



COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability

Customer Research
Insights Report
Wave 2, Q1, March 2021

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Detailed analysis of primary vulnerable groups

A detailed view of Wave1-2 trends across priority groups

The background features a warm, orange-hued sunset or sunrise over a city skyline. In the foreground, two hands are silhouetted against the bright light, reaching up towards a glowing lightbulb. The lightbulb is surrounded by a network of white lines and dots, resembling a molecular structure or a data network. In the top left corner, there are several overlapping circles in shades of green, blue, and orange, with a dashed white line forming a circular path around them.

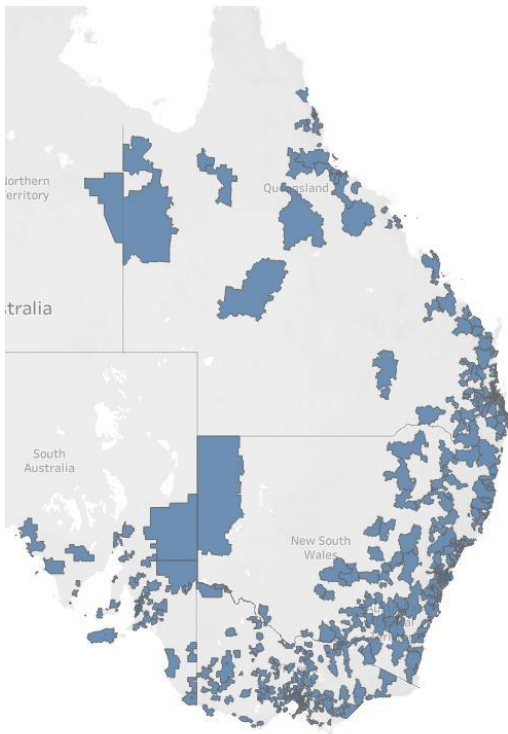
Research Overview

Our methodology and outputs

Research methodology

The second wave of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey was administered between the 11th February – 21st February , in order to monitor changes in customer wellbeing and sentiment towards energy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondent locations



Method

- This survey used a **random sample of 3,045** respondents
- Respondents were **representative of the Australian population**, using controlled attributes across **Median age, Gender and State (VIC/NSW/QLD/SA/ACT)**
- **Respondents were qualified** to ensure they were both 'connected to electricity' and 'pay or have sight of their energy bill(s)'
- Respondents were asked a range of **questions covering the following topics:**
 - Demographics
 - Wellbeing and outlook
 - Individual & household impacts
 - Actions taken and hardship support
 - Communication preferences
 - Energy investments

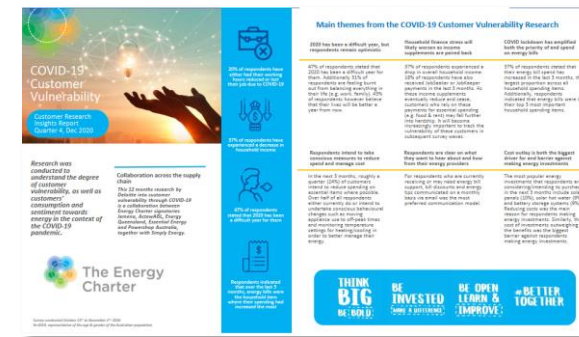
What we've developed

Four key artefacts have been developed to enable research signatories to fully leverage the findings and data.

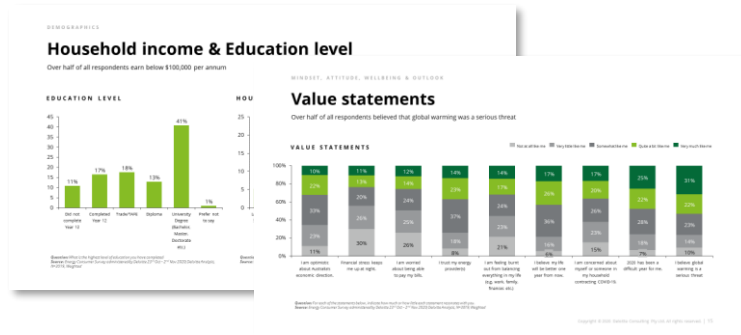
Tableau Dashboard



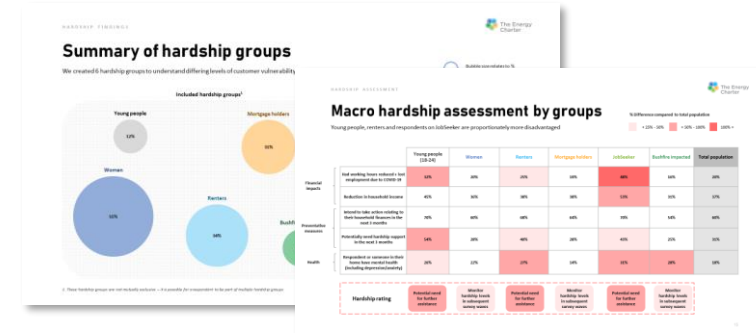
Energy Charter Placemat



Top Line Responses



Final Insights Report (focusing on hardship groups)



Wave 2 key insights

This report provides a synthesised view of insights and trends related to Wave 2 of the COVID-19 Customer Vulnerability survey.

Four main themes are emerging:

A range of survey responses are trending positively (when compared to Wave 1), pointing to signs of recovery.

- A 4% uplift in optimism about Australia's economic direction.
- A decrease of 3% in those who reported reduced working hours due to COVID-19.
- A decrease of 4% and 6% respectively, amongst those reporting a reduction of individual and household income.
- For those categories where household spending had fallen, there has also been a turnaround. A 11% improvement in Recreation spend (e.g. entertainment or holidays), and a 10% improvement in transport spend.

The pandemic has increased stress levels for many, and significant concern about the lasting impacts of COVID-19 will see that trend likely continue.

- 50% of respondents agreed that COVID-19 had increased their stress levels.
- Nearly 70% of respondents are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19.
- Compounding stress levels, there has also been a 3% increase in those respondents worried about being able to pay their bills (i.e. compared to Wave 1).


The impacts of COVID-19 are being felt more significantly by vulnerable groups. But it is JobSeekers who are falling further into hardship.

- Three *primary* vulnerability groups stood out in Wave 1 as being impacted more significantly than the broader population – Young Adults (18-24), Renters and JobSeekers.
- While these groups persist in their prominence in Wave 2, the impact gap between JobSeekers and the broader population is widening.
- Financial stress increased across these three groups, but there was a significant increase of 12% amongst JobSeekers, when compared to Wave 1.
- The need for energy bill support was consistently higher amongst vulnerable groups when compared to the broader population.

There is an upward trend in both those receiving and potentially needing support, in response to the increase in energy bills and the balancing of household spend.

- Consistent with Wave 1, energy bills remain the category where household spending has increased the most, with 36% of respondents indicating they are spending more.
- At 19%, more respondents are currently receiving support for energy bills than any other household finance category. A further 15% stated that they may need support in the next 3 months, and this figure is trending upwards.
- Compounding the increase in spend, is the decline in the priority of energy bills amongst vulnerability groups, as they balance the importance of different spending categories.

See Topline Responses for detail.

