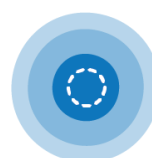


National Customer Code

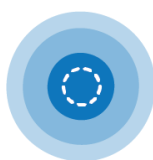
Knock to Stay Connected



Knock to Stay Connected Customer Code – a nationally consistent, customer-focused approach to help keep customers connected to their energy. This Customer Code is supported by the [Energy Charter as a Priority #BetterTogether initiative](#).



**National
Customer Code**
Knock to Stay Connected
Proudly supported by the Energy Charter



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Background

Energy plays a vital role in everyone's lives. It lights homes, keeps us cool and warm and powers businesses. It is important that energy is affordable, available and can meet customer and community needs now, and into the future.

The purpose of this Knock to Stay Connected Customer Code (this *Customer Code*) is to help you stay connected to your energy. We understand that non-payment of energy bills can be driven by circumstances and not by choice, that's why this *Customer Code* encourages you to engage with your energy retailer to get support.

This *Customer Code* covers a simple knock on the door or, if you are not there, a letter-drop when your energy is at risk of disconnection. The *Crew* that visit your home or small business (referred to as a site visit) are often people who work in your area every day and are part of your community.

If you haven't been able to pay your energy bill, we will let you know that assistance to stay connected is available and encourage you to contact your energy retailer straight away. Your energy retailer can help you access their range of support and referral services if you are experiencing payment difficulties.

Signatories to this *Customer Code* are energy retailers (companies that sell you your energy) and distributors (companies that deliver gas and electricity to you). Industry suppliers may also choose to support this *Customer Code*.

The *Signatories* to this *Customer Code* are working together with customer and community representatives to promote customer-centric, safe, sustainable, and responsive processes.

Please note that:

- When we refer to "you" we are referring to you, our Customer
- When we refer to "we" we are referring to the *Signatories* of this *Customer Code*, energy retailers and distributors. Where needed for clarity, we specify where functions may be specifically applicable for the energy retailer or distributor
- Responsibility for the *Crew* during the site visit usually rests with the distributor unless it is arranged directly by the energy retailer
- Responsibility for the *Customer Team* rests with the energy retailer.

This *Customer Code* does not replace any of the safeguards already in place for you, or obligations for energy retailers or distributors under the National Energy Customer Framework or other State based energy consumer protections, including rules where disconnection of your energy cannot occur in certain circumstances and your rights to support from your energy retailer to keep you connected.

Signatories are encouraged to be flexible in their approach to applying the voluntary commitments in this *Customer Code*. The focus is for *Signatories* to work together ensure better customer outcomes are achieved for you, rather than taking a fixed or compliance-based approach.

This *Customer Code* is supported by the [Energy Charter as a Priority #BetterTogether initiative](#).



Objectives of this Customer Code

This *Customer Code* aims to:

1. Explain our *Customer Code* commitments which are designed to help keep you connected to your energy when you are at risk of disconnection for not being able to pay your energy bill
2. Assist you to get back on track and help you manage your energy debt
3. Advocate for *Signatories* to continue to treat you fairly and with dignity, respect your privacy and behave in a non-judgmental way when offering you sustainable support
4. Build better practice guidelines for *Signatories* on how to implement this *Customer Code*
5. Develop nationally consistent, scalable and efficient business-to-business processes to better support you
6. Create standardised measures of the impacts and outcomes of this *Customer Code*, so we know that it's working
7. Establish independent administration and governance to foster an ongoing community of *Signatories* and customer representatives to share better practice through a *Customer Code Council*.

Structure of this Customer Code

- **Part A** outlines our guiding principles
- **Part B** outlines the better practice guidelines, including our specific commitments to you and the arrangements between the *Signatories*
- **Part C** covers the governance and administration functions that underpin the running of this *Customer Code*
- **Part D** includes some handy definitions

Part A: Our Guiding Principles

Our guiding principles under this *Customer Code* are:



Customer Centricity



Safety



Sustainable Support



Responsiveness



Customer Centricity

We will:

- Put you at the centre of our business and make decisions with you to help drive better outcomes in circumstances where you are at risk of disconnection for not being able to pay your energy bill
- Treat you with dignity, respect your privacy and behave in a non-judgmental way to help you to sustainably manage your energy
- Empower you to access a positive framework of assistance through your energy retailer to build ongoing trust and keep you connected to your energy whilst ever you and your energy retailer continue to engage.



