers who deferred payments												
Number of residential customers	-	-	-	8,577	8,848	5,105	-	-	-	7,072	7,594	4,913
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by residential customers	-	-	-	\$610	\$639	\$628	-	-	-	\$442	\$497	\$507
	-	-	-	-	+5%	-2%	-	-	-	-	+12%	+2%
Number of small business customers	-	-	-	2,310	2,269	1,361	-	-	-	908	933	515
Average amount deferred and change from previous month (%) by small business customers	-	-	-	\$2,461	\$2,604	\$2,113	-	-	-	\$1,623	\$1,813	\$1,962
	-	-	-	-	+6%	-19%	-	-	-	-	+12%	+8%
Other customers with arrears (excludes customers receiving payment assistance or deferrals)²												
Number of other residential customers with arrears	-	-	-	-	243,285	245,134	-	-	-	-	189,882	201,075
Average arrears – other residential customers	-	-	-	-	\$457	\$488	-	-	-	-	\$370	\$422
	-	-	-	-	-	+7%	-	-	-	-	-	+14%
Number of other small business customers with arrears	-	-	-	-	48,641	50,567	-	-	-	-	9,162	9,567
Average arrears – other small business customers	-	-	-	-	\$900	\$989	-	-	-	-	\$1,264	\$1,420
	-	-	-	-	-	+10%	-	-	-	-	-	+12%

² This indicator includes customers with any amount of arrears over \$0, which may include small amounts owing.

Indicator	Electricity					Gas				
	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	August (27 Jul to 30 Aug)	April (30 Mar to 26 Apr)	May (27 Apr to 31 May)	June (01 Jun to 28 Jun)	July (29 Jun to 26 Jul)	August (27 Jul to 30 Aug)
Calls waiting times										
Average call waiting time – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i> (seconds)	111 seconds	75 seconds	89 seconds	80 seconds	98 seconds	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
Calls and enquiries (market-wide) ³										
Weekly average phone calls to retailers (calls to an operator) – <i>totals for both electricity and gas</i>	90,765	98,783	104,794	103,367	98,373	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>	<i>Refer to electricity</i>
Weekly average residential customer calls seeking assistance	6,298	7,134	5,762	5,298	5,022	4,064	4,656	4,224	4,035	3,763
Weekly average small business customer calls seeking assistance	1,738	2,332	1,371	633	618	265	257	189	121	96
Missed bills (market-wide)										
Weekly average residential customers who missed bills	38,535	43,768	46,797	47,137	44,067	27,432	28,085	32,264	32,244	32,582
Weekly average small business customers who missed bills	8,192	9,548	8,173	8,576	8,860	1,876	1,905	1,703	1,740	1,821

³ The number of customers seeking assistance have been revised due to a retailer updating its methodology to produce the figures for this indicator.