

National Consumers Roundtable on Energy

Enabling Group Reporting Template

1. Project Name, Enabling Group Lead Name and Enabling Group Members Names

Name: An improved framework for supporting consumers in payment difficulty
Members: Douglas McCloskey (PIAC, lead) Robyn Robinson (COTA), Mark Henley (Uniting Communities), Fiona Hawthorne, (QCOSS), SACOSS (representative to be advised), Iain Maitland (ECC), Jake Lilley (CALC) Bernadette Jago (TasCOSS), Kellie Caught (ACOSS)
Additional involvement from: Peter Appelman (Uniting Kildonnán), Susan Helyar (ACTCOSS)

2. Project Goals

<p>Overarching goal:</p> <p>To develop a common, co-ordinated understanding on support and assistance for people experiencing payment difficulty, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying the key issues surrounding payment difficulties, key problems to overcome, key barriers in accessing assistance, and - Identifying and agreeing a common framework of language and terminology in expressing and responding to payment difficulty - Identifying and agreeing a common understanding regarding how best to respond to payment difficulties and provide support more sustainably, and - Identify and co-ordinate responses to reform and policy processes which present an opportunity to implement agreed principles and recommendations for improved support for payment difficulty.
<p>Short term goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To co-ordinate substantive consumer advocate involvement in and input to, the current AER process developing and implementing enforceable hardship guidelines for retail electricity. - For final AER hardship guidelines to reflect co-ordinated input from consumer advocates (and to recognise it, where it is not able to reflect it in the short term) - For the AER hardship process to identify future needs, which reflect co-ordinated consumer input.
<p>Long term goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreed principles framework for the provision of assistance to people experiencing payment difficulty, that maintains affordable connection to electricity for all consumers. - Support for this framework amongst all energy consumer advocates - Development of practical measures for implementing the principles of the framework, to inform advocacy with energy businesses, governments, market bodies and other community service providers. - Reform of the NECF to reflect the agreed framework, implementing best practice response to payment difficulties, that ensures affordable, ongoing connection to electricity for all consumers.

3. Project Outputs

These may be key agreements of the Enabling Group, such as policy principles, policies, joint submissions or reports, or decisions made by governments or businesses which the Project influenced. Please provide references if available, or attach additional pages if required. If the output was a published document, please provide a copy.

Outputs (in chronological order)

- Identification of hardship and payment difficulty as a priority area for co-ordination and co-operative advocacy
- Development of enabling group, with agreement to proceed in developing agreed short and long-term objectives, and future work opportunities.
- Agreement identifying AER hardship process as a vehicle for the identification of shared understanding of issues surrounding hardship and payment difficulties, common terminology, agreed principles for best response.
- Facilitation of consumer advocate direct participation in AER hardship consultation workshop in Melbourne 25 february 2018, including:
 - o Iain Maitland (Ethnic communitiies council NSW)
 - o Robyn Robinson (COTA)
 - o Bernadette Jago (TasCOSS)
 - o Jake Lilley (CALC)
 - o Douglas McCloskey (PIAC)
 - o Fiona Hawthorne (QCOSS)
- Workshop of enabling group members held on 26 Feb to discuss and progress a co-ordinated response to AER process, examine Victorian Essential Services Commission Payment difficulty framework as a case study of alternative approach, and agree priority principles for an agreed framework for providing better assistance, synthesising immediate responses.
- PIAC submission developed to embody co-ordinated approach (attached), used as a basis to facilitate supportive responses from other consumer advocates including:
 - o Uniting Communities
 - o QCOSS
 - o VCOSS
 - o NCOSS
 - o TasCOSS
 - o ACOSS
 - o COTA
 - o ECC
 - o Vinnies NSW
- Priority principles for payment support assistance identified, with next meeting to identify opportunities to progress (to be confirmed)
- Reported to National Consumer roundtable in Hobart, answering questions on development of work, response to the AER process, and providing wider opportunities for engagement of Roundtable members not involved in the enabling group (Including Kildonnann, ACTCOSS, Anglicare Tasmania), to facilitate their support.

Date Provided to SACOSS

26 March 2019