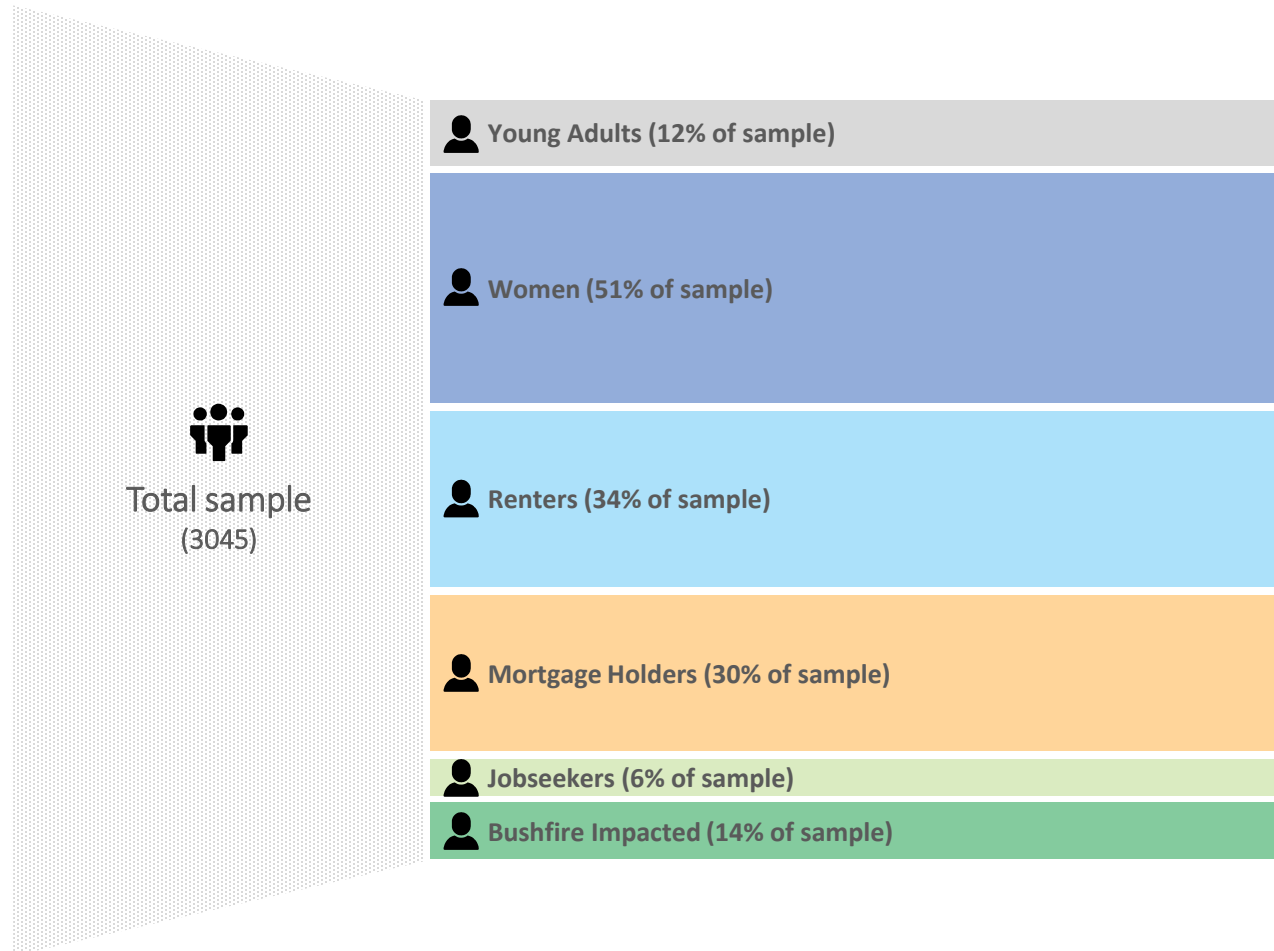


Vulnerable Group Analysis

As in Wave 1, we have anchored our analysis to a range of Vulnerable Groups

We're continuing to track 6 vulnerable groups

These groups were created to anchor our synthesis and understand differing levels of customer vulnerability.



1. These vulnerable groups are not mutually exclusive – it is possible for a respondent to be part of multiple groups

Vulnerable group framework

Groups were defined using the following criteria.

% of respondent population ¹	Vulnerable group	Qualifying question	Qualifying response	No. of qualified respondents
12%	Young Adults (18-24)	What is your age?	18-24	365
51%	Women	How do you describe your gender identity?	Woman	1,545
34%	Renters	Which of the following best describes your home ownership situation?	Rent – intend to own a home later + Rent – never intend to own a home	1,050
30%	Mortgage Holders	Which of the following best describes your home ownership situation?	Own – paying mortgage	912
6%	JobSeeker	In the last 3 months, have you received any of the below supplements to your individual income?	JobSeeker	185
14%	Bushfire Impacted	What is your postcode?	Postcodes classified as having been impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires by the Australian Taxation Office	433

1. These vulnerable groups are not mutually exclusive – it is possible for a respondent to be part of multiple groups

Young Adults (18-24)



22

Average age



56%

Renters



61%

Employed full time, part time or casually



21%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

There are signs of recovery for Young Adults. However, they remain apprehensive about the economic future, prioritising reducing spend on non-essential items.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **47%** of young adults **felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, compared to 31% of respondents aged 25+. Of note in Wave 1, 61% of young adults and 46% of respondents aged 25+ felt that **2020 had been a difficult year for them**.
- **44%** of young adults are **feeling burnt out from balancing everything in their lives**, an **improvement** from 49% reported in Wave 1.
- **30%** of young adults are **optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, compared to 37% of respondents aged 25+. The proportion of young adults who are optimistic is lower than that reported in Wave 1 (36%).
- ***61%** of young adults reported that **COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, compared to 50% of respondents aged 25+.
- ***49%** of young adults reported that **COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed**, compared to 38% of respondents aged 25+.

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **17%** of young adults **have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, an **improvement from 24% in Wave 1**.
- ***78%** of young adults have **spent 1 or more additional days at home per week** over the last 3 months, compared to 65% of respondents aged 25+.
- **32%** of young adults have **experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months**, an **improvement from 42%** in Wave 1.
- **11%** of young adults have received **JobSeeker** payments in the last 3 months, which is **over double the proportion of respondents aged 25+** (5%). The **proportion of young adults who reported receiving JobSeeker payments in the last 3 months is larger than that of Wave 1** (8%).
- Meanwhile, **13%** of young adults have received **JobKeeper** payments in the 3 months, a **smaller proportion than in Wave 1** (18%).

Young Adults (18-24)



22

Average age



56%

Renters



61%

Employed full time, part time or casually



21%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

There are signs of recovery for Young Adults. However, they remain apprehensive about the economic future, prioritising reducing spend on non-essential items.

Actions taken

- In the next 3 months, **50% of young adults intend to reduce spending on non-essential items**, compared to 37% of respondents aged 25+. Reflecting an upward trend in intention, **47% of young adults reported this in Wave 1**.
- Consistent with Wave 1, on average, a **smaller proportion (30%) of young adults are currently adopting energy saving behaviours** than respondents aged 25+ (39%). However a **larger proportion of young adults intend to adopt these behaviours** (33% vs 21%).
- On average, the proportion of young adults **currently adopting energy saving behaviours in Wave 2** (30%) is also **smaller than the proportion in Wave 1** (35%).
- **Energy bill priority amongst young adults fell** from 16% in Wave 1 to **7% in Wave 2**, a more significant drop compared to other groups.
- **23% of young adults are not currently receiving energy bill support but may need it within the next 3 months**, down from 28% in Wave 1.
- **Potential support needed in the next 3 months for essential goods (e.g. groceries) increased** from 21% in Wave 1 to **28% in Wave 2**. This is over double the proportion of respondents aged 25+ who stated they may need essential goods support in the next 3 months (11%).
- Consistent with Wave 1, the top reason (14%) for **currently receiving hardship support** amongst young adults was that they **needed help staying on top of money matters due to COVID-19**.
- The top reason (18%) young adults **may need hardship support in the next 3 months** is because they **are feeling uncertain about the future and to make themselves as safe financially as possible**.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for young adults is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated weekly via email**. In Wave 1, fortnightly was the most preferred cadence.

Energy investments

- On average, **9% of young adults have made an energy investment in the last 3 months**, down from 10% in Wave 1, but still a larger proportion than that of respondents aged 25+ (5%).

Women



46

Average age



30%

Own a mortgage



51%

Employed full time, part time or casually



22%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Women continue to be impacted more than male respondents. Consistent with Wave 1, female respondents also appear more likely to adopt cost cutting measures and behavioural changes to safeguard their households and mitigate financial impact.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **34% of women felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, which is higher than the proportion of men who felt the same way (31%). Reported in Wave 1, 50% of women felt that **2020 had been a difficult year for them**.
- **32% of women are optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, a smaller proportion compared to men (40%), but an overall **increase since Wave 1** (26%).
- **30% of women are worried about being able to pay their bills**, a larger proportion than reported in Wave 1 (27%).
- ***55% of women reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, compared to 47% of male respondents.
- ***71% of women are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19**, a larger proportion compared to men (64%).

