

## Family violence survivors getting more support from utilities in wake of royal commission

A new report has found customers experiencing family violence are getting more support from water businesses after customer protections were strengthened by the state's independent economic regulator.

The research report looked at how the state's water businesses were implementing new rules developed by the Essential Services Commission following the [Royal Commission into Family Violence](#).

Commission director Marcus Crudden says the research shows water companies are acting with more sensitivity toward victims of family violence.

"The research shows water businesses are demonstrating a greater willingness to check on client safety and improving support for customers experiencing financial difficulty in the wake of changes we made to the [water customer service codes in 2017](#)," he said.

The commission has also recently made [changes to the Energy Retail Code](#) requiring energy companies to better support victims of family violence.

The [research](#) involved interviews with 21 financial counsellors from across Victoria, six community advocate organisations and family violence service providers.

Two-thirds of counsellors said support for victims had improved since the code changes in 2017 and that most clients seeking support had a positive experience.

The commission has released the research along with a [new better practice guide](#) for both water and energy businesses to implement safe and effective family violence responses.

The guide features practical advice and in-depth case studies from major organisations including Carlton Football Club, Commonwealth Bank, Telstra, Yarra Valley Water and Australia Post.

View the independent report and better practice guide at: <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/family-violence-resources-businesses>.

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## Our family violence work: a timeline

### 2016

The Royal Commission into Family Violence released 227 recommendations. We were assigned responsibility for implementing recommendation 109, which related to updating the [Energy Retail Code](#) and [water customer service codes](#).

We [updated the Energy Retail Code](#) to better protect residential electricity and gas customers anticipating or facing payment difficulty.

### 2017

We made [changes to customer service codes for water businesses](#) as part of our response to one of 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The code changes required water businesses to develop and implement family violence policies which, as a minimum, provide for:

- training and support for frontline staff dealing with customers affected by family violence
- ensuring against the disclosure of private and confidential customer information to perpetrators
- access to existing payment difficulty programs provided by businesses
- minimising the need for customers to repeatedly tell their story to different staff, and
- referring customers to appropriate support services.

### 2018 and 2019

On 1 January 2020, we'll implement [changes to the Energy Retail Code](#) that require energy retailers to have a family violence policy, and meet minimum standards on:

- training
- account security
- customer service
- debt management practices
- external support services
- evidence of family violence.

We have also released a better practice industry guide to support ongoing improvements in the sector.

We reported on the [outcomes for customers following the family violence changes](#) to the water customer service codes, including the release of an independent report by research firm Wallis.