

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE
FOR PRIMARY CARE & AGEING

THE ENERGY-HEALTH HARDSHIP NEXUS IN VICTORIA: SYSTEMS MAPPING

Summary Report

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ENQUIRIES

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The Energy-Health Hardship Nexus in Victoria: Exploring the Role of the Health System

1. BACKGROUND

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) has been funded by Energy Consumers Australia to develop research-informed interventions to effectively leverage the capacity of the health system to address the energy-health nexus more effectively. VCOSS proposes to drive systems-level change by improving the capacity and capability of place-based state-funded public health services and community health services to engage with energy market actors to prevent, intervene and respond to energy hardship and its health impacts.

VCOSS has identified three initiatives for driving systems-level change:

1. Awareness raising
2. Joint advocacy
3. Policy integration

2. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

La Trobe University undertook the following activities in partnership with the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) to support the project.

1. A literature review to understand the energy-health hardship nexus through a Victorian health system lens, and to answer the following questions:
 - How do health system actors in Victoria currently participate in tackling energy hardship and other social determinants of health?
 - Are there promising health-related interventions relevant to energy-health hardship nexus, and what are the existing barriers to their wider implementation?
 - What broader challenges may be preventing recognition of the energy-health hardship nexus in Australia?
2. Systems Mapping to show and describe (i) existing intersections and (ii) gaps/points of disconnection between National Energy Market actors and health system actors. The systems mapping activity is intended to identify how/where to nurture the practice, program and enabling policy conditions that mean the diverse households experiencing ongoing energy-and-health hardship are identified earlier and supported better.
3. The systems mapping activity was supported by consultation with experts through VCOSS-convened “Critical Friends Group”.
4. Further information was gathered by conducting an environmental scan of existing programs and initiatives to address energy hardship.

In combination with the literature review and environmental scan, the systems mapping activity helped to identify actors that could be engaged to develop strategies and pursue goals in partnership.

3. SUGGESTED PRIORITIES

This report provides an overview of the information gathered to inform recommendations for stakeholder engagement for the next Phase of the Energy-Health Hardship Nexus project. Identifying the most effective areas to engage is particularly relevant to the first two initiatives for driving systems-level change: awareness raising and joint advocacy.

Some underlying questions to be addressed in the next phase include:

- Whose awareness needs to be raised?
- Who needs to know what? What is the goal of awareness raising?
- What are the consequences of raising awareness – are supports and programs available?

Based on the project activities to date, actors that could be prioritised are described in Table 1.

In most cases, the actors who have been identified as a priority for awareness raising are linked to the proposed Advocacy partners. The advocacy partners generally represent an efficient way of engaging the proposed actors.

Note that we haven't included government departments as Advocacy partners; however, they are potential partners rather than just target of advocacy.

The rest of the report documents the information that has informed these suggestions, including describing priority groups and detailed systems maps.

Table 1: Suggested priorities for next phase of project

Recognise and Refer Actors	Advocacy Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted programs operating through local government including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maternal and Child Health Nursing services ○ Library services ○ Community Aged Care (becoming limited) ○ Health & Wellbeing services – communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Municipal Association Victoria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted programs operating through community health services including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community Health Program (allied health & counselling) ○ Refugee Health Nursing Program ○ Hospital Admission Risk Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Health First and Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health (Registered CHS) ▪ VACCHO ▪ Victorian Healthcare Association – targeting integrated community health services (hospital managed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social/community services with past/current engagement including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anglicare (EAP) ○ Brotherhood of St Laurence ○ Neighbourhood Houses ○ Community Legal Services ○ CISVic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VCOSS ▪ Neighbourhood Houses Victoria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large community aged care providers including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bolton Clarke ○ Australian Unity ○ Mercy Health ○ VAHS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Older persons' advocacy bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Council on The Ageing (COTA) ○ National Seniors Victoria ○ Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

Recognise and Refer Actors	Advocacy Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MECWACARE ○ Bapcare 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary Health Networks – particularly those with past/current involvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Public Health Units – those that have past/current involvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Centre for culture, ethnicity & health ▪ Ethnic Communities’ Council of Victoria

4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Priority Groups

The literature review and environmental scan suggested there were some people who were more at risk of energy hardship and negative health impacts of energy hardship than others. These represent potential points of engagement with the health (and other) system.

RISK OF ENERGY HARDSHIP – LIT REVIEW	RISK OF POOR ACCESS TO ENERGY AFFORDABILITY SERVICES – DELWP RFT	HEALTH CONDITIONS MOST LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO AND/OR BE NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY ENERGY HARDSHIP
Within lowest 20% of household income	without access to a computer and/or the internet	Respiratory conditions
Relying on jobseeker payments	with limited computer literacy	Circulatory conditions
Renting in public/ community housing	from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds	Cardiovascular diseases
Immigrant from non-English speaking country	who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Arthritis/inflammatory conditions
Single parent	experiencing financial stress/hardship	Communicable diseases
Private renter	who are older	Obesity
At least one person with long-term health condition or disability	living with a disability	General frailty associated with age or disability
	In rural and regional areas	Mental health conditions – depression, anxiety

Potential targeted engagement with these in mind:

- Regions/areas where people with greatest need live – e.g., LGAs with highest SE disadvantage; public housing
- Health services (& health professionals within them) that work with those most likely to be at risk
 - Settings that bring health system actors close to priority groups (Lit review suggested health professionals who visit homes are well placed to identify those experiencing hardship)

Systems Mapping

The Health System mapping identified opportunities for connection, with a particular focus on the role of health system actors to recognise and refer people experiencing energy hardship and actors to engage in Advocacy.

