



# Media Statement

3 April 2024

## Family violence protections extended to gas customers

Western Australian household gas customers will receive a range of new protections through changes made by the Economic Regulation Authority today.

The ERA has [published an updated Compendium of Gas Customer Licence Obligations](#), which regulates the conduct of retailers and distributors that supply gas to residential and small business customers.

Under the amended Compendium, all gas retailers must develop and publish a family violence policy, which must cover:

- Staff training on how to recognise and assist customers affected by family violence.
- The protection of customer account information from third parties.
- Customer support procedures to avoid the need for customers repeatedly discussing or disclosing their experience of family violence.
- The need to assess the possible affect on customers before initiating debt recovery processes.
- Consideration of customer circumstances before disconnecting their service for non-payment.

ERA Chair Steve Edwell said these changes would provide vital protections for a very vulnerable cohort of customers.

“We know from our engagement how distressing it can be for customers to have to repeat their experiences of family violence over and over while ringing their retailer to discuss a bill or supply issue,” Mr Edwell said.

The ERA has made other changes to the Compendium, including:

- Introducing a \$300 minimum bill debt before customers can be disconnected for non-payment.
- Making assistance measures, like payment plans and extensions, available to all customers that request them, rather than just those customers in proven financial hardship.
- Preventing retailers charging a fee for paper bills for concession or vulnerable customers and those experiencing financial hardship.

Mr Edwell said the changes substantially improve protections and increase access to assistance for gas customers.

“As we head into winter, and with so many households and small businesses battling the cost-of-living crisis, gas users will have the added protection of knowing their supply can’t be disconnected if they fall behind on a bill that’s under \$300,” he said.

The changes are modelled on those made by the ERA in 2022 for electricity customers, following a thorough review of the Code of Conduct for the Supply of Electricity to Small Use Customers.

The amended Compendium comes into effect on 1 July 2024, but licensees will be granted an additional three months beyond 1 July to consult with consumer representatives on their family violence policies and any staff training required.

### **About the ERA**

The ERA is Western Australia's independent economic regulator. We aim to benefit all Western Australians by promoting strong economic outcomes through effective regulation and decision making. We strive to make sure current and future consumers pay no more than necessary for safe and reliable utilities.

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