



Media Statement

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Customers having difficulty paying energy bills

The number of Western Australian households having difficulty paying their energy bills is increasing, according to a new report by the Economic Regulation Authority (ERA).

The ERA's annual report on the performance of energy retailers has found the number of people needing more time to pay a bill, or requiring an instalment plan, reached a six year high in 2016-17.

ERA chair Nicky Cusworth said the numbers of residents and businesses disconnected in the year was also at a six year high.

"The data shows there is a correlation between the increase in customers seeking help to pay their bill and the rise in disconnections," she said.

"There were more households disconnected that had a history of bill stress.

"These customers were previously on an instalment plan, held a concession card, or had been disconnected within the past two years."

"Energy bill debt is an issue affecting many Western Australian households," she said.

At the end of the financial year 22,852 electricity customers and 18,643 gas customers, who were not on a hardship program, were repaying a debt to their retailer.

The average debt for electricity customers was \$384, and for gas customers \$65.

Customers on a hardship program had a larger outstanding debt, 10,179 electricity customers owed an average of \$596; and 5,669 gas customers owed an average debt of \$245.

"It is reasonable to assume that many customers have outstanding debts with both their electricity and gas provider," Ms Cusworth said.

The report found 19,256 electricity and 14,500 gas customers used Centrelink's Centrepay to make regular payments towards their energy bills.

ENDS

- The 2017 annual performance report for energy retailers is available on the ERA's [website](#).
- An [infographic](#), highlighting the findings is also available.

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