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **13% of women have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, an **improvement** from 16% in Wave 2.
- **23% of women have experienced a decrease in individual income** in the last 3 months, a **slight improvement** from 24% in Wave 1. However, where Wave 1 saw a larger proportion of men who reported a drop in their individual income (30%), the **same proportion of men (23%) as women reported a decrease in income in Wave 2**.
- ***Of the 15% of women who reported to be receiving JobSeeker and/or JobKeeper income supplements in the last 3 months, more than half (9%) were not receiving any income supplements prior.**

* New metric included in Wave 2

Women



46

Average age



30%

Own a mortgage



51%

Employed full time, part time or casually



22%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Women continue to be impacted more than male respondents. Consistent with Wave 1, female respondents also appear more likely to adopt cost cutting measures and behavioural changes to safeguard their households and mitigate financial impact.

Actions taken

- Consistent with wave 1, a **larger proportion of women** (30%) than men (24%) are considering to **reduce spending on essential items where possible in the next 3 months**. **Compared to wave 1, the proportion of women who intend to do this has increased** from 27%.
- On average, **more women (41%) are currently adopting energy saving behaviours than men (35%)**. This is consistent with results from Wave 1, however, this **proportion of women has dropped since Wave 1 (43%)**.
- **15% of women are receiving energy bill support**, an **increase** from 12% of women in Wave 1.
- The top reason (11%) for **needing hardship support** amongst respondents was that it was a **standard pension supplement**, increasing from 9% in Wave 1.
- The top reason (14%) women **may need hardship support in the next 3 months** is because they are **finding household bills/finances difficult to afford**. In wave 1, a smaller 11% of women felt the same.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for women is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email**.

Energy investments

- **Consistent with Wave 1**, on average, **women (3%) are less likely to have made an energy investment in the last 3 months than men (8%)**. Similarly, a **smaller proportion of women than men are considering/intending to make a purchase in the next 3 months**.

Renters



41

Average age



68%

Renters intend to own their home later



12%

Renters are unemployed



25%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

There are some positive signs amongst Renters, as the impact gap with the broader population appears to have narrowed. Renters continue to leverage income supplements and hardship support to manage household finances .

Mindsets & attitudes

- **43% of renters felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, which is higher than the proportion of non-renters who felt the same way (27%). This is an **improvement from Wave 1**, where 57% of renters felt that **2020 has been a difficult year for them**.
- The proportion of renters who **believe that their life will be better one year from now** (44%) and the proportion of renters who are **feeling burnt out balancing everything in their life** (40%) has **not materially changed** since Wave 1.
- **39% of renters are worried about being able to pay their bills**, which is nearly double the proportion of non-renters (22%). This proportion of renters has **increased since Wave 1** (36%).
- ***57% of renters reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, compared to 47% of non-renters
- ***47% of renters reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel depressed**, compared to 35% of non-renters

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **13% of renters have had their hours reduced due to COVID-19**, an **improvement** from 18% of renters who reported a reduction in hours in Wave 1.
- **26% of renters have experienced a decrease in income in the last 3 months** compared to 21% of non-renters. This is an **improvement from Wave 1**, where 32% of renters reported a decrease in income.
- **A larger proportion** (12%) of renters are receiving **JobSeeker payments** in Wave 2 than in Wave 1 (10%). However, a **smaller proportion** (10%) are receiving **JobKeeper payments** in Wave 2 than in Wave 1 (12%).

* New metric included in Wave 2

Renters



41

Average age



68%

Renters intend to own their home later



12%

Renters are unemployed



25%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

There are some positive signs amongst Renters, as the impact gap with the broader population appears to have narrowed. Renters continue to leverage income supplements and hardship support to manage household finances.

Actions taken

- Compared to Wave 1 (13%), a **smaller proportion** (10%) of renters **ranked energy bills as their most important household spending item**.
- **Current housing costs** (e.g. rent, repairs & maintenance) **maintained the most important household spending item ranking, trending upwards since Wave 1**.
- **11% of renters intend to borrow more in the next 3 months**, an **increase** from 9% of renters who had the same intention in Wave 1.
- **A larger proportion of renters also intend to reduce spending on non-essential items (46%) and essential items (34%)** than reported in Wave 1 (44% and 32% respectively).
- **22% of renters are currently receiving energy bills support**, an **increase** from 18% of renters in Wave 1.
- The top reason (20%) renters **may need hardship support in the next 3 months** is because they are **finding household bills/finances difficult to afford**. This reasoning has increased since Wave 1 (16%).
- **45% of renters who required COVID-19 related financial assistance were aware that their energy retailer was offering it**. While this remains much lower than non-renters (64%), the **level of awareness from renters has increased since Wave 1 (37%)**.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for renters is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email**. In Wave 1, weekly was the most preferred cadence.

Energy investments

- While nearly half the **proportion of renters (11%)** than **non-renters (20%)** already own energy investments in their homes, relatively **the same proportion have purchased energy investments in the last 3 months** and are **considering/intending to purchase energy investments in the next 3 months**.

Mortgage Holders



44

Average age



51%

Are couples with children



78%

Employed full time, part time or casually



14%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

With relatively consistent numbers to Wave 1, Mortgage Holders are not experiencing strong improvement, nor are they in greater levels of hardship. Noticeable improvements in employment and income point to a steady recovery for mortgage holders.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **30% of mortgage holders felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, which is lower than the proportion of non-mortgage holders who felt the same way (34%). In Wave 1 **47% of mortgage holders felt that 2020 had been a difficult year for them**.
- **25% of mortgage holders don't trust their energy provider**, an **improvement** from 30% of mortgage holders who felt the same in Wave 1.
- **30% of mortgage holders are optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, compared to a higher 35% of non-mortgage holders. **Optimism of mortgage holders has dropped since Wave 1 (34%)**.
- ***53% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, relatively consistent with non-mortgage holders.
- ***41% of mortgage holders reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless**, compared to a lower 38% of non-mortgage holders.

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **25% of mortgage holders experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months**, an **improvement** from 30% of mortgage holders in Wave 1.
- **36% of mortgage holders have not had their job or employment status impacted by COVID-19**, an **increase** from 34% in Wave 1 and over 1.5 x the proportion of non-mortgage holders (21%).
- **The proportion of mortgage holders working in a hybrid home/office model (i.e. working from home during some hours and from the workplace during some hours) has increased since Wave 1 (23% vs 19%)**. This reflects a steady migration back to the office and acceptance of a hybrid working model.

* New metric included in Wave 2

Mortgage Holders



44

Average age



51%

Are couples with children



78%

Employed full time, part time or casually



14%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

With relatively consistent numbers to Wave 1, Mortgage Holders are not experiencing strong improvement, nor are they in greater levels of hardship. Noticeable improvements in employment and income point to a steady recovery for mortgage holders.

Actions taken

- **34% of mortgage holders ranked current housing costs (e.g. mortgages) as their top household spending item**, compared to a higher 37% in Wave 1.
- **9% of mortgage holders considered energy bills to be their most important household spending item, which is consistent with Wave 1.**
- **10% of mortgage holders are considering deferring their mortgage**, a slight increase from 9% of mortgage holders in Wave 1.
- **Relatively the same proportion (11%) of mortgage holders in Wave 2 as Wave 1 are considering re-mortgaging their property.**
- **13% of mortgage holders are currently receiving mortgage support**, a slightly smaller proportion than Wave 1 (14%).
- While the **top reason for needing hardship support** amongst mortgage holders was that it was a **standard pension supplement**, the top reason in Wave 1 was that respondents were feeling overwhelmed and needed help staying on top of money matters due to COVID-19.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for mortgage holders is **offers for energy bill discounts, communicated weekly via email.**

Energy investments

- Consistent with Wave 1, **energy efficient household appliances are the most currently owned and recently purchased energy investment item** amongst mortgage holders.
- **Saving money continues to be the biggest driver for purchasing energy investments**, increasing from 43% in Wave 1 to 47% in Wave 2.

JobSeekers


41

Average age


68%

Renters


42%

Unemployed


33%

 of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

Reductions in financial supplements have likely contributed to the growing hardship being experienced by JobSeekers. Support is required to mitigate this group falling further into hardship.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **48% of respondents on JobSeeker felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, approximately 1.5x the proportion of those not on JobSeeker payments.
- **41% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that financial stress keeps them up at night**, compared to 25% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments. This has **increased significantly since Wave 1**, where 28% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that financial stress keeps them up at night.
- **29% of those on JobSeeker are optimistic about Australia's economic direction**, a higher proportion compared to Wave 1 (24%), but lower than the proportion of respondents not on JobSeeker payments (36%).
- **45% of respondents on JobSeeker are worried about being able to pay bills**, compared to 27% of respondents who are not on JobSeeker payments. There is no significant change in the proportion of respondents who are worried about being able to pay bills since Wave 1 (44%).
- **48% of respondents on JobSeeker reported that COVID-19 has caused them to feel helpless**, compared to 38% of respondents who are not on JobSeeker payments.

