

Community Forum Guest Speaker Series



Session #2: Perspectives of vulnerable energy customers - Wednesday 17 July 2024

Communication Link

37 people attended

25 members attended

12 project team members and observers

10 questions on: energy efficient upgrades, appliance and installation costs, incentives to improve energy efficiency, smart meters, connection fees and Government assistance programs

The second of our speaker series presented the perspectives of vulnerable customers in the ACT energy transition.

Guest speakers Jana Farook and Dr Devin Bowles from the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) shared insight into the challenges and potential solutions surrounding the energy transition for vulnerable consumers.

“Very informative.”

“Thanks Jana and Devon, it’s been fantastic to hear from you both.”

Additional information and links provided

Energy equity in electrifying ACT households

Towards energy equity

Supporting a fair, fast and inclusive energy transition in the ACT

Key topics

Vulnerability in the Energy Market

- **Who is vulnerable:** People with varied incomes, renters, those with disabilities, and domestic violence survivors are more likely to struggle with energy costs
- **Impacts:** High energy bills can lead to social isolation, health problems, housing instability, and financial stress

Energy transition and vulnerability

- **Transition risks:** The shift to renewable energy could make things harder for low-income households and renters if we don’t plan carefully
- **Transition benefits:** However, a well-managed transition could save people money on their energy bills, improve health, and create jobs

Solutions

- **Targeted support:** We need to help those most in need to afford the transition by expanding assistance programs and offering more help to renters
- **Government action:** Regulations may need to change to make it easier for renters to upgrade their homes and for landlords to invest in energy efficiency
- **Consumer protection:** We need to make sure consumers are protected as new technologies are introduced, so they don’t get taken advantage of.
- **Nationwide effort:** We need to think about how to support vulnerable customers across Australia, not just in the ACT

Key issues and challenges

Costs and affordability of the transition

- High upfront cost of electrifying homes
- Barrier to participation for low incomes
- Potential for price increases/gouging for energy efficiency upgrades due to government incentives

Equity and fairness

- Logistical barriers for vulnerable consumers
- Renters often lack the ability to improve energy efficiency independently
- Eligibility for government assistance programs beyond concession card holders
- Alternative support methods besides low-interest loans

Challenges with apartment complexes

- Coordinating energy upgrades in apartment buildings with diverse ownership structures
- Limited incentives for strata management organisations to undertake upgrades

Regulatory framework

- The existing regulatory framework may not be sufficiently flexible to manage the changing energy landscape
- The need for a framework that encourages innovation, supports consumers, and ensures equity

Government support

- The current level of government assistance is insufficient to fully support vulnerable households during the transition
- Greater federal investment and leadership are needed

Communication and trust

- Clear and transparent communication about the transition is crucial
- Consumers need understandable information about costs and benefits
- Inconsistent advice from installers can erode trust in the process

Stranded assets

- The potential for remaining gas users to bear the burden of inflated costs
- Regulatory changes may be necessary to address stranded assets
- The need for a fair and equitable distribution of costs and benefits during the transition