



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

# Better Practice Customer Relationships

**SACOSS Hardship & Affordability Conference 2015**

**Peter Sutherland**

**Senior Member, ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal**

**Visiting Fellow, ANU College of Law**

## Overview of This Presentation

1. Energy and Water Hardship in the ACT
2. ACAT Energy & Water Hardship Assistance Program
3. Key Elements in the ACAT EW Approach
4. Support Mechanisms for ACAT EW
5. Questions and Discussion

## Energy and Water Hardship in the ACT

Approximately 12 % of Canberra residents live in poverty. Relative poverty is very high because of high average household income

The ACT is cold, high country – Winter energy use is the major problem, not summer use (ie. air conditioning, pools)

Poor thermal qualities of older housing stock, particularly in private rental

Winter bills in many low income households typically are \$800 - \$1,500

Energy concession is well targetted but not sufficient to help high consumption households

Debt levels on presentation to ACAT EW (ie disconnected or facing disconnection) are usually above \$2,000 and commonly above \$4,000.

## Key Elements in the ACAT EW Approach

### Personal case management

#### Identifying the issue/s:

- Household income
- Household expenditure
- Unnecessary consumption
- Tariffs

#### Assisting the client:

- Fortnightly payments above consumption, particularly CentrePay
- Education and refit assistance – “Outreach” Program
- Debt waiver, generally on a systemic basis rather than one-off

### Active review of client payments and consumption levels

## Support Mechanisms for ACAT EW

- Capable, empathetic staff
- ACAT members bring wide personal experience to their decision-making role
- Outreach (energy efficiency program) and financial counselling services
- Engagement with community organisations and Housing ACT and active referrals to address broader household issues

## Questions & Discussion

Could the ACAT EW approach be implemented in  
South Australia?

What would it cost?