



3 September 2020

Mr Benn Barr  
Chief Executive  
Australian Energy Market Commission  
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Dear Mr Barr,

We are writing to you in support of the Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW (EWON)'s rule change request to make it easier for people to maintain their Life Support Customer Registration.

Until recently, the St Vincent de Paul Society was one of the largest providers of the NSW Government's Energy Account Payment Assistance Scheme (EAPA). In this work, our member volunteers and paid staff have supported many thousands of people to pay their bills, to navigate the energy market and to access consumer protections and other assistance. We continue to assist people to manage their energy bills, and to access the EAPA Scheme via other providers where appropriate.

Each day, our members work with people who find the energy market confusing and hard to navigate. As such, they often end up paying more than they should, or missing out on the protections and support to which they are entitled.

We believe the proposed rule change is a small step towards simplifying the way in which customers on the Life Support Register engage with the energy market. We agree with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre's assessment that the current arrangement, which requires consumers (or their carers/guardians) to inform their retailer of their need to be on the Life Support Register, and to complete a new medical confirmation form each time they switch retailers or move house, is not only unnecessarily onerous but also presents a safety risk.

Rather than requiring customers to resubmit information, a process should be introduced whereby information can be shared between energy businesses with the customer's consent. We also agree that the onus should be on energy businesses to confirm whether a Life Support registration is still required before a premise is deregistered, to reduce the risk that someone is inadvertently deregistered.

Thank you for your ongoing work to improve the operation of the energy market, particularly efforts to ensure it works as effectively as possible for people experiencing poverty and other forms of disadvantage.

Sincerely,

Jack de Groot  
CEO