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **8% of respondents on JobSeeker are working more hours due to COVID-19**, approximately **double the proportion of respondents who reported the same in Wave 1**.
- ***80% of respondents on JobSeeker are spending an additional 1 day or more at home per week**, compared to 66% of respondents not on JobSeeker payments.
- **47% of respondents on JobSeeker experienced a decrease in individual income**, double the proportion of respondents not on JobSeeker payments (21%), but still an **improvement from 54% in Wave 1**.

* New metric included in Wave 2

JobSeekers



41

Average age



68%

Renters



42%

Unemployed



33%

of respondents or
someone in their
household has a
mental illness

Reductions in financial supplements have likely contributed to the growing hardship being experienced by JobSeekers. Support is required to mitigate this group falling further into hardship.

Actions taken

- Current housing costs (e.g. rent, mortgages) remain the top household spending item for those on JobSeeker.
- 57% of JobSeekers intend to reduce spending on non-essential items (e.g. clothes, entertainment), an increase from 45% of respondents in Wave 1.
- On average, the proportion of respondents on Jobseeker currently adopting energy saving behaviours (36%) is lower than seen in Wave 1 (40%). However, intention is trending upwards with 25% of JobSeekers intending to adopt these behaviours.
- 17% of respondents on JobSeeker are receiving support for other debt obligations (e.g. credit cards, personal loans), an increase from 11% of respondents receiving this support in Wave 1.
- The top reason (15%) for needing hardship support amongst respondents was that it was a standard pension supplement. In Wave 1, the top reason (18%) for needing support was that they were finding household bills/finances difficult to afford.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for respondents on JobSeeker is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated monthly via email. In Wave 1, weekly was the preferred cadence.

Energy investments

- Consistent with Wave 1, on average, respondents on JobSeeker are less likely to invest in energy saving devices in their home and are also less likely to purchase them in the next 3 months.

Bushfire Impacted



50

Average age



35%

Own their home outright



26%

Retired



20%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Bushfire Impacted respondents appear to be dealing with COVID-19 better than other hardship groups. They are more optimistic about the future and appear to have greater control of their household finances.

Mindsets & attitudes

- **32% of bushfire impacted respondents felt that the last 3 months have been difficult for them**, which is only slightly lower than the proportion of respondents not impacted by the bushfires (33%).
- **37% of bushfire impacted respondents are optimistic about Australia's economic direction.** This represents a positive trend in optimism since Wave 1, where 30% of respondents were optimistic.
- ***42% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that COVID-19 has increased their stress levels**, compared to 52% of respondents not impacted by the bushfires.
- ***38% of bushfire impacted respondents reported that they are most highly concerned about the lasting impacts of COVID-19**, compared to 45% of respondents not impacted by the bushfires.

COVID-19 & household impacts

- **21% of bushfire impacted respondents experienced a decrease in individual income in the last 3 months**, compared to 18% of respondents in Wave 1.
- However, a **lower proportion** of bushfire impacted respondents experienced a **decrease in household income** in Wave 2 (29%) than in Wave 1 (31%).

* New metric included in Wave 2

Bushfire Impacted



50

Average age



35%

Own their home outright



26%

Retired



20%

of respondents or someone in their household has a mental illness

Bushfire Impacted respondents appear to be dealing with COVID-19 better than other hardship groups. They are more optimistic about the future and appear to have greater control of their household finances.

Actions taken

- The proportion of bushfire impacted respondents that prioritised medical care and health expenses as their most important household spending item doubled in Wave 2.
- A larger proportion of bushfire impacted respondents in Wave 2 have taken action to manage their household finances, including deferring mortgages, borrowing more and reducing spending on essential items where possible.
- Consistent with Wave 1, generally more bushfire impacted respondents are currently adopting energy saving behaviours than those not impacted.
- On average, more bushfire impacted respondents in Wave 2 (12%) have accessed hardship support than in Wave 1 (9%). Support for mortgages, insurance (e.g. car, home, contents), and other debt obligations (e.g. credit cards, personal loans) have increased since Wave 1.

Offer/communication preferences

- The preferred communication model for bushfire impacted respondents is offers for energy bill discounts, communicated quarterly via email.

Energy investments

- Despite exhibiting less intention to purchase energy investments than other groups, the proportion of bushfire impacted respondents who purchased energy investments has doubled since Wave 1.



Primary Vulnerable Groups

Analysis and convergence on priority groups

Vulnerability framework overview

A framework was created in order to converge focus and track respondent vulnerability over subsequent research waves.

In order to track respondent vulnerability, **3 sets of metrics** were utilised to understand how respondents have been impacted by COVID-19:

- **Financial impacts** – To understand the degree to which respondents’ household finances have been adversely affected.
- **Alleviating measures** – To understand the proportion of respondents taking actions to mitigate hardship.
- **Health** – To understand the proportion of respondents suffering from stress, mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Metric grouping	Vulnerability metric	Qualifying question	Qualifying response
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced/lost employment due to COVID-19	How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your employment status?	I have had hours reduced at my current job(s) or I have lost some of my job (s) + I have lost all job(s) and am unemployed
	Reduction in household income	In the last 3 months, how was your household income been affected? If at all?	Decreased a little + Decreased significantly
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months	Are you considering taking any of the following actions relating to your household finances in the next 3 months	Respondent selected “Yes” to at least 1 action
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months	Are you currently receiving support for any of the following household finance categories?	Respondent selected “No I am not, but I may need to within the next 3 months” to at least 1 household finance category
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	Do you or someone in your household have any of the following?	Medical illness (including depression/anxiety)
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	For each of the statements below, indicate how much or how little each statement resonates with you.	Financial stress keeps me up at night “Quite a bit like me” + “Very much like me”
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills		I am worried about being able to pay my bills “Quite a bit like me” + “Very much like me”
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	In relation to the last 3 months, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.*	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels “Strongly agree” + “Agree”
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*		COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed “Strongly agree” + “Agree”
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*		COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless “Strongly agree” + “Agree”

* New question/metric included in Wave 2

Wave 1 – Vulnerability heatmap

The table below provides a visual representation of the gap or delta between vulnerable group responses and the total sample. It highlights three primary vulnerable groups – i.e. Young Adults, Renters and those on JobSeeker.

% difference compared to total sample



		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	32%	20%	25%	19%	48%	16%	20%
	Reduction in household income	45%	36%	38%	38%	53%	31%	37%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months	70%	60%	68%	64%	70%	54%	60%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months	54%	28%	40%	28%	43%	25%	31%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	26%	22%	27%	14%	31%	28%	18%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	35%	24%	31%	26%	29%	24%	24%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	40%	27%	36%	25%	44%	28%	26%

Wave 2 – Vulnerability heat map

The three primary vulnerable groups (Young Adults, Renters, JobSeekers) persist in Wave 2 responses, however the impacts being experienced by JobSeekers are more pronounced.

% difference compared to total sample



		Young Adults (18-24)	Women	Renters	Mortgage Holders	JobSeeker	Bushfire Impacted	Total sample
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	24%	18%	20%	17%	48%	14%	16%
	Reduction in household income	39%	33%	34%	31%	50%	29%	31%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months	60%	58%	67%	65%	75%	56%	59%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months	44%	29%	41%	31%	46%	29%	32%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	21%	22%	25%	14%	33%	20%	18%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	38%	26%	34%	25%	41%	24%	26%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	39%	30%	39%	25%	45%	28%	28%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	61%	55%	57%	53%	49%	42%	51%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*	49%	40%	47%	39%	49%	35%	39%
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*	40%	39%	44%	41%	48%	34%	39%

* New metric included in Wave 2

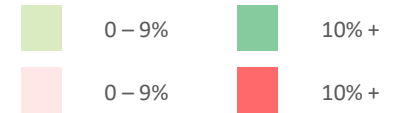
Wave 2 vs 1 – Improvements and declines

The table below visualises improvements/declines in vulnerability metrics for the three primary groups. While the broader theme of recovery is being reflected here, that can't be said for JobSeekers where the *vulnerability gap* is widening. Consistent across all three groups is a decline in the financial stress metric.