Safety

We will:

- Ensure safety for you and other people, as well as for our Crew during a site visit to your home or small business
- Ensure that when visiting your home or small business, our Crew have been provided appropriate and consistent training
- Ensure your privacy is maintained and only share information with our *Customer*
- Ensure that our energy retailer *Customer Teams* consider your needs by creating an environment where you are comfortable sharing with us, and we can work collaboratively to build sustainable outcomes.



Sustainable Support

We will:

- Provide you with relevant and accessible customer information through your energy retailer including any available assistance programs or entitlements to concessions or rebates. Your distributor may also provide you with some helpful information
- Ensure that you are treated fairly and offered programs to help you pay for your energy in a way that is sustainable for you. We may also offer you advice on reducing your energy usage
- Work to keep you engaged with your energy retailer as part of their ongoing support
- Help to put you in touch with the relevant services that can best support you where help is needed beyond what we can provide.



Responsiveness

We will:

- Apply available energy support programs in a way that is driven by your needs, capacity to pay and preferences
- Ensure all processes for co-ordination between your energy retailer and distributor are simple and seamless. These details are covered in the Business-to-Business section of this *Customer Code*
- Be responsive and take prompt, appropriate action if you make an enquiry or complaint to ensure our continuous improvement
- Create standardised measures of the impacts and outcomes of this *Customer Code*
- Utilise learnings to help develop better practice through this *Customer Code Council*.

Part B: Our Better Practice Guidelines

How Knock to Stay Connected Works

This *Customer Code* aims to keep you connected to your energy with a knock on the door to deliver you information when your energy is at risk of disconnection because you haven't been able to pay your energy bill. The purpose of the site visit to your home or business is to let you know that assistance and support are available, so that you feel confident to contact your energy retailer to discuss your options to stay connected. Importantly, at each step, we will uphold our guiding principles.





Our Better Practice Commitments to You

1. Best endeavours

- 1.1. We will work to meet the objectives of this *Customer Code* to the best of our capacity and as appropriate to our customer base
- 1.2. We will provide at least 24 hours for you to contact your energy retailer following a site visit before disconnection occurs. Details about this process are included in the Business-to-Business section of this *Customer Code*
- 1.3. We will work to keep you connected to your energy through this *Customer Code* and you can help us by contacting your energy retailer promptly following the site visit
- 1.4. We aim to build ongoing trust with you as we work together.

2. Site visit


- 2.1. Our *Crew* will confirm that you are the *Customer* and clearly explain the purpose of the site visit
- 2.2. Our *Crew* are trained to ensure they understand how and what needs to be communicated, that they strive to meet our commitments under this *Customer Code* and always ensure your and their safety
- 2.3. During a site visit to your home or small business premises, we will aim to speak with you face to face. If you are not there, we will leave behind information and ask you to contact your energy retailer. Our *Crew* will provide you with information (see below), however they are not able to provide you with specific advice for your individual needs. Instead, they will encourage you to contact your energy retailer's *Customer Team* and can also give you information about community programs that may exist in your area
- 2.4. Our *Crew* and *Customer Team* staff will always treat you with respect and ensure your rights under applicable laws are maintained while visiting your home or small business and when communicating with you by telephone, email or other means.

3. Duty of care

- 3.1. Your privacy is important to us. We will only ever speak to you or leave information in your letterbox, under your door in your home or in a secure location or with the business owner of a small business
- 3.2. Your safety is also important to us. Our *Crew* visiting your home or small business will be trained and accredited, including undertaking a Criminal History Check. Other checks, such as a Working with Children/Working with Vulnerable Person Check and training such as identifying family and domestic violence may also be recommended
- 3.3. From time to time, the State Government's Department of Health may set rules regarding this type of site visit, our *Crew* will always follow applicable rules
- 3.4. Our *Crew* will not enter your home except in the case where disconnection of energy is required and the meter is located inside your home.