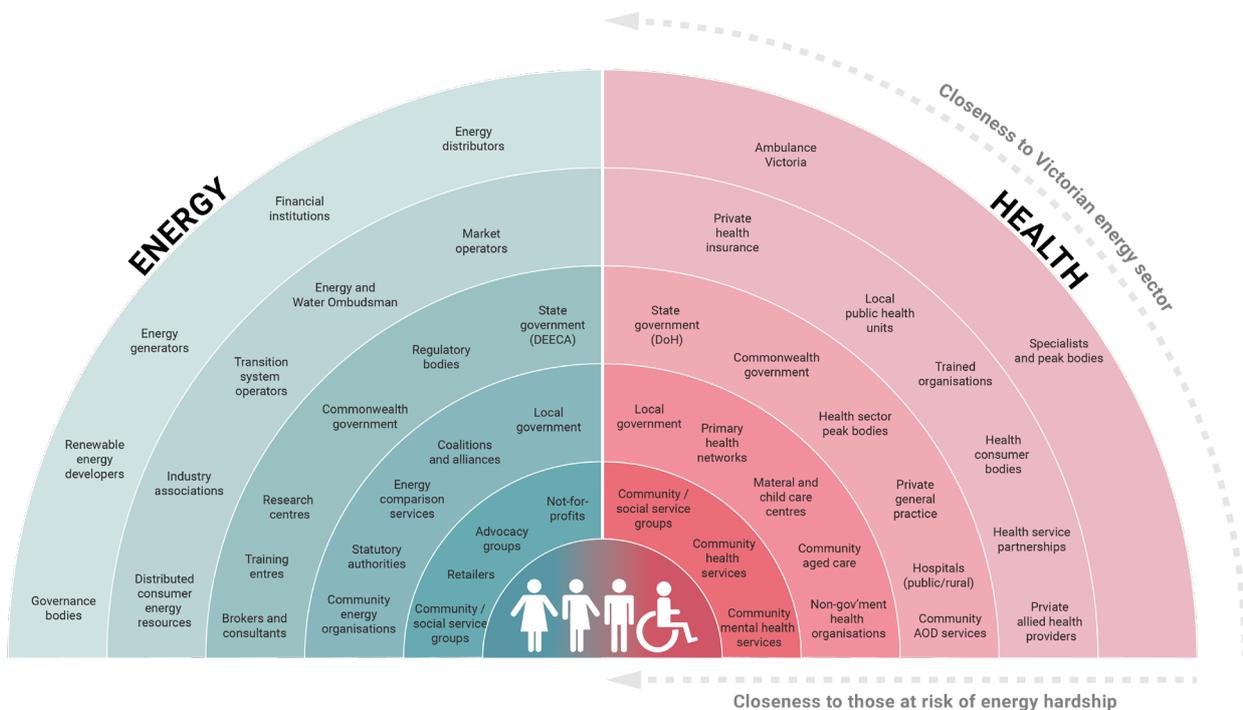
Summary representation

As indicated above, through the systems mapping activity we identified a range of actors across the energy and health systems. The degree to which these actors interacted with priority groups and the broader energy-health hardship was highly variable.

This complexity is presented in the hemispheric systems map below. In this figure, energy and health sector actors are positioned within the hemisphere based on the following rules.

1. Actors positioned closer to the hemisphere centre indicates a closer connection to the energy-health hardship nexus itself. For example, energy retailers directly interact with customers experiencing hardship, and are therefore closer to the centre of the hemisphere than an energy generator or energy distributor, which do not interact with consumers.
2. Actors positioned closer to the sector boundaries indicate a closer relationship with the opposite sector. For example, community and social service groups work closely with energy retailers to secure hardship policies for clients – this places them closer to the boundary between the sectors.

Figure 1: Position of stakeholders relative to priority groups in energy (teal) and health (red) systems



The position of actors within the systems map figure is informed by stakeholder views in VCOSS’ Critical Friends group sessions, and data summarised in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Health system mapping

Actors	Description	Existing connections to energy system (programs/practice)	Opportunities for connection
Commonwealth government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health & Aged Care; DVA; Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care; National Mental Health Commission; National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of energy policies with medical/health-related priority access Energy retrofit program for social housing and vulnerable households has been announced; DISER is working on energy equity framework; 	<p>Recognise and refer</p> <p>Aged Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSAF (National Screening and assessment Form) contains questions that can immediately identify people who may be vulnerable to energy disadvantage. NSAF could be extended by a few energy-related questions; however, the current format has just been agreed so this would be longer-term goal. <p>Note also that there are huge issues in the Vic aged care sector at present, particularly in relation to transition of aged care (MAC) assessment to commonwealth single assessment model.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are already long waiting lists for assessment and a lack of services after assessment. <p>Primary Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest in social prescribing & some GPs involved in existing programs and trials with PHNs, Local Government & others – see below under primary care. GPs do a Refugee Health Check in the first 12 months. Could advocate to ensure it includes something about energy. <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore potential to improve clarity of communication around the energy-health hardship nexus, including consistent use of the term across State Gov comms platforms (Better Health Channel, energy.vic.gov.au etc). Consider potential to influence appropriate communications strategies around c'wealth policies and programs (universal and targeted messaging). Equity frameworks being applied to energy intersect with social & commercial determinants of health equity frameworks.
State government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health & Ageing; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing; Department of Premier and Cabinet <p>Note: within the Health department there are units of different relevance (e.g. Environmental Health Unit: https://www.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VIC energy concessions use “passport” approach for eligibility to energy hardship support programs, e.g. health care card; medical cooling concession linked to some but not all life support machines and conditions that make people more sensitive to heat or cold. Better Health Channel is the Victorian Government's main health communications platform, and contains energy-related health info, including how to access concessions etc (e.g. http://tiny.cc/n5tlwz) 	<p>Recognise and refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for existing state-funded programs to include energy hardship as a health concern to be addressed. E.g., through HACC-PYP for young people, Community Health Program (CHP) funding, HARP funding <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider bringing different Departments together to consider where they intersect. Consider linking to parts of Vic DoH that are responsible for existing programs and policies that target people likely to experience hardship or have poor access to energy affordability measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Health Program Hospital Admission Risk Program Refugee Health Nurse Program Public housing already has a role in quality of accommodation, tenancy laws and their enforcement, etc. It is not clear what they currently do re informing landlords/tenants about energy hardship. E.g., Would they distribute the thermometer to monitor temperature? Links to available supports/services. Offering support to gain access to programs etc?
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> n=79 Victorian local government areas (LGAs) MAV - Municipal Association of Victoria LGAs are required to produce Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many LGs are running energy retrofit and energy assistance programs – source of funding unclear but seems varied. Many LGs are looking for further opportunities to improve the energy performance of the homes in their area; some have trialled initiatives e.g. retrofits, refuge rooms etc. (See examples elsewhere) Many LGAs provide 'home energy efficiency kits' through their library services, which may be a useful resource for directing households to (e.g. http://tiny.cc/71elwz) Many LGAs employ Sustainability Officers that provide advice to residents on reducing energy costs, navigating the energy market, transitioning to sustainable energy, and finding the best energy offers (e.g. http://tiny.cc/r0elwz) 	<p>Recognise and refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Government areas across Victoria have different priorities and areas of interest. There are a number of potential areas where they may have a role in providing advice or directing residents to resources/support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Websites, newsletters sharing information Libraries – including for computer literacy Maternal & Child Health Nursing services – including single parents Environmental Health Officers - housing inspections and assessments A declining number of local government areas are providing aged care services, including basic maintenance services. The sector is transitioning. See below for Aged Care sector. For those who remain involved, potential for maintenance teams to provide information and advice, e.g. will install light bulbs that householders have bought = could be an opportunity to discuss efficiency of lighting; could do low-cost, low effort draught proofing etc. <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipal Association of Victoria as peak body Vic Gov requirement for Health & Wellbeing Plans – could be an opportunity to highlight health-energy nexus
Primary Health Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 PHNs in Victoria: Eastern Melbourne, North Western Melbourne, South Eastern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some PHNs are members of consortia/alliances that are implementing programs addressing climate change or energy hardship 	<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information could be provided to GPs when providing letters of support for social housing. (Consumer is already engaged but would extend awareness of GP.)