Improvement

Decline

% difference compared to Wave 1



		Young Adults (18-24)	Renters	JobSeeker
Financial impacts	Had working hours reduced + lost employment due to COVID-19	-8%	-5%	0%
	Reduction in household income	-6%	-4%	-3%
Alleviating measures	Intend to take action relating to their household finances in the next 3 months	-10%	-1%	+5%
	Potentially need hardship support in the next 3 months	-10%	+1%	+3%
Health	Respondent or someone in their home have mental health (including depression/anxiety)	-5%	-2%	+2%
	Financial stress keeps me up at night	+4%	+3%	+12%
	I am worried about being able to pay my bills	-1%	+3%	+1%
	COVID-19 has increased my stress levels*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel depressed*	N/A	N/A	N/A
	COVID-19 has caused me to feel helpless*	N/A	N/A	N/A

* New metric included in Wave 2



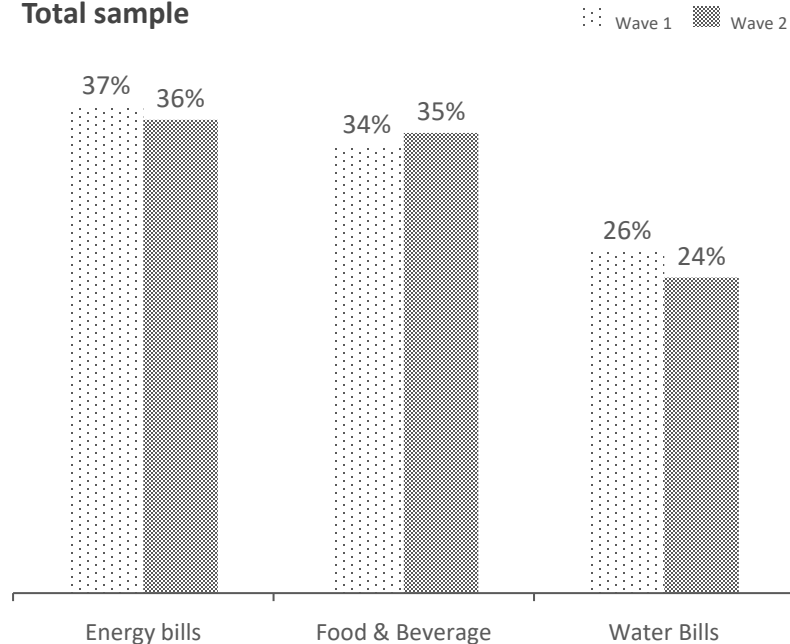
Detailed Analysis of Primary Vulnerable Groups

*A detailed view of Wave1-2 trends in Young Adults,
Renters and JobSeekers*

Categories where household spending increased the most

Key trends in 'spending more' categories

Total sample

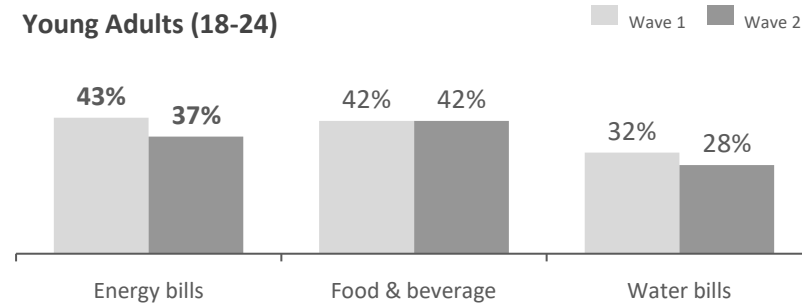


Energy bills remain the category where household spending has increased the most.

Question: For the following spending categories, how has your household's spending changed in the last 3 months?

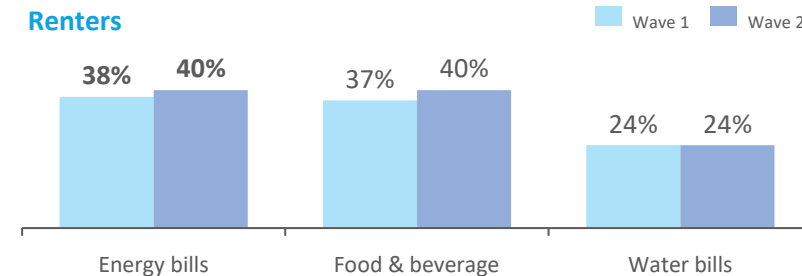
Qualifying response: Spending a little more + Spending significantly more

Young Adults (18-24)



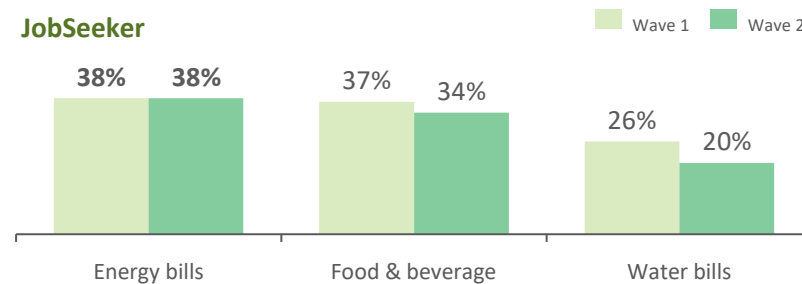
Young Adults who reported spending more on energy bills fell by 6%. This may also reflect the decline in priority of energy bills amongst this group.

Renters



Renters indicated an increase in spending on both energy bills and food & beverage.

JobSeeker

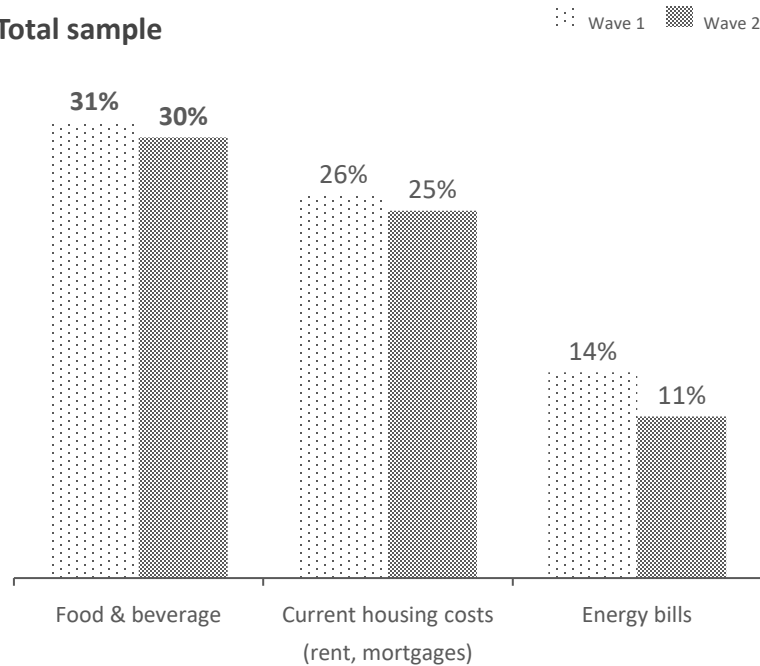


While JobSeekers indicated a decrease in spend on food & beverage and water bills, Energy Bills held steady.

Top 3 most important household spending categories

Key trends in top spending categories

Total sample

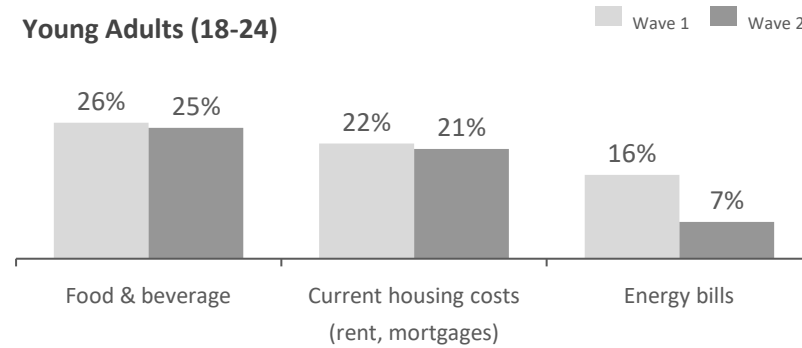


While the third most important spending category, the priority of energy bills is proportionately less than food & beverage and housing costs, and is falling amongst vulnerability groups.