4. Customer information provided

- 4.1. During the site visit, our *Crew* will provide information to you that could include:
 - 4.1.1. Support that may be available to you through your energy retailer and other relevant community and government organisations

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- 4.1.2. The contact details of your energy retailer including a direct phone number for the *Customer Team* where available
 - 4.1.3. A call to action to encourage you to contact your energy retailer within 24 hours
 - 4.1.4. The scheduled date for disconnection of your energy, if you do not contact your energy retailer, or are unable to agree on a support arrangement with your energy retailer
 - 4.1.5. The contact details for the Energy and Water Ombudsman in your State or Territory
 - 4.2. *Customer information* will be easy to understand, provide details about where relevant information can be sourced in different languages, and will be accessible for all customers
 - 4.3. An example of *Customer information* is [here](#). You will also find other examples of *Customer information* at the [Energy Charter Content Hub](#) under 'Practical Customer Notices'.

5. Customer support from your energy retailer

- 5.1. When you contact our *Customer Team*, our trained staff will take your personal circumstances into account and you will be offered a range of options to stay connected depending on your individual circumstances. This may include a payment plan or helping you join the hardship program where applicable. We can also help with advice about reducing your energy usage to help make future energy bills more affordable
- 5.2. Our *Customer Team* is trained and will treat you in a non-judgemental way with empathy for your current situation. They will offer ongoing support to help you stay up to date with your payment arrangement and will be there to help whenever you need it
- 5.3. For example:
 - 5.3.1. We will aim to develop payment plans with you that are affordable and that enable you to maintain consistent payments over time
 - 5.3.2. We can also help you access relevant government or community voucher or rebate programs that may be available and advise you of any concessions for which you may be eligible
 - 5.3.3. We maintain a hardship program that supports eligible customers experiencing payment difficulties and can help you to better manage your energy bills on an ongoing basis. We will not unreasonably withhold access to a hardship program
- 5.4. Where support is needed beyond the programs offered by us we will help you to access other services by providing information, or a direct referral. By working together, we can empower you to make choices that you are comfortable with
- 5.5. Our *Customer Team* will work with you on a sustainable solution that meets your individual circumstances.

6. Customer service

- 6.1. We will ensure Business-to-Business processes between your energy retailer and your distributor are simple and seamless, so that they don't have any negative impacts on our commitments to you
- 6.2. We will be responsive and take prompt, appropriate action if you make an enquiry or complaint.

7. Continuous improvement

- 7.1. We aim for continuous improvement in the way we deliver this *Customer Code* by listening and responding to your feedback with our *Crew* or *Customer Team*
- 7.2. We have a complaints management process, and we will be accountable and responsive. If you are unable to resolve a complaint with a *Signatory*, you can contact this *Customer Code Administrator* and access this *Customer Code Independent Complaints Management Process*
- 7.3. We will create standardised measures of the impacts and outcomes of this *Customer Code* to ensure continuous improvement.

Our Better Practice Arrangements Between Signatories

8. Business-to-Business process

- 8.1. Distributors agree to receiving a Disconnection Non-Payment Service Order (the *Service Order*) from the energy retailer to both initiate the site visit and arrange the disconnection if the *Service Order* is not subsequently cancelled by the energy retailer
- 8.2. Distributors will manage separating the *Service Order* into two functions:
 - Site visit
 - Disconnection
- 8.3. The *Service Order* should allow sufficient time from the date the *Service Order* is raised to the scheduled date for disconnection to enable the site visit to occur and the customer to have time to contact their retailer. While ideally, more time would be helpful, it is recognised that for the viability of this initiative, the process is set to five (5) business days. Some energy retailers may choose to provide more time
- 8.4. The timeline should include a minimum of five (5) business days from the issue of the *Service Order* to the scheduled disconnection date:
 - Day 1 – *Service Order* issued by the energy retailer
 - Day 2 – Distributor schedules the site visit with contractor
 - Day 3 – Site visit occurs
 - Day 4 – Customer chooses to contact the energy retailer
 - Day 5 – Disconnection occurs if *Service Order* is not cancelled by the energy retailer
- 8.5. Distributors will arrange for their *Crew* to conduct the site visit by Day 3
- 8.6. For regional and remote areas or in some other agreed circumstances, this timeframe may need to be managed and agreed between the *Signatories*
- 8.7. Distributors are encouraged to maintain a risk register to record any incidents from a site visit including any privacy concerns where the contact is not completed or where the person is not the Customer
- 8.8. The energy retailer can cancel the *Service Order* prior to the scheduled date of disconnection
- 8.9. Distributors will not complete the disconnection if the *Service Order* is cancelled
- 8.10. Energy retailers who do not wish the site visit to occur for certain customers can indicate this in the notes section of the *Service Order*. In such cases, the distributor will complete the disconnection as scheduled. Any decision by the energy retailer to forgo the site visit should be fair and reasonable.