Actors	Description	Existing connections to energy system (programs/practice)	Opportunities for connection
	Melbourne, Gippsland, Western Victoria, Murray <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support general practice sector Platform through which Commonwealth Gov delivers many health-related programs including those targeting gaps and market failure. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information campaign for primary care settings (GPs, Nurses, Practice Managers, Reception staff) including making patients aware of medical energy concessions; telling them about health risks of cold/hot homes and what to do about it GP/clinic/service waiting rooms may be an opportunity for sharing consumer-focused information about health-energy nexus <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PHNs provide support and capacity building to primary healthcare sector including but not limited to general practice. E.g., homelessness services, psychosocial support. Engaging PHNs around health-energy nexus would reach many parts of health system.
Local Public Health Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New in Victoria (2020). 9 LPHUs: NE, SE, Western metro; Barwon SW; Goulburn Valley; Grampians; Gippsland; Loddon Mallee; Ovens Murray Focus on disease prevention and "population health" (infectious diseases focus); "public health programs that impact their regions" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some LPHUs are members of consortia/alliances that are implementing programs addressing climate change or energy hardship 	<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each LPHU has set own priorities; Identify those with an interest in health-energy nexus and consider how to scale and spread successful programs and actions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E.g., Climate Change and Health are one of LMPHU priorities. Have subregional (Mallee, Murray and Loddon) climate change and health prevention and population health officers and regional climate change and health prevention and population health officer covering whole of Loddon Mallee <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some LPHUs are already involved and others may be interested. Could be potential collaborators in rural/regional areas in particular.
Health Service Partnerships (Hospital focused)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New in Victoria (2021) n=8. Replace Regional Area Health Partnerships & Health Service "clusters" (during COVID). NE metro; SE metro, Western metro; Barwon SW; Grampians; Gippsland; Loddon Mallee; Hume. Mandated m'ship: CEOs of Vic public health services, multi-purpose services and public, metro and non-denominational hospitals in the geographical region. Specialist health providers are members too. 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially could promote a systemic approach to including energy-health in roles for health professionals with close contact and more time to engage with priority groups. E.g., social workers and others making discharge decisions. May provide access for engaging <u>specialists</u> whose patients may be more at risk by virtue of health conditions, or where energy access may have strong impacts on existing health. Many hospitals have peer navigators and community connector roles - some are linked to particular health conditions and some support population groups. Could explore potential to make sure they're including energy hardship in their information sharing - in the context of staying healthy post hospital, and/or ambulatory care conditions. <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each HSP is required to have a small number of "strategic system priorities". These may be a good avenue for exploring ideas of engaging specialists and/or peer navigators. - some are linked to particular health conditions and some support particular population groups. Could explore potential to make sure they're including energy hardship in their information sharing - in the context of staying healthy post hospital, and/or ambulatory care conditions. Each HSP is meant to have health service clusters/groups including ACCHOs, registered CHS, local government, LPHUs, interim regional bodies/MHW Boards, PHNs, private hospitals. Opportunity for advocacy to these groups.
Health sector peak bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of peak bodies for different parts of health sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VACCHO – Aboriginal community controlled orgs (https://www.vaccho.org.au/) Victorian Association of Maternal and Child Health Nurses (VAMCHN) VHA - hospitals and CH sector VAADA - alcohol and other drugs DANA - Disability Advocacy Network Australia MHV - Mental Health Victoria IAHA - Indigenous Allied Health Australia Orgs that are interested in social/commercial determinants of health. E.g. - VicHealth 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member agencies and their staff would be the target for awareness raising campaigns because of existing reach/contact with recognised priority groups. Peak bodies could offer workforce training & support; consumer-directed information <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> These types of organisations are KEY to a strategic coalition. Key ones with existing reach to recognised priority groups with poor access to energy hardship initiatives are VACCHO, VHA, DANA, Orange Door (family violence). Other orgs (e.g., VAADA, MHV) are likely to be interested but may not be first priority for advocacy.
Non-government disease-focused health organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider those with relevant health conditions (putting people at risk or at risk of from energy hardship) e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lung Foundation Stroke Foundation Heart Foundation Palliative Care Victoria Kidney Health Australia 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member organisations, clinicians and consumers/families could be target for awareness raising and information sharing. (Currently some provide information and forms for medical/health-related concessions and supports.) <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing advocacy by Asthma Foundation for more energy efficient homes – could provide support to broaden advocacy. Some of these orgs may be useful for supporting distribution of information and resources:

Actors	Description	Existing connections to energy system (programs/practice)	Opportunities for connection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CEH - Centre for culture, ethnicity & health 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ for consumers experiencing health issues already – which puts them at greater risk, particularly in combination with other factors such as low income. ○ for health professionals with an interest in the kinds of health issues that are likely to be most relevant to energy hardship.
Health Consumer bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General and condition specific groups exist, e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consumers Health Forum ○ Physical Disability Council of Australia ○ VMIAC - Vic Mental Illness Awareness Council ○ ECCV - Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria • Aged care consumer peak orgs 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct sharing of information with members through existing channels <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target bodies whose constituents are recognised as being at risk of negative effects of energy hardship AND/OR are at risk of having poor access to energy affordability services. (SEE RISK GROUPS & CHARACTERISTICS)
Other Consumer bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public tenants union 		
Private General Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonwealth controlled • Fee for service funding model • Corporate practices dominate (over small GP-owned practices) • workforce shortages experienced across Australia • PHNs are tasked with supporting the sector 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PHNs and professional bodies may share information with primary care workforce • Programs that support GPs to provide care to priority groups could include energy-health information – e.g., Victorian refugee health nurse program <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider engaging professional associations such as AMA/RACGP/DRS – potentially through links to chronic disease management, social prescribing. • Other member groups in PC sector include Nurse Practitioners, Practice Managers
Private Allied Health providers & peak bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer appointment times in general and a commitment to holistic care in many AH professions. • Wide range of health professionals are included in the term "AH" – See Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Association (AHPRA) and • Allied Health Professionals Association • Wide range of professional peak bodies exist e.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physiotherapists ○ Occupation therapists ○ Social Workers 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider those professions most likely to come into direct contact with people at risk of negative health effects of energy hardship or poor access. • Potential to collaborate with professional associations to support distribution of communication/resources, particularly in relation to health conditions they're most likely to treat. Would need to have a "Call to Action" - not just be information, as they are very likely to be aware of heat/cold effects. • Provide information that can be shared with clients <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Associations may not be as likely to engage in Advocacy – other clinical priorities may dominate.
Registered Community Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive funding from multiple sources, including Vic DoHA Community Health Program (CHP) to provide community nursing and AH services to priority populations. • GP clinics in CH aim to deliver wrap-around holistic care but are limited by funding in most cases. Some block funding enables more integrated care. • Community Health model of care is based on recognising and addressing the social and commercial determinants of health. • Most are members of VHA • New Advocacy Alliances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CHF - Community Health First - all stand alone CHS ○ ARRCH - Rural & regional stand alone CHS 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from CHCs that have been funded under EAP/COP to support people to access a range of supports including concessions and energy saving incentives. • Target programs and services delivered by CHS where staff have more time with clients and/or go into homes. (Recognising that some programs have more time to engage with people but are not able to act for the client in many cases – funding compliance and time pressure.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allied health and counselling services provided to priority populations, some including home visiting. ○ HARP – ensure it includes recognition of energy-health nexus ○ Community connector programs e.g., in public housing. ○ GPs in CH: "Social prescribing" is meant to be BAU. Ensure information is up-to-date and includes a Call to Action - not just information. ○ Refugee Health Nurse Program - Statewide Refugee Health Nurse program is the first health contact for people who need additional support. ○ Financial Counsellors ○ Health-Justice partnerships (e.g., Seniors Law) <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New advocacy alliances for community health could be helpful given the populations they support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community Health First ○ Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health