1. Proportion of respondents that selected each household spending category as their **most important**

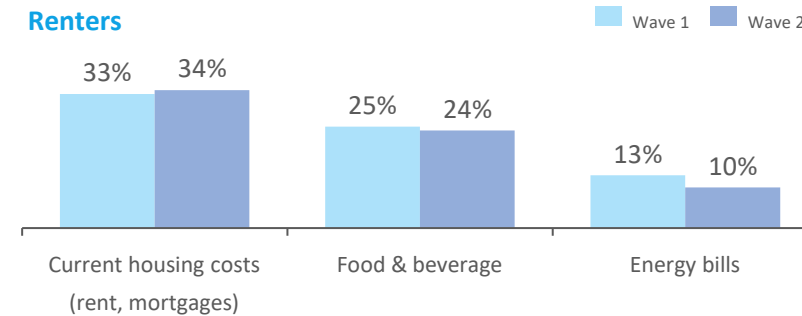
Question: Below are categories of household spending items. Please select the top 5 categories according to your preference, where 1 = most important.

Young Adults (18-24)



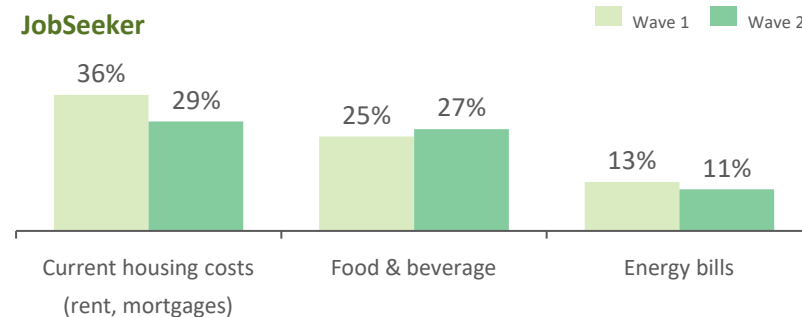
Compared to Wave 1, half as many Young Adults selected energy bills as their most important spending category in Wave 2.

Renters



The importance of energy bills amongst Renters also fell since Wave 1.

JobSeeker

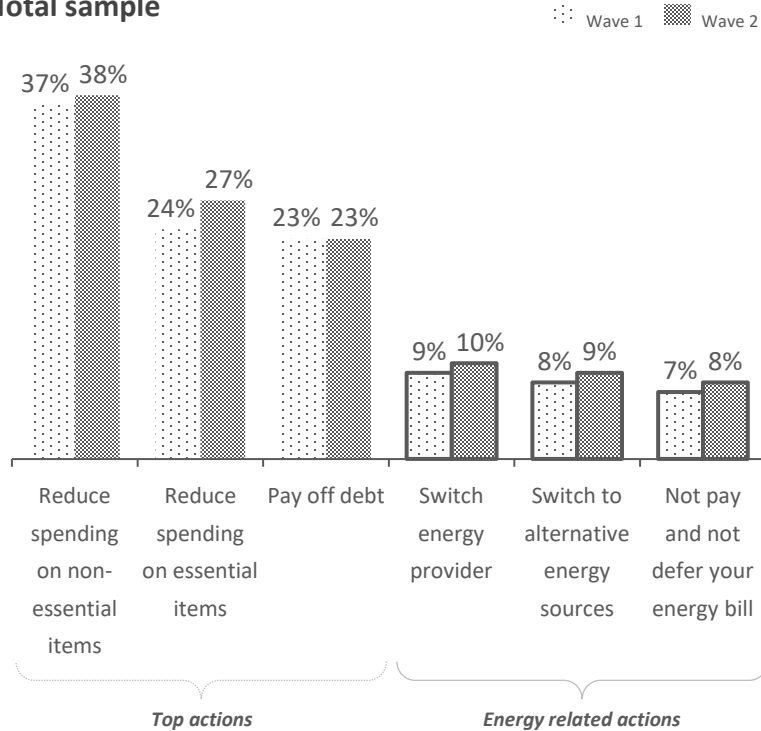


JobSeekers saw less importance in both housing costs and energy bills.

Consumer intentions/actions

Key trends in intended action

Total sample

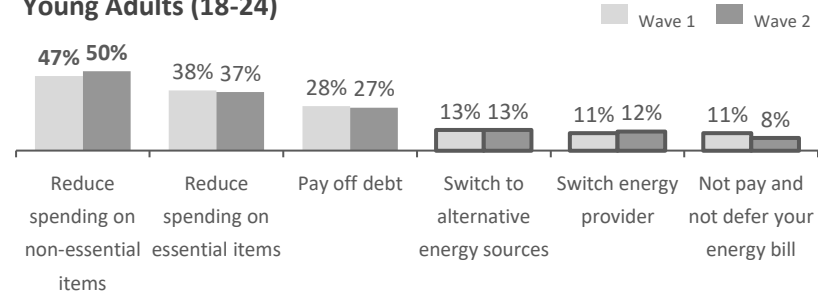


Consistent across categories is an upward trend in intent to take action relating to household finances.

Question: Are you considering taking any of the following actions relating to your household finances in the next 3 months?

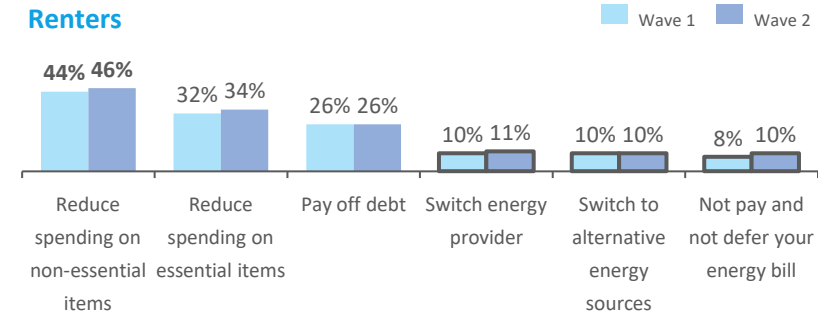
Qualifying response: Yes

Young Adults (18-24)



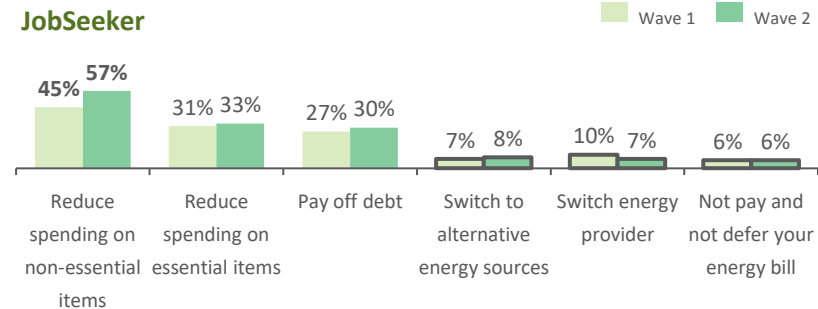
Young Adults considering taking action remained relatively consistent with Wave 1.

Renters



Intent to take action amongst Renters appears to be trending upwards.

JobSeeker



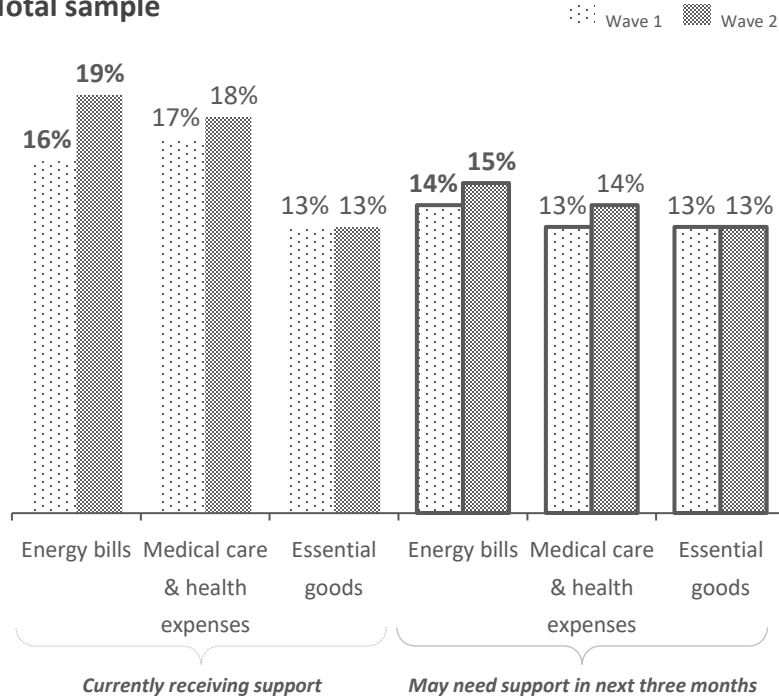
Amongst JobSeekers, there was a 12% increase in those considering reducing spend on non-essential items.

