



EnergyAustralia Financial Inclusion Action Plan

Supporting those who need it most



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A message from our Managing Director



In Australia today, one in 10 adults are struggling with their finances. These could be your friends, your family, your colleagues or your neighbours.

As a provider of an essential service, we have firsthand experience of how a lack of access to financial services can impact our community. We have more than 12,000 customers in our vulnerability program, and there are probably many more needing help. We know they desperately want to pay their bills, but are struggling to do so. And our bill is just one of many piling up on the kitchen counter.

Financial inclusion is about ensuring all Australians have access to the affordable financial services and support they need to live their lives. We already support our vulnerable customers in a number of ways – through payment plans, matching payment opportunities, debt waivers, and many other important initiatives. However, we recognise that more is needed and that a lack of access to basic financial services continues to affect the lives of millions of people around the world, particularly women and girls.

Our first Financial Inclusion Action Plan is an important milestone that gives us the opportunity to bring our programs together and consider strategically how we can help people manage financial difficulties and achieve greater financial security.

Our commitment reflects the values we at EnergyAustralia hold dear: ensuring customers are our priority, doing the right thing and leading change. However, we can't solve financial inclusion on our own – to do that we must work with the wider community, other businesses, customer advocates and government.

Together, we can remove the barriers to financial inclusion so that our customers have access to the essential financial services many of us take for granted. For EnergyAustralia it's about working together to do the right thing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine".

Catherine Tanna
Managing Director
EnergyAustralia

Understanding our business

EnergyAustralia provides gas and electricity to residential and business customers across Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Queensland. In addition to supplying 2.6 million customers, we provide energy services including installation of solar systems and battery storage.

We source our energy from the wholesale market which includes our generation portfolio of coal and gas-fired power stations and renewable energy sources.

As one of the country's leading energy businesses, supporting communities is very important to us. We partner with local organisations where we operate, focusing on local projects and helping people who are experiencing hardship.

Headquartered in Melbourne, and employing more than 2,000 people, EnergyAustralia is a wholly-owned subsidiary of CLP, one of the largest power businesses in the Asia Pacific and one that has reliably provided electricity to Hong Kong for over 100 years.

The FIAP Working Group

Initiatives like the Financial Inclusion Action Plan are important parts of the work we do to support our community. We would like to acknowledge the role the foundation Working Group has played in developing EnergyAustralia's first Financial Inclusion Action Plan. This group will grow and evolve over time to best meet the needs of those we support.

