

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.

- **Stay Connected** – Power and Water Corporation has a hardship gap policy known as Stay Connected for crisis or longer term assistance. To be eligible, you must be named on the electricity account at your principal place of residence, be behind in payments and show you are willing to comply with a repayment plan or cooperate in referrals to welfare agencies or financial counselling services. Longer term assistance is reviewed every 12 months. Recipients of this rebate need to reduce consumption and manage household expenditure to remain in the Stay Connected program.
- **Government Concessions as a pensioner or carer** – The Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme is managed by the NT Department of Health and Families. Contact <http://www.health.nt.gov.au> 1800 777 704 for information on eligibility.
- **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.

Vouchers and grants

Customers in financial hardship can apply for payment vouchers or grants to put towards their utility bills.

Types of vouchers you can apply for include:

- **Hardship e-Vouchers** – You may be eligible for emergency relief in the form of hardship e-vouchers. E-vouchers are only available to



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

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assist low income households in crisis resulting in temporary financial difficulties and not as ongoing income support. Annual funding for e-vouchers is issued by the NT Government to certain welfare agencies such as The Salvation Army and Anglicare, who determine whether assistance will be given. For further information about which organisations may be able to help, call Cancer Council 13 11 20.

The e-vouchers cannot be used for non-usage related fees and charges (such as disconnection or dishonor fees). If you have made an appointment with a community welfare organisation to discuss your eligibility for an e-voucher, you should notify your energy provider immediately to prevent disconnection.

- **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.

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:

- Ombudsman NT ombudsman.nt.gov.au
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, 1800 062 058.

Note to reader

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

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