9. Customer information


- 9.1. We will work with customer and community representatives to co-design *Customer information* that meets our commitments. This will include testing the design, delivery and implementation of the *Customer information* to generate better outcomes to keep you connected to your energy
- 9.2. We will share our learnings with other *Signatories* as part of continuous improvement under this *Customer Code*
- 9.3. We will work with our *Customer Code Council*, customer and community groups and external referral services over time to improve this *Customer Code* including *Customer information*.

10. Benefits and costs

- 10.1. Trials under this *Customer Code* have shown:
 - 10.1.1. Improved *Crew* morale and safety which can lead to occupational health and safety improvements
 - 10.1.2. A greater sense of engagement in *Customer Teams* which can lead to reduced staff turnover
- 10.2. *Customers* who have received site visits as part of the trials leading up to this *Customer Code* have shown positive results. For example in some cases, where the customer has contacted the energy retailer after the site visit, 60 to 80 percent of *Service Orders* have been cancelled. Empowering customers to seek support has led to good outcomes in the trials and once the initiative is more widely implemented across distributors and energy retailers this is expected to continue
- 10.3. Distributors will clearly and transparently communicate any costs for the site visit to energy retailers
- 10.4. *Signatories* are encouraged to manage the costs for providing the site visit on an agreed, shared basis with the respective amounts negotiated directly between distributors and energy retailers
- 10.5. If disconnection of energy occurs, you are ultimately responsible for the costs of disconnection and reconnection of your energy and/or other charges where allowable under relevant regulations.

11. Outcome measures

- 11.1. We will co-design outcome measures to assess the effectiveness of this *Customer Code* through this *Customer Code Council* which may include for example:
 - 11.1.1. The number of *Signatories* as a proportion of industry participants
 - 11.1.2. Developing metrics, measures and high-level quantitative reporting for *Signatories* particularly measuring the volume and reasons for *Service Order* cancellations and the percentage of customers who contact their energy retailer following the site visit
 - 11.1.3. The percentage of *Customers* where a payment arrangement has worked and has not worked and whether there is a further *Service Order* for disconnection within a specified timeframe. The aim of this *Customer Code* is not to just delay an eventual disconnection
 - 11.1.4. Where possible, measuring the number of *Customers* who agree to and keep up to date with a payment arrangement

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- 11.1.5. Where possible, the number of Customers who are referred by their energy retailer to external services for further support to help gauge community need for further services
 - 11.1.6. The percentage of Customers who enter a hardship program with the energy retailer following a site visit
 - 11.1.7. Sharing and benchmarking performance between *Signatories* to see which approaches (through site visits, leave behind information and telephone support) are providing better outcomes. This information will be anonymised, discussed with this *Customer Code Council* and shared with *Signatories*. Where possible external information such as Australian Energy Regulator quarterly reporting may be utilised
 - 11.1.8. Encouraging better communications between the distributor and the energy retailer where possible to provide insights, while maintaining Customer privacy
 - 11.1.9. Developing impactful *Customer information* to promote the initiative with industry, customers and community stakeholders
 - 11.1.10. Listening to Customer feedback through any unresolved complaints referred to the *Code Administrator* and through discussion with members of this *Customer Code Council*. This feedback will be used to improve outcomes and incorporated in each Customer Code review
 - 11.1.11. Surveying a group of customers who have received a site visit each year (with their permission) to learn from their experiences and sentiments at each point in the process.