David Ackland

Head of Customer Experience Operations

Briar Hall

Customer Vulnerability and Recovery Leader

Jenny Odgers

Social Enterprise Leader

Kane Stella

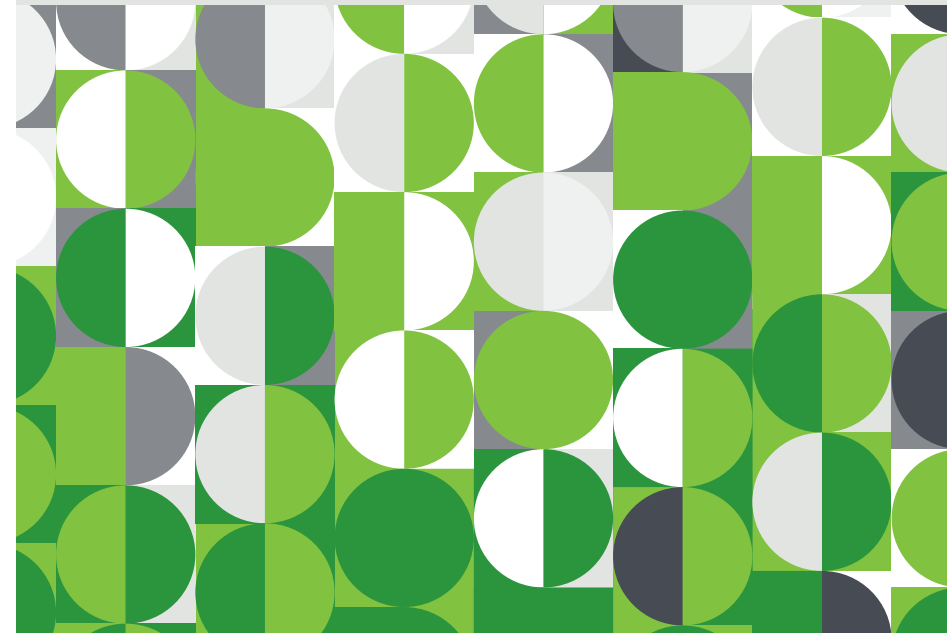
Program Lead Vulnerability and Recovery

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EnergyAustralia has been committed and genuine in its work to support vulnerable communities. Collaborating on projects supporting victims of family violence and customers experiencing financial difficulty, EnergyAustralia has ensured adequate employee training, top-down support and resourcing to effectively develop and deliver these projects to those who need it most in our community.

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**Specialist Projects Lawyer,
WEstjustice**



Our Financial Inclusion Action Plan

Our approach to financial inclusion

As a provider of an essential service, we have a responsibility to support customers who are struggling to pay for their energy. However, our commitment to financial inclusion is about more than corporate social responsibility – it’s ingrained in our company values:



Our customers are our priority.



Do the right thing.



Lead change.

In 2016, Rank the Retailer listed EnergyAustralia as Victoria’s leading energy retailer for its hardship program, EnergyAssist. Whilst we appreciate the acknowledgement of our efforts, we’re not complacent and know there is much more room for improvement. In our first foundation Financial Inclusion Action Plan (FIAP), we’re working to:











- Improve our understanding of why and how our customers can face financial exclusion, particularly those who are over-represented (e.g. women).
- Understand how we can improve our products, services, policies and practices to better support vulnerable customers.
- Help our employees better understand financial inclusion, the issues that affect it and how they can best support our customers.
- Work with community groups, advocacy groups and partners in business to lead change and improve lives.

Our commitment

Relationships	We will develop strong relationships based on respect and trust with customers, employees and external agencies because we know that by working together we can make lasting and effective change.
Impact	Real and lasting change only occurs through commitment on all sides. We will listen to our stakeholders so that we understand issues that are important to them. Then we will craft solutions and measure the impact of the changes we make.
Learning	EnergyAustralia has a focus on supporting vulnerable customers. Further education of our employees about financial inclusion and its impacts will mean a greater level of understanding and focus. We see this area as an opportunity to innovate and lead change.
Reporting	We want to understand the impact of what we do, and whether we’re making a difference to peoples’ lives. Drawing on the skills of Good Shepherd Microfinance, the Centre for Social Impact, Ernst & Young, and the Australian Government will help us develop evidence-based solutions and to better engage with our stakeholders.

Products and services











We recognise that the affordability, appropriateness and accessibility of our products and services is vital for our customers, particularly those who are most vulnerable. We will review our existing products and services and make improvements to better meet the needs of the community.

No.	Action	Output	Outcome	Stakeholder	Timeframe	Responsibility	Values
1	Review existing EnergyAustralia products and services to evaluate their appropriateness and affordability for vulnerable customers.	Report outlining the suitability of EnergyAustralia products and services and areas for improvement.	Appropriateness and affordability of EnergyAustralia's products and services is considered.		December 2017	Vulnerability Team	
2	Identify and explore a new product or service (or existing product improvement) to help vulnerable customers.	Informed product and service recommendations are taken to the Product and Design team.	Customers have access to appropriate and affordable products and services.		December 2018	Vulnerability Team and Sales Team	
3	Identify and explore a joint initiative with another FIAP trailblazer for an integrated service or product for vulnerable customers.	Development of a FIAP partnership. Recommendations for an integrated service or product.	Customers have access to complementary products and services within and outside of EnergyAustralia that address financial exclusion.		December 2018	Vulnerability Team and Reputation Team	
4	Advocate for policy and regulatory structures that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrably support financial inclusion promote access to appropriate and affordable products and services. 	Engagement with government and peak bodies on policy and regulation relevant to financial inclusion.	Regulatory frameworks support customers having access to appropriate and affordable products and services within and outside of the energy sector.		Monitored yearly	Reputation Team	
5	Continue to work with regulatory bodies on current and future regulations and consider how these affect EnergyAustralia's financial inclusion actions.	Engagement with regulators and reports outlining the impact of regulations on EnergyAustralia's customers.	Regulatory frameworks support our customers.		Monitored yearly	Reputation Team	

Stakeholder key	Customers	Staff	Partners	Community
				

Capabilities, attitudes and behaviours

Our employees are key to how we support and engage our customers. We will work to improve our employees' understanding of financial inclusion, and ensure they have the information they need to support our customers. We will also work to build strong relationships with the community and business leaders to effect change.