Actors	Description	Existing connections to energy system (programs/practice)	Opportunities for connection
Integrated Community Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated community health services are part of hospitals. Receive Victorian DoH CHP funding to provide free/low cost allied health and community nursing services. Also run other programs (e.g., HARP) 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar to registered CHS, target services and programs with more time, close connection to consumers and home visiting. <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated CHS are run by hospitals; relevant peak body is VHA. Hospital networks
Social & Community Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide range of services in this category– many are members of VCOSS. Public & Community Housing providers (e.g., Unison, Doorway, Haven Accommodation) Salvation Army Brotherhood of St Laurence Jesuit Social Services Community Legal services Consumer Action Law Centre Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Thriving Communities Partnership Foundation – new digital platform increasing access to essential services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy Assistance Program (EAP), which delivers energy-related support to households facing energy hardship via tendered providers (Anglicare, 18 CisVIC members; RFT 2022 included more orgs). Community outreach programs to promote programs such as \$250 Power Saving Bonus, to June 2023. This included Anglicare; BSL; BCHS; CActionLawC; CISVic agencies; ECCV; GS-NHouses Vic; State Trustees; cohealth. Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Climate Change & Environment Program. Many NHs assisted/ing with energy literacy, energy reduction, efficiency and involved in social prescription programmes already One Stop One Story platform operated by Thriving Communities Partnership 	<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many agencies have had funding in the past (and currently) so should have a higher level of awareness of the energy-health nexus than others. E.g., Brotherhood of St Laurence, Uniting and GV Community Energy Financial counselling services - help people to access concessions, and deal with debt. Public/community housing providers Community Legal Centres One Stop One Story platform operated by Thriving Communities Partnership Neighbourhood Houses <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anglicare and CISVic as leading EAP providers Neighbourhood Houses Victoria Agencies and services that have past or current role in addressing energy hardship are likely to be more willing to join advocacy. (Before raising awareness and increasing demand for programs like EAP, it's important that there will be capacity for a response when people ask for help. This highlights the importance of advocacy and creating a coalition to demand more services to support people when they are identified.)
Community Mental Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large organisations like Mind, NEAMI Other providers including Community Health (e.g., MHW Locals) Many will be members of Mental Health Victoria Network of peaks. Victorian Mental Health Peaks Network (VMHPN) New early intervention services – Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals New Area Mental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing providers helping housing providers in installing solar panels 	<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy and support could extend to including information and advice about energy hardship <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MHV Large MH providers
Community AOD Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist treatment services & other supports Members of VAADA 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possibly support services present opportunity for increased awareness and information sharing <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VAADA
Maternal & Child Health Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services offered by Local Government, health services and ACCHOs 		<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear role in supporting health of infants and mothers; best access to provide resources for MCHNs and families is via organisations managing MCHNS or professional bodies <p>Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MAV Victorian Association of Maternal and Child Health Nurses (VAMCHN) VACCHO
Community Aged Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and private providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big providers have reach e.g., Bolton Clarke, Australian Unity, Mercy Health, VAHS, MECWACARE, Bapcare Peak bodies for aged care sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Aged Care Collaboration - group of six aged care peak bodies: Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA), Anglicare Australia, Baptist Care Australia, Catholic Health Australia, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information available for older Victorians – Seniors Online https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/ 	<p>Recognise and Refer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Aged Care (MAC) assessors are trained to assess living conditions and issues and refer to other providers to deliver Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). Assessors could give information to the householder about what supports are available and how to access them. (THEN there needs to be capacity to respond.) Current RFT is out for new single assessment service at regional level in Victoria. Services supported by CHSP generally involve workers going into homes. MAC assessors and CHSP workers can identify shortcomings in overt material quality of homes like broken windows, lack of heating appliance etc. Other community-based aged care programs provided by agencies could offer energy advice sessions (e.g., as part of psychosocial activities) people with disability are particularly vulnerable

Actors	Description	Existing connections to energy system (programs/practice)	Opportunities for connection
	Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) and UnitingCare Australia. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older health consumers' advocacy bodies – see above <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older persons' advocacy bodies Council on The Ageing (COTA) National Seniors Victoria Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) 		Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big providers Peak bodies Consumer advocacy groups
Rural hospitals & health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of services offered. Depending on remoteness, health service system may be limited. Part of Health Service Partnerships. 		Recognise and Refer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health professionals/services that go to people's home as part of transition out of acute setting include social workers, OT, community nursing. General consideration of living conditions. Questions asked of patients prior to discharge could identify energy hardship and offer information/ advice/ resources. Community-health/ambulatory care services could also be encouraged to recognise need and respond (NEED capacity in the response) Many different health professionals – specialists
Metropolitan public hospitals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very large organisations delivering complex services. All part of Health Service Partnerships. 		Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Via Health Service Partnerships Some hospitals are also part of Alliances with community-based services
Specialists – private and public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges and Associations for wide range of specialists 		<p><i>Consider different <u>types of health professionals</u> as target groups; also different <u>health conditions</u> as a priority population to target; and consider <u>what kind of information health professionals require themselves</u> and <u>what their role might be</u> (Call to Action) within the scope of their contact with patients/people and their influence. E.g., what kind of information they could share</i></p> Recognise and Refer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> General (universal) information for peak bodies to share with all members; targeted for particular professions and health conditions Resources to give to patients. E.g. raising awareness of medical cooling concession for recognised conditions. E.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Paediatricians</u> link between cold or hot homes and children's health. E.g recurring bronchitis; heat rash <u>Dermatologists</u> advise use of air conditioning to avoid heat rash on children's skin <u>Rheumatologists</u>: cold and pain – (fibromyalgia) <u>Cardiologists</u> make patients aware of medical energy concessions; tell them about risk of cold homes and what to do about it <u>Endocrinologists</u> Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target colleges and professional associations for those associated with relevant health conditions
Private health insurance companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Big providers like Medibank Private, BUPA have health promotion services. Consider companies that serve priority groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Seniors 		Recognise and Refer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information, resources that can be shared through existing channels – websites, e-mails, newsletters Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large private companies Smaller companies targeting priority populations
Ambulance Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often go into people's homes and see living circumstances during period of health crisis. 		Recognise and Refer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AV officers recognise issues like Hoarding and Squalor. Unclear what they do if they see someone living with energy hardship. Could be added to a list of recognised risk factors. Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to be a high priority for AV
Health Professional Initial Training – Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deans of Health Sciences, Medical Schools, Nursing & Midwifery 		

