

Guideline: supporting utility relief grant applications

1. Purpose of this guideline

- 1.1. The Energy Retail Code contemplates that energy retail licensees (retailers) will ensure that information in relation to the utility relief grant is readily available to residential customers, and requires retailers to provide specific advice about the Utility Relief Grant Scheme to residential customers who are in arrears.
- 1.2. The purpose of this guideline is to outline for retailers and Victorian energy customers the support that retailers must provide in relation to the lodgement of utility relief grant applications. This guideline recognises that financial hardship may be suffered by residential customers and promotes best practice in energy service delivery to facilitate continuity of supply.
- 1.3. This guideline is made under section 44 of the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and section 48H of the Gas Industry Act 2001 and takes effect from 1 October 2020. A retailer must comply with this guideline as a condition of their licence.

2. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme

- 2.1. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme provides help to customers to pay a mains electricity, gas or water bill that is overdue due to a temporary financial crisis. The Utility Relief Grant Scheme is administered by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).
- 2.2. Eligible customers can apply for a grant through their retailer. Once the application form is completed, it must be lodged with the DHHS for assessment. If a grant is approved, it is paid directly to the retailer who will credit that amount to the customer's account.

3. Retailer obligations to support customer applications

- 3.1. Retailers are required to support customers in completing and submitting utility relief grant applications.
- 3.2. Retailers must assist customers to fill out the online application form over the phone and lodge the form online on behalf of the customer, unless the customer requests otherwise.
- 3.3. If the retailer is unable to complete and lodge a utility relief grant application form over the phone (for example, because a customer requests otherwise or supplementary

documentation is required), the retailer must provide reasonable assistance to the customer, having regard to the customer's particular needs, to understand the application process.

3.4. This may include:

- (a) completing the online application form (to the extent possible) over the phone with the customer and sending the customer the partially completed form with instructions on how to complete the remainder of the form;
- (b) explaining to the customer what further documentation they are required to provide (e.g. copies of payslips, receipts or a statutory declaration);
- (c) informing the customer that they can lodge the application, with copies of the required documentation, by:
 - (i) the customer emailing the application to the appropriate DHHS email address;
 - (ii) the customer posting the application to the appropriate DHHS postal address; or
 - (iii) emailing or posting the application back to the retailer, at a specified email or postal address, for the retailer to send documentation to DHHS on the customer's behalf;
- (d) following up with the customer at a later date to offer any further assistance required.