No.	Action	Output	Outcome	Stakeholder	Timeframe	Responsibility	Values
6	Review and evaluate the way EnergyAustralia supports employees to learn about financial inclusion and the issues that lead to it.	Financial inclusion learning and development plan.	EnergyAustralia's employees have a better understanding of the issues that affect financial inclusion and how to better address these issues.		December 2017	Vulnerability Team	
7	Develop a project specification and scope to review and evaluate EnergyAustralia's ability to collect financial inclusion data on administration systems.	Report setting out the parameters for a review and update of data administration.	Intelligence to implement a project to better support and identify vulnerable customers.	 	December 2019	Vulnerability Team and Social Enterprise Team	
8	Expand and maintain EnergyAustralia's FIAP Working Group to drive delivery, evolution and monitoring of FIAP actions.	Quarterly FIAP Working Group meetings and annual FIAP reporting.	Evolve EnergyAustralia's commitment to financial inclusion and support of vulnerable customers.		Monitored annually	FIAP Working Group	
9	Continue to build strong relationships with financial counsellors in the community to identify ways we can work together to address financial exclusion.	Engagement with financial counsellors from different areas of the community.	Build the financial security of customers supported by financial counsellors. Advocate on behalf of customers in the community.	 	Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	















I recently had to assist two women who were drastically affected by family violence. EnergyAustralia's immediate and empathetic responses have helped create a much better environment for my clients. Their service isn't just a tick box exercise – they followed up on my clients to ensure their safety and energy security needs were met and maintained. I can't thank them enough. EnergyAustralia's genuine responses to situations like these has made my work with them very rewarding, streamlined, and productive.



Moneycare Senior Financial Counsellor, Salvation Army









Awareness and understanding of culture and diversity

With more than 2.6 million customers, we service the needs of a broad cross-section of the community who face an equally broad range of barriers to financial inclusion. We have customers who lack access to knowledge, who have language barriers and who suffer from illness. There are also those who suffer from family violence, or are refugees or asylum seekers. Many customers in these groups also face financial challenges. No two customers are the same, which is why we're working to recognise and respect the diversity of our customers, and find the most appropriate ways to support their needs.

No.	Action	Output	Outcome	Stakeholder	Timeframe	Responsibility	Values
10	Continue to work with WEstjustice on the <i>Restoring Financial Safety</i> pilot project for victims of family violence.	Delivery of the <i>Restoring Financial Safety</i> pilot project.	Improve the financial security of victims of family violence.		December 2017	Vulnerability Team	
11	Review EnergyAustralia's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in a financial inclusion context and consider areas for improvement.	Informed recommendations to update EnergyAustralia's RAP to include reference to financial inclusion.	Financial inclusion needs are considered as part of EnergyAustralia's RAP.		December 2017	RAP Working Group	
12	Identify and explore financial inclusion education campaigns targeted to female customers of EnergyAustralia.	Informed recommendations for the development of female focused education campaigns.	Female customers and their families better understand financial inclusion topics and tips.		December 2018	Vulnerability Team	
13	Continue to work with Legal Aid NSW on the debt waiver pilot for closed accounts of customers experiencing high stress and vulnerability.	Delivery of the initial debt waiver pilot program in NSW.	Contribute to alleviating the financial burden of people in long-term financial hardship.		Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	
14	Continue to collaborate with energy and water retailers on initiatives and education to help refugees and asylum seekers access utility financial hardship services.	Develop and implement the refugees and asylum seekers initiatives.	Refugees and asylum seekers targeted have improved education and access to financial hardship support.		Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	
15	Evaluate new opportunities to work with community and advocacy groups on financial inclusion initiatives that support vulnerable groups in the community.	Review and evaluation of new initiatives in the community.	Supporting the community to improve their financial security.		Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	

Economic participation and status

Our vulnerability programs play a vital role in supporting financial inclusion and fostering customer resilience. We are committed to providing programs that help our customers and employees manage financial difficulties and achieve greater financial security.