Table 3: Energy System Map

Jurisdiction/ scale	Actors	Definition of role	Organisations	Existing Connections to Health System	Opportunities for connection
Federal	Regulatory bodies (Federal)	Regulates Australian energy market	Australian Energy Regulator	Has the power to advise energy companies to stop disconnection, e.g. during COVID. It was a voluntary measure but it seems companies adhered to the advice. Debts still accrued	Game changer proposed reforms: https://www.aer.gov.au/game-changer-reforms
Federal	Government (Federal)	Governance and development of energy-related policy	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	May offer grants to applicants from health services to coordinate energy efficiency interventions that alleviate hardship (e.g. Community Energy Efficiency Program)	
Federal	Financial institutions (Federal)	Government-owned finance organisations investing in clean energy projects to facilitate the shift to a low carbon economy.	Clean Energy Finance Corporation	Delivers the Household Energy Upgrade Fund, which offers discounted consumer finance for energy efficiency upgrades and solar PV for housing projects (e.g. https://www.cefc.com.au/where-we-invest/special-investment-programs/household-energy-upgrades-fund/)	
	Government (Federal + Jurisdictions)	Governance and development of energy-related policy	Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council		
National	Market operators (National)	Oversees the energy transmission network, plans and procures electricity transmission network infrastructure	Australian Energy Market Operator		
National	Governance bodies - energy economics (National)	Oversees rules and frameworks related to the national energy market. AEMC makes and amends the National Electricity Rules, National Gas Rules and National Energy Retail Rules that are enforced by the AER.	Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) - https://www.aemc.gov.au/		
National	Industry associations	Represents businesses in the clean energy sector	Australian Energy Council, Clean Energy Council		
National	Advocacy, not-for-profit and lobby groups (National)	Address state issues relating to energy supply, efficiency and sustainability, influence energy policy at national level	Coalition for Community Energy, Energy Consumers Australia, Energy Users Association of Australia, Renew Australia, Energy Efficiency Council Healthy Homes - https://www.healthyhomes.org.au/	Energy Consumers Australia etc. are well aware of link between energy vulnerability and health May collaborate with health organisations to advocate or raise awareness for clean energy opportunities and climate change related issues (e.g. Renew Australia's raising energy performance standards joint campaign - https://shorturl.at/aqwWX)	Take part in the coalition to further explore the health impacts of unhealthy homes and unaffordable bills.
Victoria	Government (State)	Governance and development of energy-related policy	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set minimum standards for new homes; have developed scorecard; run Victorian Energy Upgrade programme (non means tested; no priority groups at all); actively push for all-electric new and existing homes with little support for vulnerable households Coordinate with the Department of Health on emergency management involving life support customers and wide scale power outages (including welfare checks) (DEECA). Funds the Energy Assistance Program (EAP), which delivers energy-related support to households facing energy hardship via tendered providers (Anglicare, 18 CisVIC members; RFT 2022 included more orgs). Funded community outreach programs to promote programs such as \$250 Power Saving Bonus, to June 2023. This included Anglicare; BSL; BCHS; CActionLawC; CISVic agencies; ECCV; GS-NHouses Vic; State Trustees; cohealth. Also delivers the Victorian Energy Upgrades scheme, which supports households to upgrade their appliances	Opportunities to identify trends in vulnerable consumers and support marketing and promotion of rebate and incentive schemes

Jurisdiction/ scale	Actors	Definition of role	Organisations	Existing Connections to Health System	Opportunities for connection
				and equipment with incentives (and in turn reduce energy costs).	
Victoria	Government (state)	Government-owned renewable energy company.	SEC Victoria - https://www.secvictoria.com.au/		
Victoria	Government (Local)	Provide advice and guidance to industry on proposed energy developments		Many LGAs employ Sustainability Officers that provide advice to residents on reducing energy costs, navigating the energy market, transitioning to sustainable energy, and finding the best energy offers (e.g. http://tiny.cc/r0elwz)	Many LGAs provide 'home energy efficiency kits' through their library services, which may be a useful resource for directing households to (e.g. http://tiny.cc/71elwz)
Victoria	Regulatory bodies (State)	Regulate and/or administer energy efficiency incentives program, Victorian Energy Upgrades Program which aims to reduce greenhouse gases by making energy efficiency improvements more affordable for Victorian consumers	Essential Services Commission as per Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act (Victorian Energy Upgrades Division (see equivalent programs in NSW (iPART) and other jurisdictions (worth calling out as a standalone regulatory function as objectives are distinct from energy market regulation)		Participate in co-design of energy assistance programs Opportunity for program to be promoted to support energy efficiency and cost savings outcomes for vulnerable consumers
Victoria	Statutory Authority	Supporting Victorians in the transition to a circular, climate-resilient economy, statewide waste management and planning.	Sustainability Victoria	Sustainability Victoria (SV) promotes sustainability and environmental responsibility. It develops programs and initiatives to reduce energy consumption and promote clean energy practices. SV's sustainability initiatives and energy efficiency programs may indirectly contribute to better environmental health, which can effect public health outcomes.	
Victoria	Program delivery/regulatory bodies (State)	Administer government rebate program for solar	Solar Victoria		
Victoria	Independent Ombudsman	Independent facilitation of customer complaints	Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria)		Consider linking in with Health Complaints Commissioner?
Victoria	Transmission system operators (electricity)	Operation, maintenance and development of Victoria's electricity transmission network	AusNet	From 1 March 2024, transmission companies that use statutory powers to access private land will have to develop and implement health risk management policies for risks associated with land access.	
Victoria	Transmission system operators (gas)	Operation, maintenance and development of Victoria's electricity transmission network	APA Group, Gas Pipelines Victoria Pty Ltd		
Victoria	Energy generators (electricity)		AGL, Alinta, Energy Australia, Origin Energy, Snowy Hydro		
Victoria	Gas extractors and processors	Undertake extraction and processing of natural gas	Origin Energy, ExxonMobil		
Victoria	Energy distributors (electricity)	Distribute energy for consumers	Powercor, Jemena, CitiPower, United Energy, AusNet	Distributors have obligations to: - register and maintain life support customer information - provide registered life support customers (and non-life support customers) at least four business days notice of a planned interruption (failure to do so is a breach of the code) - notify the department of Health on any wide scale power outage events (to consequentially affect life support customers) - keep website updated on outages, including information on the nature of the outage and estimated restoration time, and have a 24h telephone service available for customers - use best endeavours to restore supply as soon as possible during an outage, making allowance for reasonable priorities	A registered life support customer must also obtain medical confirmation (certification by a registered medical practitioner). There may be opportunities to better connect the health and energy systems to keep life support customer registers accurate and up-to-date.
Victoria	Energy distributors (gas)	Distribute energy for consumers	AGN, Multinet, AusNet	Special care of gas-fueled life support customers - needs to be confirmed by GP ESC: Distributors have obligations to:	

