

Breaking down barriers to essential services

“If we’ve learned anything over the past year, it’s that vulnerability is something that can happen to anyone at any time, it’s not something you are.”

Kate Symons, chairperson Essential Services Commission

In a national first for a regulator, Victoria’s Essential Services Commission has released a draft strategy aimed at breaking down the barriers many face in accessing essential services.

In **Getting to fair: breaking down the barriers to essential services**, the commission looked at the challenges many Victorians face in getting access to clean drinking water, affordable lighting and heating, sustainable council rates and energy efficient products.

Commission chair Kate Symons says working on the strategy during the first truly global pandemic in more than a century highlighted the need to better understand vulnerability.

“From losing your job, unexpected illness, natural disaster, global pandemic, ageing, mental health or disability – these are all things that can happen to you, but they don’t define you.

“After months of conversations and workshops with regular Victorians and experts alike, we came to the conclusion that vulnerability is something a person or group may experience, but it’s not who you are,” she said.

The commission has published a draft strategy with eight goals ranging from:

- improving how essential services communicate with customers so they better understand their rights
- boosting consumer trust to empower consumers to make choices and seek help when they need it
- having better processes to identify consumers who need help early, and ensuring support is flexible and suited to their needs.

The draft strategy includes a commitment to develop a reconciliation action plan to improve outcomes for First Nations consumers and communities. It also aims to improve coordination and collaboration across government, industry and the community sector, especially in responding to sudden and unexpected challenges – like a global pandemic.

The draft strategy is available for feedback on [Engage Victoria](#) until 17 June 2021. Interested stakeholders can also [register to attend a public forum](#) on 11 May 2021.

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