

Help in paying power bills

If you are struggling to pay your energy bills and you live in NSW, you may be eligible for financial support.

This article provides information about rebates and financial assistance that is available to eligible NSW energy consumers.

Low Income Household Rebate

On 1 July 2011, the NSW Government introduced the Low Income Household Rebate.

The Government provides this rebate to eligible account holders to help cover their electricity costs. For this financial year, the Low Income Household Rebate will cover up to \$200 of a household's energy bill. The rebate is paid through credits on a household's bill at a rate of just over 54 cents per day.

To be eligible for the rebate, the account holder must have a Commonwealth Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card, or a Gold Card issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Low Income Household Rebate replaces what was known as the Energy Rebate.

Households that previously received the Energy Rebate should have been automatically transferred to the Low Income Household Rebate from 1 July 2011.

If you are eligible for the Low Income Household rebate, and have not previously received the Energy Rebate, you must apply to your electricity retailer. If you have recently moved home, or switched your supplier, you should also contact your retailer to reapply for the rebate.

More information on the Low Income Household Rebate is available via the Energy Information Line on 1300 136 888 or online at:

www.trade.nsw.gov.au/energy/customers/rebates#The-Low-Income-Household-Rebate-replaces-the-Energy-Rebate-

Medical Energy Rebate

The NSW Government funds a Medical Energy Rebate. This is available to eligible customers who have a medically diagnosed inability to self-regulate their body temperature. This is often a symptom associated with medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis.

The Medical Energy Rebate was increased to \$200 on 1 July 2011, in line with the Low Income Household Rebate.

Eligible households are able to receive the Medical Energy Rebate in addition to other assistance such as the Low Income Household Rebate, the Life Support Rebate and the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme.

Applications for the Medical Energy Rebate should be made through your energy retailer. Applications need to include medical evidence supplied by a GP that has been treating the person for at least three months. There are also other eligibility criteria that need to be met.

More information on the Medical Energy Rebate and eligibility criteria is available via the Energy Information Line on 1300 136 888 or online at:

www.trade.nsw.gov.au/energy/customers/rebates/medical-energy-rebate-questions

Life Support Rebate

The NSW Government provides a Life Support rebate for customers who have increased electricity costs because they use vital medical equipment to sustain life. The Life Support Rebate is offered in addition to other energy rebates. A range of medical equipment is covered under the rebate, including Positive Airways Pressure (PAP) devices machines, ventilators and home dialysis machines.

Information on eligibility for the Life Support Rebate, and the list of Life Support equipment covered under the rebate, can be obtained via the Energy Information Line on 1300 136 888 or online at:

www.trade.nsw.gov.au/energy/customers/rebates/life-support-rebates-questions

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) Vouchers

Another avenue of assistance for NSW energy consumers is the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) scheme. This is designed to assist financially disadvantaged people in crisis or emergency situations. EAPA vouchers can be used to make payments on electricity and gas bills, and are distributed by participating Community Welfare Organisations (CWO) such as St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army and Anglicare.

Individuals who wish to secure EAPA vouchers should contact a distributing agency to make an appointment. Eligibility for the scheme is assessed by interview with a CWO staff member.

Each EAPA voucher is worth \$30. The number of vouchers available per household is at the discretion of the CWO. The CWOs do not usually distribute enough vouchers to cover payment for an entire bill, and vouchers are not available for consecutive bills.

Though EAPA vouchers are not intended to provide ongoing assistance, the scheme does play an important role in helping people in difficult circumstances to stay connected to an essential service. EAPA vouchers may also be used to pay gas bills, however EAPA is not available for bottled gas (LPG).

More information on the EAPA scheme is available via the Energy Information Line on 1300 136 888 or online at:

www.trade.nsw.gov.au/energy/customers/help

Customer hardship programs

All electricity retailers are now obliged to have Customer Hardship Charters that are publicly available on their websites. Under these charters, consumers who are experiencing payment difficulties have access to two payment plans and some additional protection from disconnection. More information is available by telephoning the relevant energy retailer or visiting their website.

Energy use

Households can bring down their energy bills by reducing consumption. The Home Power Savings Program is a free service that provides eligible low-income households with a power savings kit, as well as offering household assessments by an energy expert who can provide an energy saving action plan.

The power savings kit includes energy saving tools such as energy efficient light globes and an eco switch — a device that shuts down standby power. According to the NSW Government, the Home Power Savings Program can help households reduce their energy consumption by up to 20 per cent.

For more information on the Home Power Savings Program, call the Home Power Saving Info Line on 1300 662 416 or go online at:

www.savepower.nsw.gov.au/households/home-power-savings-program/about-the-program.aspx

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