Jurisdiction/ scale	Actors	Definition of role	Organisations	Existing Connections to Health System	Opportunities for connection
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - register and maintain life support customer information - notify any person affected by a disruption of supply at least 10 business days prior - can notify the department of Health of any wide scale power outage events 	
Victoria	Retailers	Purchase energy on the wholesale market from generators and sell to consumers (distributor and transmission systems costs also forwarded to consumers)	AGL, Red Energy, Energy Australia, Origin Energy, Simply Energy, Lumo Energy	<p>When the customer changes retailer, they have to revisit the doctor to get a form signed and resubmit if it is older than 4 years. Without bulk-billing, this is an added cost to consumer.</p> <p>Retailers have obligations to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - register and maintain life support customer information - notify any relevant distributor of any life support customers they register 	<p>Opportunity to identify vulnerable consumers and promote low investment, energy efficiency savings (i.e. free or immediate payback including via incentive schemes like VEU, Solar Vic etc).</p> <p>There could be potential for relevant healthcare services to make people aware of energy supports available.</p> <p>Separately, a registered life support customer must also obtain medical confirmation (certification by a registered medical practitioner). There may be opportunities to better connect the health and energy systems to keep life support customer registers accurate and up-to-date.</p> <p>May be opportunities to foster partnerships with community health organisations to raise awareness of negative health outcomes associated with energy hardship, given that many retailers/distributors have a community partnerships team (e.g. https://shorturl.at/eyIU2)</p>
Victoria	Brokers and consultants	Advise businesses and individuals on energy purchase/procurement, and navigating the energy market	Eutility, Elengas, T & O Energy Consulting		
Victoria	Distributed/consumer energy resources	Generate locate energy that is integrated into the electricity grid	Solar PV rooftop systems, community batteries		Potential for DER such as batteries to be used by life support customers or other vulnerable customers, protecting them from outages or potentially lowering their energy costs.
Victoria	Renewable energy developers	Design, develop, construct, and operate renewable energy programs and projects	Neoen, Infigen Energy		
Victoria	Advocacy, not-for-profit and lobby groups (State)	Address state issues relating to energy supply, efficiency and sustainability, influence energy policy at state level	Environment Victoria, Sustainability Victoria	May collaborate with health service actors to refer/recruit individuals for energy efficiency interventions (e.g. Victorian Healthy Homes Program)	
Victoria	Community organisations	Deliver community-led energy projects	Bendigo Sustainability Group, Yarra Energy Foundation, Cooperative Power	Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), Energy Efficiency Council (EEC).	Development of energy-health sector coalitions, joint advocacy and submissions
Victoria	Consumer advocacy groups/Financial counsellors	Advice, information	Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) - also operates National Debt Helpline, Financial Counselling Australia, Financial Counselling Victoria	Provides advice, information and support for persons experiencing energy hardship or debts. This may also include support to vulnerable households, including persons in public housing (DFFH).	
Victoria	Education/Training centres	Schools, TAFEs, Universities			
Victoria	Energy Assessors	Assess the energy performance of all new homes; voluntary energy assessment of existing homes with the Scorecard already exists and is supported by grants and NGOs; soon this will be available nationwide		Could help connect customers to energy assistance	

Jurisdiction/ scale	Actors	Definition of role	Organisations	Existing Connections to Health System	Opportunities for connection
Victoria	Research centers and institutes	Conduct energy-related research and technology development	Melbourne Energy Institute (University of Melbourne), Energy Business Unit (CSIRO), Digital Energy Futures (Monash) Monash Energy Institute - https://www.monash.edu/energy-institute/research/themes#tabs__2019329-01 and https://www.monash.edu/digital-energy-futures/home RACE for 2030 - https://racefor2030.com.au/race-for-homes/ (Theme 3 - Mainstreaming efficient electric homes)	There is an increased interest in energy equity and the link between energy vulnerability and health	May provide evidence bases and policy recommendations for energy-related issues; may provide energy-related expertise at stakeholder forums; participate in coalitions and alliances and provide academic expertise on issues
Victoria	Exempt persons	Certain activities related to the small-scale sale, supply and generation of electricity are eligible for a general exemption from licence requirements under the provisions the General Exemption Order 2022 (GEO 2022).	Many different organisations hold registered exemptions as listed on the public register. These can also be registered to individual sites/owners corporations etc so the numbers are large. Multiple exemption categories are deemed under the GEO 2022 and organisation information is not held in these cases. A register of exempt persons can be found here: https://escvic.microsoftcrmpportals.com/rex-home/	Exempt persons have obligations to: - register and maintain life support customer information - if the exempt person purchases electricity from a licenced retail provide the customer life support information to that retailer.	Since the ongoing status of a registered life support customer is dependent on medical confirmation (certification by a registered medical practitioner), there may be scope here to consider how to better connect the health and energy systems in order to increase efficiencies in relation to this as part of up-to-date life support customer registers, as it relates to energy distributors (electricity)
Victoria	Coalitions and alliances	Partnerships that campaign on energy-related issues	One Million Homes Alliance	Campaign on energy hardship related matters, such as equitable access to energy efficient housing, and affordable clean energy	Coalitions, joint advocacy and submissions

APPENDIX 1: SERVICES IN VICTORIA RELATED TO ENERGY HARDSHIP

It is worthwhile to summarise the existing Victorian services available to those currently experiencing, or at risk of, energy hardship, in order to better understand the landscape.