Part C: Governance and Administration

1. Signatories

- 1.1. Signing up to this *Customer Code* is voluntary. *Signatories* include energy retailers and distributors along with other relevant industry participants wishing to support this *Customer Code*
- 1.2. *Signatories* agree to pay the annual fee set by this *Customer Code Council*
- 1.3. *Signatories* will provide a copy of this *Customer Code* to you on request and promote its availability, including through sharing their involvement with community organisations and prominent links to or a display of this *Customer Code* on their websites
- 1.4. In applying to become a *Signatory*, each organisation agrees to co-operate with the *Code Administrator* and this *Customer Code Council* in their exercise of the responsibilities under this *Customer Code*
- 1.5. *Signatories* agree to comply with this *Customer Code* and the governance, administration and operational frameworks and acknowledge that failure to do so may make them ineligible to remain a *Signatory*
- 1.6. *Signatories* will annually confirm to the *Code Administrator* by a written checklist how they are meeting the commitments of this *Customer Code*, and this will be appropriately reflected in the annual report prepared by the *Code Administrator*
- 1.7. *Signatories* should ensure that all relevant employees are made aware of this *Customer Code* and the *Signatory* commitments
- 1.8. Crew conducting site visits to *Customer* premises must undertake a training module within one month of the *Signatory* joining this *Customer Code*. New employees must undertake the training module when being onboarded
- 1.9. All *Signatories* will have an internal complaint handling process that meets relevant Australian standards.


2. Governance Framework

- 2.1. This *Customer Code* is governed and administered by:
 - 2.1.1. This *Customer Code Council* which will comprise representatives of key stakeholders including *Signatories*, consumer representatives, the *Code Administrator* and an Independent Chair with the Energy Charter and interested regulators as observers from time to time
 - 2.1.2. The initial *Customer Code Council* will be appointed by the Independent Chair and the Energy Charter Executive Director from nominations received

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- 2.1.3. The first *Customer Code Council* will be appointed for 12 months
 - 2.1.4. Excluding the Independent Chair and consumer representatives, no member will stand on this *Customer Code Council* for more than two consecutive years without vacating the position and standing for re-appointment
 - 2.2. The *Code Administrator* appointed by this *Customer Code Council* is responsible for day-to-day administration of this *Customer Code*
 - 2.3. This *Customer Code Council* will enter a Memorandum of Understanding expanding upon the role of this *Customer Code Council* and the *Code Administrator*. This may be revised from time to time, following consultation with stakeholders
 - 2.4. A Competition Law Protocol will apply to all *Customer Code Council* meetings and other activities facilitated by the *Code Administrator*
 - 2.5. This *Customer Code Council* will appoint a *Code Administrator* for an initial period of 12 months, followed by three (3) yearly appointment periods from then on, for an agreed fee.
 - 2.6. This *Customer Code Council* and the *Code Administrator* will promote the benefits of this *Customer Code* to *Customers*, the community, industry participants and to relevant stakeholders
 - 2.7. This *Customer Code Council* and the *Code Administrator* will set a program of events to assist *Signatories* in capability building to better deliver on their commitments such as industry roundtables, lunch and learn sessions and developing resources for *Signatories* and/or *Customers*
 - 2.8. This *Customer Code Council* and the *Code Administrator* will review this *Customer Code* including a review of its performance against the objectives with the *Signatories* after the initial period of 12 months of operation, followed by every three (3) years from then on.

3. Administration

- 3.1. The *Code Administrator* is independent of the *Signatories* and *Customer Code Council* and is responsible for the day-to-day administration and governance of this *Customer Code* including evaluating *Signatories'* ability to meet *Customer Code* commitments
- 3.2. The *Code Administrator* is responsible for developing application and renewal processes for *Signatories* including:
 - 3.2.1. Where an application is made, the *Code Administrator* will assess whether to admit the applicant as a *Signatory*, considering whether their approach, processes and documents are sufficient to support the *Signatory* meeting the standards of this *Customer Code*
 - 3.2.2. Where a business applies to renew their status as a *Signatory*, the *Code Administrator* may consider any complaints that have been made about the *Signatory*, whether the *Signatory* has co-operated with the *Code Administrator* in carrying out its responsibilities and any other relevant factors
 - 3.2.3. In either case, acceptance of a *Signatory* will not be unreasonably withheld
- 3.3. The *Code Administrator* will operate this *Customer Code* on a not-for-profit basis such that any activity to increase or maintain the number of *Signatories* is based on broadening the reach of this *Customer Code* and not on any financial incentive

