



# Hardship Utility Grant Scheme

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is HUGS?

The Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS) provides financial assistance to Western Australians who are struggling through financial hardship and are unable to pay their utility bills. The purpose of HUGS is to prevent residential customers from being disconnected from essential utility services to ensure basic living needs can be met.

### Am I eligible?

You may be eligible if your Utility provider assesses you as being in the following situation:

- You contact your utility provider to discuss your outstanding debt and you are assessed by your utility provider as being in financial hardship and not in payment difficulty;
- Exhausted all your options with the utility provider and enter into a payment arrangement for at least 180 days to address the outstanding debt; and
- After completion of the payment arrangement, if your outstanding bill is still more than \$300 but less than \$1,750 (or \$2,500 if you live north of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel) you may be eligible to apply.

### How much help can I apply for?

If you live south of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel (south of Denham), you are eligible for up to \$581 per financial year. If you live north of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel (North of and including Denham), you are eligible for up to \$962 per financial year.

### When I am not eligible to apply for HUGS?

Not everyone is eligible for HUGS, you may not be eligible if:

- You have used all of your grant limit for the financial year;
- You are a customer with bottled gas;
- You are assessed as not being in financial hardship;
- For Water Corporation, Busselton Water and Aquest customers, HUGS is only available for the owner-occupiers of residential properties;
- You live in an Aboriginal community and have your water managed by the Water Corporation.



## **How can I apply?**

All applications are made through your utility, so it is best to call them as soon as you are experiencing any kind of financial hardship to discuss your options.

As part of your application, your utility provider will need to work with you to achieve the following:

- Assessing whether you are experiencing payment difficulties or in a state of financial hardship;
- Sign you up to the Utility's hardship program if applicable; and
- Set up a payment arrangement of at least 180 days.

If you have complied with the payment arrangement after 180 days and have avoided a disconnection or restriction notice, you may enquire with your Utility provider to consider applying for HUGS on your behalf.

## **What if I am currently disconnected?**

If you are currently disconnected from your utility supply, you may be eligible for HUGS on the following conditions:

- You agree to pay the minimum amount required to reconnect your property (usually 50% of the outstanding amount);
- Your outstanding amount is between \$300 and \$1,750 (if south of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel or \$2,500 if north of the 26<sup>th</sup> parallel);
- You enter into a payment arrangement to repay the remaining balance.

HUGS may be used to assist you pay the minimum upfront payment required from your utility provider.



## Further Information

For further information, please contact your relevant utility provider to discuss your options.

AGL - 1300 001 190

Alinta Energy - 13 13 58

Aqwest – (08) 9780 9500

Busselton Water – (08) 9781 0500

Esperance Gas Distribution Company – (08) 9072 1422

Horizon Power 1800 267 926

Kleenheat 13 21 80

Origin Energy 13 24 61

Synergy 13 13 53

Water Corporation 13 14 50

If you have any further enquiries please write to:

Manager Concessions

Department of Communities

Locked Bag 3

Perth BC 6849 or via email: [hugs@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:hugs@communities.wa.gov.au)