The scope of the literature review has identified energy hardship interventions at the broadest scale, from policy and advocacy through direct consumer support. For Victoria-specific interventions, the review is limited to those involving the health sector, and programs linked to other sectors, such as social services, were not considered.

One of VCOSS' main initiatives will be to facilitate a better system for guiding individuals at risk of energy hardship towards appropriate resources ('signposting'). There is thus a need to investigate in further detail existing services, programs and resources across energy, housing, health and social sectors that directly connect with those identified as being at risk of energy hardship, and thus may be appropriate for signposting practices.

It is important to note that many of the described services are dependent on funding and may not be available in future years.

Financial counselling

Energy Assistance Program (EAP)

The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) was initially established in 2020 by the Department of Energy, Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP; now the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action) to provide one-on-one support to households at risk of energy hardship. The program was designed to connect households with the best energy deal for their circumstances.

A second round of funding for the EAP (\$3.75mⁱ) was included in the Victorian State Budget 2022/23ⁱⁱ, as part of the wider \$250m Energy Affordability Services packageⁱⁱⁱ. This package included the *\$250 Power Saving Bonus*.

The primary aim of the EAP is to provide tailored financial counselling to individuals experiencing energy hardship. The EAP was also intended to improve the capacity of community organisations to deliver energy-related advice.

In 2022, DELWP tendered for providers to support the delivery of the EAP^{iv}, to deliver low volume targeted support, in the form of financial counselling, for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups services. This included the following activities:

- i. Assisting individuals with understanding bills and addressing billing errors
- ii. Assisting individuals applying for retailers' hardship programs
- iii. Supporting individuals to navigate the energy market and locate the best energy offer

ⁱ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/helping-victorians-need-access-power-saving-bonus>

ⁱⁱ <https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles202223.budget.vic.gov.au/2022-23+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/more-energy-savings-and-renewable-jobs-victorians>

^{iv} <https://www.tenders.vic.gov.au/tender/view?id=240050>

- iv. Applying for grants and concessions
- v. Linking individuals with support services, or providing referrals to other services

In addition, the DELWP requested the services of provider to support the delivery of outreach services, specifically to connect vulnerable and hard-to-reach individuals without access to a computer or the internet ('Community Outreach Partners').

Two program partners were selected to facilitate the delivery of the EAP through to June 2024.

- *Anglicare Victoria*^v provides over the phone and in-person support at various sites across Victoria and meets with people at outreach locations in some circumstances. Language translation services are available. Enquiries are made by phone or online, and participants are required to have a copy of a recent energy bill available.
- *Community Information & Support Victoria (CISVic)* delivers the EAP in-person through 19 participating Community Information and Support (CIS) member agencies situated across metropolitan and rural local government areas. CisVIC also provides resources with advice on how to reduce energy costs^{vi}.

The EAP also includes a Community Outreach Program (COP) targeting individuals in public housing. The program, run by cohealth, is a continuation of a COVID support program that ran during 2020, which was refunded by DEECA to support the EAP in reaching individuals that may otherwise not be targeted through other elements of the program. The COP is scheduled to finish in June 2024 and its continuation will be subject to review.

Other energy-related financial counselling services

Charities such as Uniting offer tailored assistance as part of their wider financial counselling services^{vii}. Many local governments in Victoria also offer personalised energy advice for residents. Sustainability officers employed by local government may facilitate drop-in sessions^{viii}, one-on-one discussions, webinars, group workshops^{ix} and other support services. In most cases these services are free to the public.

Payment support

The Victorian Government offers a range of concessions, grants and rebates to assist with energy bill payments. The payment reliefs, part of the Energy Bill Relief Fund^x, may be a fixed amount, such as the \$250 Power Saving Bonus scheme; or may be a percentile amount, such as the Annual Energy Concession, which covers 17.5 per cent of usage and service costs.

^v <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/our-services/financial-counselling/energy-assistance-program/>

^{vi} <https://cisvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Client-Energy-Support-Resource.pdf>

^{vii} <https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/services/money-matters-financial-counselling/energy-bills/>

^{viii} <https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Explore/Climate-and-sustainability/Sustainable-living/Energy-and-sustainable-living-advice>

^{ix} <https://greatershepparton.com.au/whats-happening/news/news-article/!/456/post/free-energy-efficiency-workshops>

^x <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/energy>

The utility relief grant scheme is also provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), and is open to low-income households, as well as pensioner card, health care card and veterans card holders and others experiencing temporary financial difficulty^{xi}. These grants are to assist individuals in paying overdue energy and water bills. Both renters and homeowners are eligible for concessions. Grants are for \$650 per energy type over a two-year period, or \$1300 over a two-year period for homes with a single energy source.

The complete list of concessions and other payment supports is presented in Figure 3A of LTU's literature review.

Government concessions are typically only available on a per fiscal year basis. The \$250 Power Saving Bonus scheme in Victoria, for example, closed in August 2023. However, it is likely that federal subsidies for household energy bills will be repeated in 2024/25 period^{xii}.

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand^{xiii}, in partnership with other charities such as St Vincent de Paul^{xiv}, administers the No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS). Under the scheme, individuals can borrow up to \$2,000 for expenses including the cost of energy bills, provided certain conditions are met. There are also low interest schemes, such as Good Money^{xv}, that assist people on low incomes through community service providers.

It is important to note that such as payments are considered as 'one-off solutions', which may not address the long-term challenges of energy hardship (Das et al., 2022).

Energy efficiency resources and services

Victorian Energy Upgrades program

Victorian Energy Upgrades is an energy efficiency program funded by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA; formerly the Department of Environment, Land, Water, Planning), and regulated/administered by the Essential Services Commission (ESC). Under the program, households (and businesses) can access rebates or discounts on energy-saving products, such as fridges and freezers, lighting, heating and cooling systems, insulation, and weather sealing.

The program was introduced by the Victorian Government in 2009 and has undergone several expansions to accommodate new services, such as the *Residential Efficiency Scorecard* and the *Powerpal* energy monitor initiatives (refer subsequent sections). The program is expected to support a 7 per cent reduction in Victoria's electricity consumption by 2025, and approximately \$3.8 billion in energy system costs.

The program is open to all Victorian households and businesses. Private renters may also apply in conjunction with landlords. Victorians may receive discounts on the installation of energy efficient

^{xi} <https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/utility-relief-grant-scheme>

^{xii} <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/labor-to-pledge-more-help-on-energy-costs-20240121-p5eyy1.html>

^{xiii} <https://ndh.org.au/debt-solutions/no-interest-loan-scheme>

^{xiv} <https://www.vinnies.org.au/vic/services/vinnies-nils>

^{xv} <https://goodshep.org.au/services/good-money-stores/>

products if: (i) they install products that have been approved by the ESC^{xvi}; and (ii) they work with providers accredited by the ESC^{xvii}. The incentive or discount for households and businesses varies depending on the market activity and certificate price. DEECA offers training to councils to become VEU champions, which allows them to engage local communities on how the program works, what upgrades are available, and how to access rebates.