No.	Action	Output	Outcome	Stakeholder	Timeframe	Responsibility	Values
16	Identify and evaluate the ways EnergyAustralia's policies and practices support customers experiencing and exiting abusive relationships.	Review policies and practices and make recommendations for improvement.	Policies and practices that better support those experiencing and exiting abusive relationships.		March 2017	Vulnerability Team	
17	Identify and evaluate the ways EnergyAustralia's policies and practices support financial inclusion (e.g. credit, selling debt, data storage, administration fees, communications).	Report reviewing policies and practices and recommendations for improvement.	Policies and practices support those experiencing financial difficulties.		July 2018	Vulnerability Team and Social Enterprise Team	
18	Continue to run and evolve EnergyAustralia's existing programs for customers experiencing financial hardship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment match program. • Debt assistance program. • Appliance swap program. • Unrecoverable debt program. • Energy efficiency visits. 	Regular review and development of existing financial hardship programs to ensure ongoing suitability.	Customers are supported to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce costs and encourage regular payments • limit or remove debt in one-off events • own energy efficient home appliances • change behaviours to reduce electricity bills. 		Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	
19	Continue to work with partners to deliver a community engagement program on energy efficiency, affordability and financial inclusion.	Community engagement program.	Contribute to improving the financial security of vulnerable customers.		Monitored annually	Vulnerability Team	



Kildonan UnitingCare has partnered with EnergyAustralia for several years, assisting in developing the energy retailer's approach to vulnerable customers and conducting energy visits and appliance swaps. The team has embraced many of our recommendations around improving the experience for its vulnerable customers and ensuring its employees are well supported in the process.



Executive Manager, Kildonan UnitingCare

Statement from the FIAP partnership group

On behalf of the FIAP Partnership Group, I would like to acknowledge and congratulate EnergyAustralia for its ongoing public commitment to financial inclusion and financial resilience.

Together we are embarking on a journey to explore, learn and grow – both as a program through this Foundation FIAP and as Trailblazers undertaking the important process of reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive growth in our communities.

Financial hardship can impact us all, at any stage in our lives – through the FIAP, our hope is that every organisation will be able to respond in time and every time to ensure financial hardship can be identified early, managed and overcome. By building capacity, awareness and greater access to appropriate products and services, organisations will see the social and economic benefits in their engagement, outcomes and prosperity of customers and employees.

The FIAP Partnership Group exists to support the growing community of practice to identify opportunities to better respond to financial risks, develop meaningful actions across key stakeholders and measure the social and economic impact.

Drawing on our individual expertise the FIAP Partnership Group will provide implementation, evaluation and quality assurance support to ensure key actions you have identified are (i) on track to achieve the intended impact and (ii) engaging those stakeholders in most need of support. We are proud to be on this important journey with EnergyAustralia.

At the heart of the FIAP program is the belief that together we can achieve more. EnergyAustralia joins the growing community of organisations that understand they play a critical role in Australia's financial future – together we can reduce inequalities and realise inclusive growth for all Australians.

Sincerely,



Vinita Godinho

General Manager, Advisory
Good Shepherd Microfinance
On behalf of the FIAP Partnership Group.



Supported by



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Good Shepherd
Microfinance



Building a better
working world



CENTRE
for SOCIAL
IMPACT



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The people EnergyAustralia supports in its financial hardship programs have complex and varied needs. We recently helped a customer with a disability in the Yarra Valley region who was living in a very rundown home, where a broken hot water system and internal plumbing problems were causing large bills. To save money he had spent 10 years turning his water supply off at the meter and only turning it on for a short time each day. He was also bathing with a bucket and sponge or heating water on his stove for a bath.

We worked closely with Yarra Valley Water to have the pipes repaired and the hot water service replaced. We also worked with him to set up a suitable payment plan, provided him with new appliances and energy efficiency advice. For the first time in 10 years he is now enjoying a hot shower and is better able to afford his energy bills.

EnergyAustralia's Vulnerability Team work to improve the lives of customers like this every day. This Financial Inclusion Action Plan will ensure our business is best equipped to meet the needs of our most vulnerable customers, as well as those in our broader community.

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Briar Hall, Customer Vulnerability and Recovery Leader

