



Emergency Electricity Payment Scheme

Purpose

The purpose of the Emergency Electricity Payment Scheme (EEPS) is to provide assistance to households in a financial crisis who are unable to pay their electricity debt.

Overview

A payment, of up to \$400, is provided to low-income households suffering a financial crisis who are unable to pay for an electricity account, and who have been disconnected or are at risk of disconnection.

Applicants are entitled to apply for an emergency electricity payment once every three years after the date of their last EEPS payment.

Assistance of an emergency electricity payment is given on the basis of a recommendation by a financial counsellor. The Department of Human Services (DHS), Concessions and Support Services administers EEPS and allocates the payment.

Applications for an emergency electricity payment are initiated by either the customer or a financial counsellor who is assisting a customer in difficulty. Electricity retailers suspend action on the collection of accounts while an EEPS application is being processed.

The applicant completes the application form with details of their income and living arrangements and provides this to a financial counsellor.

The financial counsellor completes an assessment form, and submits both forms to DHS.

The assessment of the application is carried out by DHS and is based on the information provided by the applicant and financial counsellor.

If the information provided in the application is insufficient for an adequate assessment of the situation, contact is made with the financial counsellor for clarification of the circumstances. If the application is successful, a payment of up to \$400 will be given to cover part or all of the electricity debt.

Eligibility criteria and general provisions

Applicants must be:

- Residing at their principal place of residence.
- Financially responsible for the payment of the electricity bill. (Applicant must be the account holder.)
- Unable to pay their electricity debt (which should be no greater than \$2,000) with their current electricity retailer.
- Disconnected from their current electricity retailer or at risk of disconnection from their electricity supply.

In addition, applicants must be:

- Experiencing significant financial difficulty in paying their electricity account as a result of one of the following criteria:
 - A significant increase in the use of electricity. For example, this may be due to a faulty household appliance, or an illness that requires extra heating or cooling in the home.
 - A recent decrease in income. This may be caused, for example, by separation, illness or unemployment.
 - A large or unexpected increase in expenses on essential items. For example, medical expenses, funeral costs, or repair/replacement costs for essential household items.

Or

- Experiencing a critical time in their life-cycle, or a high risk life event, which is causing general financial stress. These can include:
 - familial breakdown
 - the birth of a child/children
 - medical conditions (suffer from or caring for)
 - contractual and/or seasonal employment
 - sudden unemployment
 - increased housing stress, including default on mortgage or rent.

Or

- Experiencing acute, general, financial stress and have no other means of paying their electricity debt.

These circumstances may have arisen anytime within the previous 12 months, not just within the current electricity billing cycle.

Other provisions and requirements

An emergency electricity payment is available to pay for a debt (including for a final bill) incurred by the applicant at their previous address, as long as the applicant has remained with the same electricity retailer when they moved to their current address.

An EEPS payment is available to cover the cost of re-connection with the applicant's current electricity retailer (for those customers who have had their electricity supply disconnected).

EEPS is not available for the payment of security deposits.

The applicant's electricity debt should be no greater than \$2,000.

The reason for the application must arise because of some pressing or unforeseen circumstance or financial stress, whether short-term or long-term.

Applicants must demonstrate the emergency nature of their situation and produce evidence in support of their application.

Applicants can make a successful application for an emergency electricity payment once every three years after the date of their last EEPS payment.

Important considerations in determining eligibility

Before being considered for an emergency electricity payment, where appropriate, financial counsellors should explore whether the financial hardship needs of the customer are able to be reasonably met by alternative means. These can include:

- instalment arrangements, including Centrepay
- an extension of time to pay
- entering the electricity retailer's hardship program
- financial or other assistance provided by welfare agencies, non-government organisations and government, or a combination of the above measures.

Recognised financial counsellors

To be qualified to submit an application for an emergency electricity payment, a financial counsellor must be eligible to become a full member of The South Australian Financial Counsellors Association (SAFCA).

This requires that financial counsellors have completed the Diploma in Community Services (Financial Counselling), as well as a 12 month program of work experience, under the supervision of a SAFCA recognised supervisor.

Role of financial counsellors

Financial counsellors:

- are the primary contact for customers
- respond to customer enquiries about EEPS
- assess applicants' eligibility for an emergency electricity payment as part of a financial counselling session
- inform customers of alternative payment options e.g. energy retailer hardship programs, instalment arrangements etc
- investigate applicants' EEPS history (through DHS)
- assist applicants to complete an application for an emergency electricity payment
- verify information provided by applicants in applying for an emergency electricity payment
- liaise with electricity retailers to confirm total amount owed by applicants
- liaise with electricity retailers about pending EEPS payments, particularly in circumstances where disconnection or other action is likely
- submit applications for EEPS payments to DHS (for approval and payment).