The VEU's aim is to reduce both energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions per household. The scheme, as well as its subsidiary programs, offer a long-term solution to energy hardship but may be less accessible to individuals on low incomes or experiencing immediate financial stress.

'Powerpal' energy monitors

'Powerpal' smart meter energy monitors are available to Victorian households, in conjunction with the VEU program^{xviii}. The Powerpal assesses the energy use of household lighting, heating, air-conditioning and appliances, allowing households to identify energy inefficiencies and make targeted improvements to reduce costs.

The scheme includes a smart energy monitor and installation by an accredited provider, which are both free of charge under the VEU program. The energy monitor requires a smartphone, as well as sound technological literacy.

Residential Efficiency Scorecard

The Residential Efficiency Scorecard, also part of the VEU program^{xix}, is an home energy rating assessment activity for households delivered by the Victorian Government on behalf of the Commonwealth Government^{xx}. The Scorecard was introduced into the VEU program on 31 May 2023.

The purpose of a Scorecard assessment ranges from reducing energy costs to improving household temperatures to alleviating the environmental impacts of the home. Assessments are undertaken by Government-accredited Scorecard assessors^{xxi}. People may apply to become accredited for the home energy rating assessment activity.

Assessors will typically visit consumers at their homes to discuss their goals and collect data regarding household features, such as the insulation, lighting, heating controls, windows, and hot water system. A Scorecard Certificate is issued based on these data and includes a 10 star energy efficiency rating and comfort rating.

Scorecard assessments may cost between \$250-500, although some local governments and community organisations provide subsidies and/or rebates, and may support a free of charge assessment for eligible

^{xvi} <https://www.veu-registry.vic.gov.au/Public/ProductRegistrySearch.aspx>

^{xvii} <https://www.veu-registry.vic.gov.au/Public/Participants2.aspx>

^{xviii} <https://www.powerpal.net/free-in-victoria/>

^{xix} <https://www.homescorecard.gov.au/about-scorecard/publications>

^{xx} <https://www.homescorecard.gov.au/>

^{xxi} <https://www.homescorecard.gov.au/find-a-scorecard-assessor>

residents (e.g. low income households)^{xxii,xxiii}. Victorian households may access rebates for an assessment under the VEU program^{xxiv}.

The Residential Efficiency Scorecard program is expected to be fully accredited and phased into the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS).

Energy Efficiency Auditing Kits

Energy Efficiency Auditing Kits are loaned to the public by local governments, typically through library services^{xxv}. The kits are used to test the energy efficiency of household items, which in turn may reduce energy costs. Kits may vary between local governments, but typically include the following items:

- a thermal imaging camera;
- a power meter;
- a stopwatch;
- a thermometer;
- the Energy Freedom Home Book;
- the CSIRO Home Energy Saving Handbook; and
- an instruction manual for identifying inefficient usage (e.g. high-energy use appliances), including water inefficiencies (e.g. leaks).

Digital resources

Digital resources refer to online information that can assist Victorians in improving their energy literacy, navigate the energy market, understand the benefits of energy efficient households, and access concessions and hardship programs.

Victorian Energy Compare

Victorian Energy Compare (VEC) is an independent energy price comparison tool, that assists Victorians in comparing electricity, gas, and solar offers from providers. The tool offers recommendations for energy plans that are tailored to the user's energy use and household characteristics, allowing users to reduce energy costs and make informed decisions when navigating the energy market.

Energy Info Hub

Energy Info Hub is a online platform that provides guidance on reducing household energy costs through accessing concessions, navigating the energy market, saving energy, and resolving payment difficulties. The platform has an intuitive and user-friendly layout, allowing for easy navigation and accessing

^{xxii} <https://www.stonnington.vic.gov.au/News-and-notice/2024/It%E2%80%99s-time-your-home-scored-top-energy-efficiency-points>

^{xxiii} <https://mvcc.vic.gov.au/free-energyaudits/>

^{xxiv} <https://www.veu-registry.vic.gov.au/Public/Participants2.aspx>

^{xxv} <https://www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Residents/Our-environment/Home-Efficiency-Audit-Kits>

appropriate information. There are a range of fact sheets, pamphlets and resources available for download across a range of languages.

Energy.vic.gov.au

The Victorian Government's energy website is the main hub for information on government programs, initiatives and concessions related to energy. The platform also includes supportive information for households, such as energy saving tips^{xxvi}.

Better Health Channel

The Better Health Channel is an online resource providing health and medical related information that is reliable and easy to understand, with the aim of supporting positive health and wellbeing.

The website provides advice on health impacts associated with cold weather, which coincides with the health factors arising from energy hardship^{xxvii}.

One Stop One Story Hub (OSOS)

The One Stop One Story Hub (OSOS) is a digital platform and referral system run by Thriving Communities Partnership (TCP) that allows individuals impacted by financial hardship to access support programs across multiple agencies^{xxviii}. The platform is accessed by frontline workers, who then connect clients with appropriate services.

Local government resources

Many local governments provide information on their websites regarding energy reducing behaviours, such as closing doors and blinds^{xxix}. Some local governments also provide targeted information and support that is specific to Victorians at risk of hardship^{xxx}. The provision of such services varies across local government areas.

Considerations

The problem with many of these services is that they are only available for a certain period of time. The EAP, for example, will end in July 2024. Local government workshops and drop-in sessions typically take place on specific dates. This means that there should be specific information available for an individual at a specific location and time.

^{xxvi} <https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/households/save-energy-and-money/top-10-energy-saving-tips>

^{xxvii} <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/Cold-weather>

^{xxviii} <https://thriving.org.au/what-we-do/the-one-stop-one-story-hub>

^{xxix} <https://www.stonnington.vic.gov.au/Community/Sustainable-Stonnington/Reduce-your-footprint/Save-energy/Reduce-energy-at-home>

^{xxx} <https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Residents/Environment/Household-Energy>

Programs may also change name, structure and scope, depending on external factors such as funding and the general political landscape.

Could actors benefit from an online directory that lists all free counselling and information services available in a given area? For example, such as Anglicare Centres, CisVIC member agencies, local government initiatives. Health services actors could access the directly on the behalf of an individual, or the individual could access the site possibly using a QR code.

Because programs and services are often only available over a fixed term, the directory would be updated periodically to provide up to date info.

Figure 2 – Map presenting Victorian services across energy, health and housing/social services sectors, as described in Appendix 1. The distribution of points within the map reflects their proximity to the energy-health hardship nexus (white circle in centre).

