

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes



**DELIVERING
FOR ALL VICTORIANS**

Tuesday, 20 August 2019

ENERGY AND WATER SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The Essential Services Commission has released a guide for energy and water retailers for *Better practice in responding to family violence*.

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio today welcomed the new guide as an important step in addressing the recommendations of the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Family violence can have a significant financial toll on victim-survivors, especially where the perpetrator has used access to money and debts to exert control.

The better practice guide will help energy and water retailers develop systems and processes that support wellbeing and build trust with their customers affected by family violence.

The guide sets out steps energy and water retailers can take to ensure staff are trained to recognise family violence, can refer customers to support services and address economic abuse by offering payment difficulty assistance to those impacted by family violence.

The guide builds on water retailer codes which require retailers to have a family violence policy and new standards of conduct to boost protections, with better training for staff and improved account security and debt management practices. Similar requirements will be included in the Energy Retail Code from 1 January 2020.

Regulated water and energy businesses will make their own decisions on how to align their policies and procedures with the principles and actions for better practice set out under the guide.

This approach will encourage businesses to offer customer service beyond the minimum standards, and to inspire business practice towards constant improvement.

The better practice guide was developed through extensive collaborative work between the Essential Services Commission, energy and water businesses, the community sector, and other related organisations.

Quote attributable to Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio

"We're delivering landmark reforms to stamp out family violence and this better practice guide will help energy businesses provide tailored support to their customers."

Quote attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"The water sector has already been leading the way in providing hardship support for customers – this guide builds upon that work to help further ease the burden of utility bills for victim-survivors of family violence."

Quote attributable to Minister for Prevention of Family Violence Gabrielle Williams

"These new measures to support victim-survivors of family violence and protect those at risk of economic abuse come from the Royal Commission's 227 recommendations – helping us rebuild the system from the ground up."