

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:

- **Energy Concession** – To be eligible, you must have a Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card, a Centrelink Low-Income Health Care Card, or a Veteran's Affairs Pensioner Concession Card. The concession applies to both electricity and natural gas. The maximum amount is \$338 per year or \$426 with the additional Utility Concession for eligible card holders.
- **Sewerage Rebate** – To be eligible, you must have a Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card, a Centrelink Low Income Health Care, a Veteran's Affairs Pensioner Concession, a DVA Gold Card. The concession will be up to 68% of the supply charges per quarter. As an applicant, you must be listed with the Land Titles Office as an owner or part-owner of the property.
- **Life Support Rebate** – 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 the Life Support Rebate. It is an additional \$121 per year.
- **Water Rebate** – To be eligible, you must have a Health Care Card, a Pensioner Concession Card or a Pensioner Concession Card or Gold Card from Department of Veterans' Affairs. The rebate will be up to 68% of the supply charge per quarter. You must be listed as an owner or part-owner of the property with the Land Titles Office.
- **Home Haemodialysis Concession Scheme** – If required, you can access up to \$1200 per year to assist with the water costs of your treatment.



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

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- **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 the Department of Social Services on 1300 653 227.

Vouchers and grants

In the ACT, customers in financial hardship can apply for Telstra Bill Assistance Certificates to put towards their Telstra bill. These are available through community welfare organisations, such as St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, The Smith Family, Anglicare, some migrant centres, community centres, Indigenous services, or directly from government departments.

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:

- **Home Energy Advice Team (HEAT)** – All ACT residents can contact HEAT for free, independent, expert advice over the phone, in fact sheets, in workshops, or in a consultation, to help save money and reduce energy consumption around the home. To find out more, call 02 6260 6165 or visit www.heat.net.au.

- **Home Energy Action Kit** – Any member of an ACT public library may borrow the Home Energy Kit to conduct their own home energy audit. Contact your nearest branch of the ACT Public Library for more information.

- **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:

- ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
02 6207 1740; acat.act.gov.au
- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman,
1800 062 058; tio.com.au

Where to get help and more information

- **Cancer Council 13 11 20**
for Information and Support

Note to reader

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

Cancer Council ACT
5 Richmond Avenue, Fairbairn ACT 2609
Cancer Council 13 11 20 for Information and Support
Facsimile (02) 6257 5055
Email reception@actcancer.org
Website actcancer.org



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