Border = Energy related actions

Consumer actions/intentions: *Hardship support*

Key trends in hardship support

Total sample

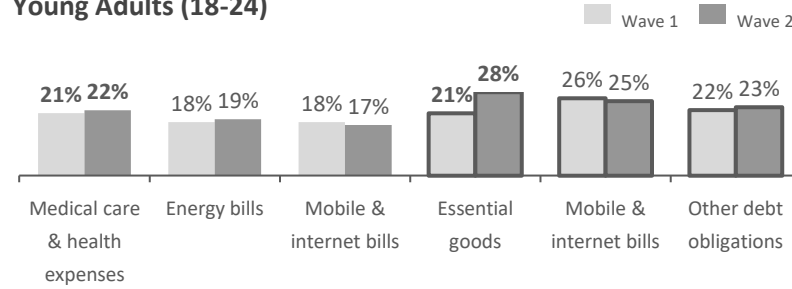


More respondents are currently receiving support for energy bills, overtaking support for medical care & health expenses as the top response. The opportunity to provide support to those who may need it is also trending upwards.

Question: Are you currently receiving support for any of the following household finance categories?

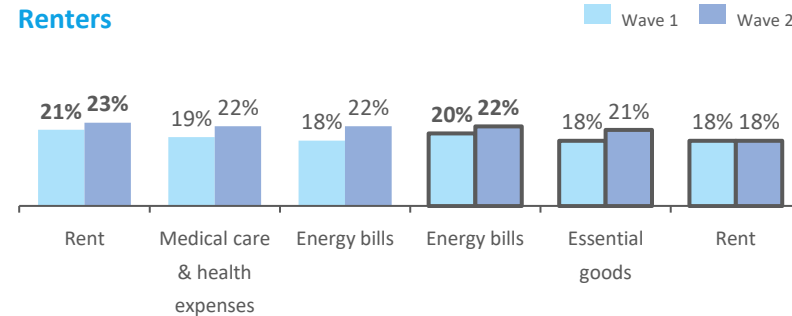
Qualifying response: Yes I am ; No I am not, but I may need to within the next 3 months

Young Adults (18-24)



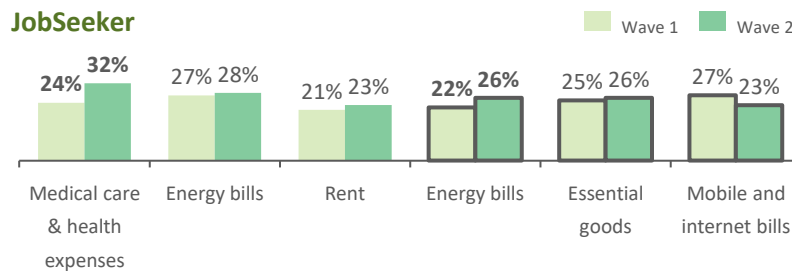
The potential need for support with essential goods (e.g. groceries) increased by 7% amongst Young Adults.

Renters



More Renters reported both receiving and potentially needing future support across all categories.

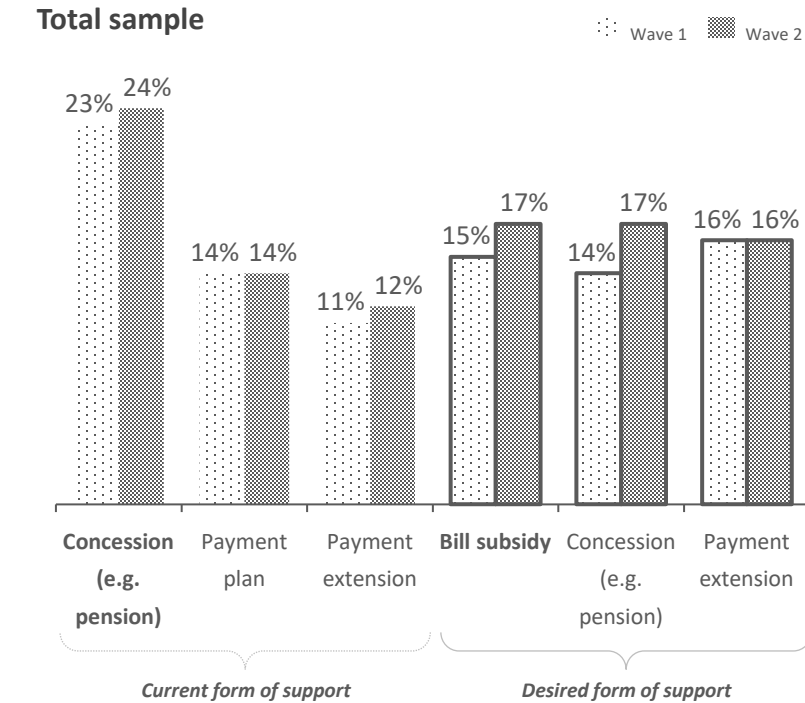
JobSeeker



8% more JobSeekers reported receiving support for medical & health expenses. The need for future energy bill support also increased.

Consumer actions/intentions: *Forms of energy bill support*

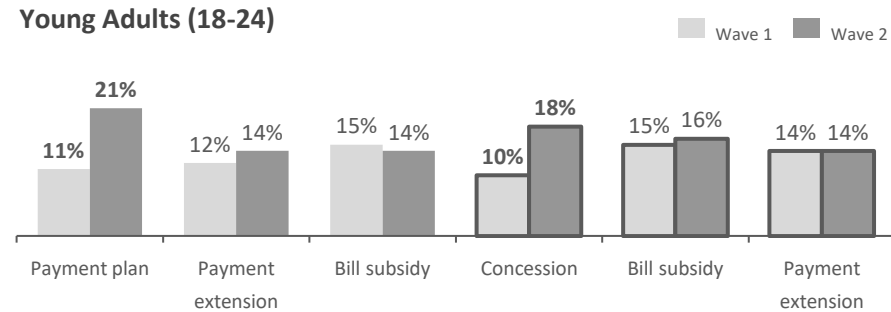
Key trends in the top forms of energy bill support



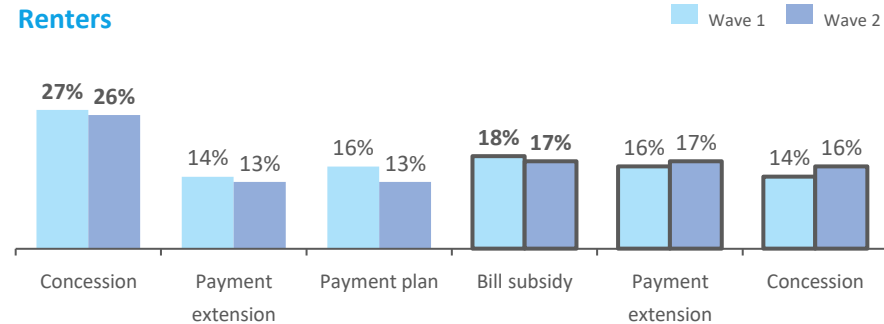
The most common form of support currently being received is via concessions. There is an opportunity for energy providers to continue responding to the growing need for bill subsidies, payment extensions and payment plans.