- 
- 3.4. The *Code Administrator* will review the fees payable by *Signatories* yearly
 - 3.5. The *Code Administrator*, in consultation with this *Customer Code Council* will develop a framework for reporting results by *Signatories* on a quarterly basis. The results will be aggregated, anonymised and shared with *Signatories* and relevant stakeholders. Results will be used to consider changes to this *Customer Code*
 - 3.6. To build customer awareness and to assist *Signatories* in meeting their commitments under this *Customer Code*, the *Code Administrator* will publish:
 - 3.6.1. Copies and accessible information about this *Customer Code*
 - 3.6.2. Easily accessible list of *Signatories* to facilitate transparency
 - 3.6.3. Information to assist *Signatories* to meet the expectations of this *Customer Code*.
These may include consumer information, checklists, templates, guides or training material
 - 3.6.4. *Customer Code* brand marketing guidelines for *Signatories*
 - 3.6.5. Details of fees: fees may vary by classes of *Signatories*. A change in fees is not effective until at least three (3) months after publication of the new fee.

4. Measuring outcomes

- 4.1. The *Code Administrator* will implement an *Independent Complaints Management Process*. Where a *Signatory's* internal Complaints Process fails to resolve the issue, the matter can be reviewed by the *Code Administrator*
- 4.2. The *Code Administrator* will provide feedback to the *Signatory* about any identified issues to provide an opportunity for improvement. If the complaint is a breach of this *Customer Code*, the *Code Administrator* will contact the *Signatory* to seek a resolution. If the *Signatory* will not comply, the matter will be referred to an *Independent Decision Maker*. Any *Signatory* involved will be charged a fee to cover the costs of the review. No *Customer* will be charged a fee for a review. The *Independent Decision Maker* will advise the *Code Administrator* of the decision including whether the company should remain a *Signatory*. *Signatories* are encouraged to self-report any identified issues
- 4.3. The *Code Administrator* will provide this *Customer Code Council* with anonymised results of monitoring and improvements
- 4.4. The *Code Administrator* will advise this *Customer Code Council* in an anonymised format of any potential systemic issues that have not been resolved
- 4.5. This *Customer Code Council* and the *Code Administrator* will determine if any parts of this *Customer Code* need to be updated or where resources could be developed to assist *Signatories* or *Customers*
- 4.6. The *Code Administrator* will develop a brief annual report to *Signatories* and other stakeholders highlighting benefits and outcomes, systemic issues and recommendations where improvements could be made.



Appendix: Some Useful Terms

Customer Code – the Knock to Stay Connected Customer Code (this document).

Code Administrator – a person or organisation with relevant experience in both the industry and in managing Customer Codes. The Administrator is responsible for the day-day management of this Customer Code.

Crew – the employees or agents conducting the site visit at the Customer's home or small business premises.

Customer – any residential or small business customer (the account holder) as defined under the National Energy Retail Law, the Victorian Energy Law and any analogous law for any Australian jurisdiction not included in the National Energy Market who is the account holder for the energy supply.

Customer Code Council – a governance body for this Customer Code made up of Signatories, customer representatives and industry observers which is responsible for working with the Administrator to ensure this Customer Code is effective in achieving better customer outcomes.

Customer information – customer information co-designed by distributors, retailers and customer and community representatives, that at minimum includes retailer contact details, the support that is available from the energy retailer and other relevant community and government organisations, and the scheduled date for disconnection, if contact is not made and an agreement reached.

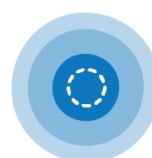
Customer Team – the employees or agents of the energy retailer who will support you when you contact them.

Independent Complaints Management Process – this Customer Code will provide a complaints management process where a customer is unable to resolve a complaint with the Signatory.

Service Order – an instruction from the energy retailer to the distributor to disconnect or reconnect energy at the home or small business.

Signatory – organisations who agree to meet the requirements of this Customer Code and contribute financially to its ongoing operation.

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