

CUSTOMER SUPPORT POLICY

Purposes

To outline Western Water's commitment to respond appropriately to customers experiencing financial difficulty, while following up on outstanding accounts.

To outline how Western Water will support and manage the water account of customers who advise they are enduring, or have fled family violence.

Policy

The Policy recognises that some customers, from time-to-time, are willing but unable to pay their water bill and could benefit from working with our Customer Support Program team.

Customers who can apply for assistance under this policy include:

- Customers who have experienced a sudden unforeseen change in living circumstances, a single event or short term resources shortfall (such as ill health, unemployment, separation, a death in the family or an emergency such as a bushfire)
- Customers who are on a low income and who do not expect improvement in their financial situation in the foreseeable future
- Customers enduring or fleeing family violence, and
- Other circumstances may also be considered at the discretion of Western Water.

Customers we will support through this policy can self-nominate for entry to the support program based on their personal situation, or Western Water or a financial counsellor can also assess a person as eligible for the program.

Where a customer is identified as being vulnerable or in need of support, Western Water will act to confirm the customer's position and offer access to the Customer Support Program. If appropriate, customers may be referred to further specialist support.

Family Violence

Western Water is committed to supporting a safe community for its customers and staff. A customer who advises Western Water they are impacted directly by family violence will be offered the opportunity to have their account managed by our Customer Support program. The Customer Support Program will provide a means for customers to be case managed to avoid having to repeat disclosure of their circumstances and to provide continuity of service.

As a water retailer, we recognise our expertise is not in providing the immediate support, advice and security our customers may need during this challenging time. However, we will undertake any actions within our area of responsibility to promote customer and staff safety. Western Water will promote customer safety by providing for the secure handling of customer information, in a manner that maintains customer confidentiality.

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Western Water will ensure that all staff and contractors are adequately trained to deal compassionately and sensitively with customers.

Ongoing training will be provided to understand strategies to:

- identify customers who require customer support or are affected by family violence;
- deal appropriately with customers in the Customer Support Program;
- and to apply the Customer Support Policy and other related policies and guidelines.

Customers in the Customer Support Program will have access to:

- A range of payment options in accordance with the customer's capacity to pay;
- Financial support where appropriate - this may include suspending or waiving debt in certain circumstances
- Arrangements to divide debt where a customer is affected by family violence;
- Information and referral to government assistance programs, no-cost independent financial counsellors, and specialist family violence services.
- Information about Western Water's dispute resolution policy, the customer's right to lodge a complaint with EWOV and any other relevant external dispute resolution forum if their hardship claim is not resolved to their satisfaction by Western Water.
- Information on how to reduce water usage, improve water efficiency and referral to relevant government water efficiency programs.

Customer's water supply will not be restricted and no legal action or additional debt recovery costs will apply while engaging with the Customer Support Program.

Confirmation will be provided of any alternative payment method as soon as possible and confirmed in writing no later than 10 business days after an agreement is reached with a customer.

A customer may cease to be eligible to participate in the Customer Support program under the following circumstances:

- The customer advises Western Water of their improved circumstances or that they no longer require assistance.
- The balance outstanding is cleared, where financial support is being offered.
- The period of temporary status (up to 12 months) has elapsed and there has been a review of capacity to pay.
- Western Water receives advice from Department of Human Services (Centrelink) that the customer is no longer eligible for the particular benefit they were receiving.
- The customer fails to maintain a mutually agreed plan, or fails to maintain contact with Western Water.

Related Documents

Collections Policy

Customer Service Code, Urban Water Businesses, 2017

Customer Service Charter

Family Violence Protection Act 2008

Moving towards better practice 2017

Personal Privacy Charter

Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014

CUSTOMER SUPPORT POLICY



Responsibility for Implementation

Western Water Board
Western Water Executive
Senior Managers
Staff and contractors