Role of the Department of Human Services

The Department of Human Services:

- responds to enquiries from financial counsellors (within three business days)
- provides financial counsellors with information about applicants' EEPS history
- receives applications for EEPS payments from financial counsellors
- liaises with financial counsellors about pending EEPS applications
- assesses and approves EEPS applications
- processes EEPS payments to electricity retailers
- advises financial counsellors of the outcome of EEPS applications
- maintains records on all EEPS applications and payments
- reports on EEPS, as required.

Role of electricity retailers

Electricity retailers:

- provide information to customers who are having difficulty in paying their electricity account about access to government, community and financial counselling services and assistance, including EEPS
- assist customers to access alternative payment arrangements, including hardship programs
- work with customers and financial counsellors to arrange suitable payment arrangements for customers experiencing financial hardship and crisis
- ensure action on the collection of accounts is suspended while an EEPS application is being processed

EEPS Application and Payment Process

Assessment of Eligibility and Application

1. Customer seeks financial assistance from financial counsellor.
2. Financial counsellor discusses options with customer, including their eligibility for all South Australian Government concessions.
3. Financial counsellor assesses the applicant's eligibility and checks with DHS whether the applicant has received an emergency electricity payment in the last three years.
4. DHS advises financial counsellor if applicant has previously received a payment.
5. Where the applicant is eligible for an emergency electricity payment, the financial counsellor will assist the applicant to complete an **Application for Emergency Electricity Payment** form.
6. Financial counsellor completes a **Financial Counsellor Use Only** form, which includes the following checklist:
 - applicant's eligibility for an EEPS payment
 - confirmation from DHS that applicant has not received an EEPS payment in at least three years
 - attach confirmation in writing from the electricity retailer with details of the following:
 - the applicant is a current customer of the electricity retailer
 - the current amount owing on the electricity account
 - any payment arrangements with the electricity retailer to consolidate the remaining debt (if applicable)
 - copy of applicant's income and expenditure details are attached to the application
 - financial counsellor has provided sufficient comment in support of the application.
7. Financial counsellor contacts the electricity retailer to advise it about the pending EEPS payment.
 - Electricity retailer to be advised to allow 20 working days for the application to be processed and payment to be made to the retailer. (If this time frame is not appropriate for the client's needs, the financial counsellor should negotiate with the electricity retailer.)
8. Financial counsellor submits the **Application for Emergency Electricity Payment** and **Financial Counsellor Use Only** forms to DHS.
 - The completed forms can be faxed, posted or scanned and sent by e-mail.

Assessment of Application

9. DHS assesses the EEPS forms and checks them for completeness and accuracy, including:
 - checklist and recommendation are complete
 - customer signature
 - documentation attached, including latest electricity account.
10. DHS follows up with the financial counsellor on incomplete EEPS forms.
11. DHS determines whether the application is approved and completes the **Financial Counsellor Use Only** form (DHS - Use Only section).

12. DHS updates the EEPS records.
13. DHS e-mails the financial counsellor to advise them of the outcome of its assessment of the customer's EEPS application and, if the application is approved, the expected date of payment to the retailer.

Where an application has not been approved, the e-mail will advise the financial counsellor of the reasons for the refusal.
14. Financial counsellor advises the customer of the outcome of their EEPS application and updates the electricity retailer of the status of the application.

Approval and Payment

15. For approved applications, DHS processes the EEPS payment.
 - The EEPS payment will be processed directly to the electricity retailer (through Shared Services SA).
 - The EEPS payments will take up to a maximum of 20 working days from the date the completed application is received by DHS until the payment is issued to the electricity retailer.

Review of Decisions

Should an applicant or financial counsellor be dissatisfied with the decision made, the financial counsellor is able to contact DHS (by telephone or e-mail) to have the decision reviewed. The period in which a request for review may be lodged is limited to four weeks from the date of notification of that decision.

The financial counsellor should provide any additional information which supports their case to have the decision reviewed.

If not satisfied with the outcome of the review, the financial counsellor will be advised to present in writing (including by e-mail) any additional information which supports their case for a further review to the Manager, Concessions and Support Services.