1. Statistics only for respondents who indicated they were receiving/may need energy bill support

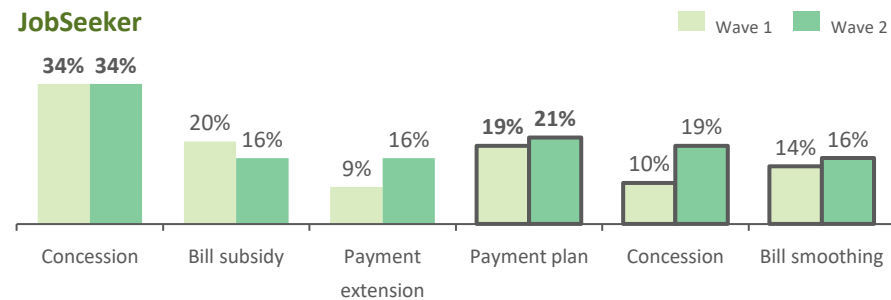
Question: You indicated that you are currently receiving / may need to receive support with your energy bill(s). What forms of support do you receive / would you be interest in receiving to help you with this?



10% more Young Adults are on payment plans when compared to Wave 1.



Concessions remain the primary of energy bill support for Renters.



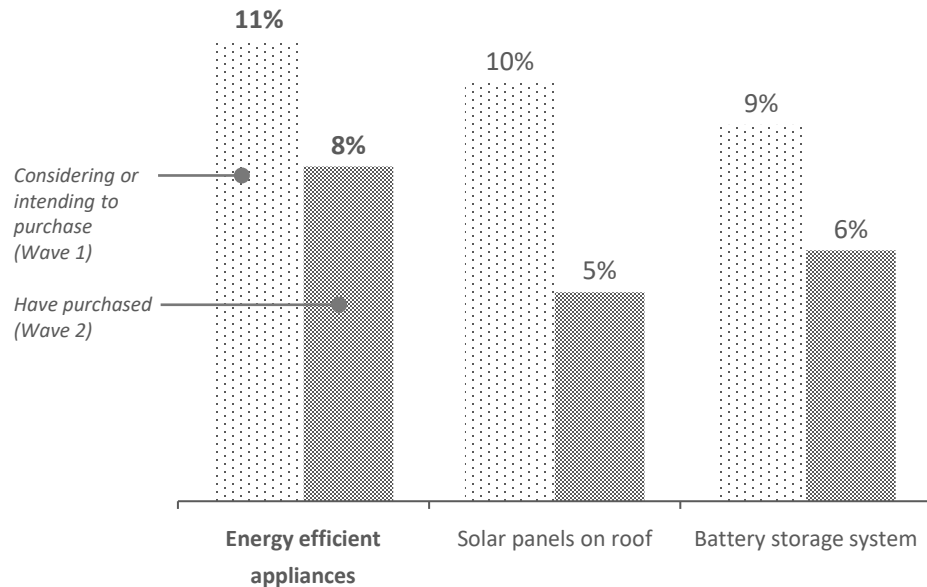
While JobSeekers currently receiving concessions remained steady, those who may need energy bill concessions increased by 9%. Other forms of support also trended upwards.

Consumer actions/intentions: *Energy investments*

Key trends in how intention is converting into action

Lighter = Considering/intending to purchase in Wave 1
Darker = Have purchased in the last 3 months / Wave 2

Total sample

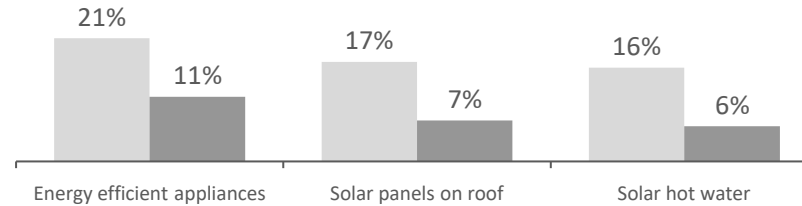


Intention to purchase energy products remains steady at between 6-11% of respondents across product types, with cost reduction/saving money as the primary reason. However, conversion into purchasing products remains lower (e.g. half as many respondents purchasing solar panels as intended). Lower conversion is likely related to barriers such as the perceived cost outweighing the benefit.

Question: Indicate which of the following you own, have recently purchased or are considering purchasing.

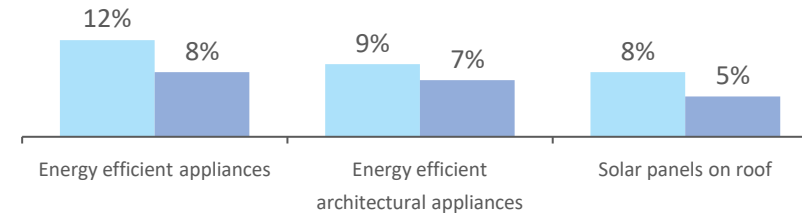
Qualifying responses: Considering or intend to purchase in the next 3 months (Wave 1); Have purchased in the last 3 months (Wave 2)

Young Adults (18-24)



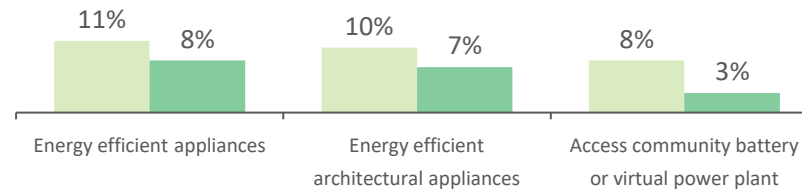
Approximately half as many Young Adults who reported the intention to purchase energy products have done so in the last three months.

Renters



A primary barrier to purchasing energy products is the inability to easily do so in rented properties. 17% of the total survey sample indicated this as a barrier.

JobSeeker




The proportion of respondents on JobSeeker who purchased energy efficient appliances in the last 3 months is relatively consistent with the total population.

Vulnerability summary

While Young Adults and Renters continue to be a focus for further support, it is those on JobSeeker that require assistance to mitigate falling further into hardship.

Vulnerable group	Overall hardship assessment - Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
Young Adults (18-24)	Young adults are displaying greater improvement than other vulnerable groups in terms of mental and financial wellbeing. Compared to Wave 1, they are feeling less burnt out and a smaller proportion have experienced an income loss. However, young adults are more sceptical about Australia's economic direction than before, driving them to increasingly adopt preventative measures like reducing spend on non-essential items. Of note for energy providers, is the proportionate drop in the priority of Energy Bills amongst this group. .	Potential need for further assistance	Potential need for further assistance
Women	Consistent with Wave 1, women were not disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 compared to other vulnerable groups and the total population. Although, financial stress continues to be a growing concern for women and as a result, they are more likely to take action to safeguard themselves from further hardship, such as reducing spending on essential items.	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves
Renters	Renters remain a comparatively vulnerable group. While working hours and reduction in income has improved, a larger proportion of renters are receiving JobSeeker payments in Wave 2 than in Wave 1. As drawbacks on payments are on the horizon, renters are intending to take greater action to manage household finances, such as borrowing more and reducing essential and non-essential spending. Consistent with Wave 1, renters may need the most support with energy bills over the next 3 months.	Potential need for further assistance	Potential need for further assistance
Mortgage holders	As noted in Wave 1, mortgage holders were not comparatively in greater levels of vulnerability. The top reason for needing hardship support amongst mortgage holders was that it was a standard pension supplement, whereas the top reason in Wave 1 was that respondents were feeling overwhelmed and needed help staying on top of money matters due to COVID-19. Signs of recovery are evident amongst this group.	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves
JobSeeker	Respondents on JobSeeker have fallen further into vulnerability since Wave 1. Financial stress has significantly increased, and is likely to further increase as supplements lower and cease in March. It is also worth noting that respondents on JobSeeker are more likely than other vulnerable groups to need energy bill support in the next 3 months, with payment plans being their most desired form of support.	Potential need for further assistance	Further assistance required
Bushfire impacted	Bushfire impacted respondents appear to be fairing comparatively well, against the total population and other vulnerable groups. Since Wave 1 ,they have been more optimistic about the future and appear to be taking proactive measures to manage their finances and alleviate financial hardship, such as borrowing more and accessing hardship support.	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves	Monitor hardship levels in subsequent survey waves



For further information:

Rob McLellan
Director (Deloitte)
m: 0418 946 320

e: romclellan@deloitte.com.au

Melanie Ngo
Analyst (Deloitte)
m: 0431 579 715

e: mngo@deloitte.com.au

Jeff Zhao
Analyst (Deloitte)
m: 0408 032 266

e: jefzhao@deloitte.com.au

theenergycharter.com.au



The Energy
Charter