



## Commitment to deliver improvements for energy consumers

**AGL Energy today commits to the below steps with our community advocates to change the way we're working and better support our customers.**

### Key commitments

- > Improve the way we work with our customers
- > Invest \$6 million over three years to support hardship customers
- > Target early intervention to support vulnerable customers
- > Support policies which enhance competition of offers
- > Improve comparability and transparency
- > Deliver clear customer choice
- > Offer direct contact for financial counsellors and community workers
- > Provide easy to find assistance.

Our commitments to provide meaningful support to our customers is today being made to, and following consultation with: Brotherhood of St Laurence, Financial Counselling Australia, NSW Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Queensland Council of Social Service, St Vincent de Paul Society, Kildonan Uniting Care and South Australian Council of Social Service.

Since 1837 AGL has been committed to supporting Australian communities, always looking for a better way - to make things easier for our customers, to work closely with our community sector partners and to provide support to customers when times get tough. Energy is fundamental to the everyday lives of Australians and as an essential service provider, we take seriously our role and responsibility to provide secure and affordable energy supplies to households and businesses.

Key areas which our community partners have raised with us for improvement include:

- > Better and more accessible information for customers experiencing financial difficulties.
- > Being clearer and more transparent in the way we communicate with our customers.
- > Enhanced customer services training.
- > Greater access to phone support for customers and financial counsellors.
- > Early identification of customers experiencing difficulties and more proactive communication with these customers.
- > Greater ability for customers to compare offers.

AGL is embarking on a longer-term program of change over the next 18 months, however below outlines the commitments we are making today to bring about meaningful changes to support our customers.

### **Improving the way we work with our customers**

AGL employees can often be the first contact point for customers experiencing financial difficulties. We commit over the coming year to implementing the following guiding principles for the way we engage with our customers:

- › Our conversations with customers will be founded in respect and trust.
- › Success measures aligned to achieving the best outcome for our customers.
- › We will provide opportunities for members of our front line staff to develop further skills and training, aligned to the changing needs of customers. Where appropriate, this will include opportunities to engage directly with members of the community experiencing financial hardship.

### **Additional investment in resources to support hardship customers**

AGL acknowledges that for some customers on limited or constrained incomes, energy costs outweigh available income impacting ability to pay, either in the short or long term. Whilst AGL acknowledges there needs to be a shared responsibility approach to supporting these customers across industry and Government, we will dedicate \$6 million (over three years) specifically to support customers in need where the gap between ongoing costs and income needs to be bridged.

This support may include incentive contributions, funding to support independent financial counselling services and energy audit services where appropriate. We will also investigate opportunities to assist customers who are at risk of hardship around improving the energy efficiency of their homes and appliances, along with other cost effective methodologies for reducing the risk of falling into energy hardship.

We will outline the framework for the expenditure of this fund by February 2015.

### **Taking an early intervention approach to supporting vulnerable customers**

AGL will over the next year take greater steps to identify and provide support to vulnerable customers, including:

- › Trialing new methods of communication to contact customers experiencing payment difficulties to enhance engagement (this may include online chat, SMS or face-to-face engagement).
- › Continuing to actively promote the 1800 number for financial counselling to support our vulnerable customers.
- › Taking further steps to proactively identify vulnerable AGL residential customers, their preferences and offer support tailored to customer needs.

### **Supporting policies which enhance competition of offers**

AGL supports the policy proposal from St Vincent de Paul Society to have the publishing/gazetted of standing offers all on the same day.



### **Improving comparability & transparency**

AGL supports the key role of comparator websites and platforms in assisting customer choice and will work with community groups, industry and regulators to improve simplicity and comparability of information available on energy offers.

### **Clear customer choice**

AGL supports customers having clear and understandable choices when it comes to their energy contract. AGL commits to developing clear and more transparent information of our products and services. This includes reviewing the structure and communications of customer energy plans.

### **Phone line and email address for financial counsellors and community workers to speak directly with AGL hardship specialists**

AGL values the important work of financial counsellors and community workers in supporting our customers through difficult times. We recognise that time spent with clients is valuable and sometimes matters need to be resolved while financial counsellors are in face-to-face meetings with customers.

We will establish an enhanced process for financial counsellors and community workers to contact our specialist team directly, by phone or email, and seek to ensure this number is widely promoted to community sector workers in all states.

### **Assistance that's easy to find and access**

AGL commits to improving the prominence of hardship information in our communication materials, from the time of sign up, through to information on our website. We commit to providing this information in an appropriate range of formats to ensure it is simple and accessible for all customers who may be experiencing payment difficulties.

AGL recognises that significant and long-term changes often don't happen overnight, and commits to working with the community sector on a range of improvements and policies over the next 12-18 months. Focus areas for this collaboration includes system and process changes, improved employee training and capability, enhanced communications and design of simpler, clearer products.

This commitment will be reviewed in 18 months to re-assess priorities which best support consumers. To provide for accountability on the commitments made today, AGL will also meet with participating community representatives once every six months, to report back on implementation and seek feedback on outcomes.



**AGL makes these commitments to energy consumers and the below organisations.**

