



HARDSHIP UTILITY GRANT SCHEME (HUGS)

Disclaimer: Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA) Inc. produced this information as a general guide only. The information is not legal advice. You may ring us on (08) 9221 7066 for more help.

CASE STUDY

After experiencing health difficulties Mary has been unable to pay her power, water and gas bills. Last week she received a letter from her electricity supplier saying that power to her home will be cut if she continues not to pay her bills. Mary calls CCLSWA for advice. She is told that she can contact her electricity supplier, and other utilities providers, to discuss making an application for the Hardship Utility Grant Scheme.

Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS) is a State Government scheme that provides grants to assist Western Australians who find it difficult to pay their electricity, water or gas bills and are at risk of having their supply disconnected or restricted.

Am I eligible for HUGS?

In order to be eligible for HUGS you must:

- Be a residential customer;
- Contact your utility provider to discuss your outstanding debt;
- Be assessed by your utility provider as being in financial hardship and not in payment difficulty;
- Have exhausted all your options with the utility provider and entered into a payment arrangement for at least 180 days to address the outstanding debt; and
- After the payment arrangement is complete, your outstanding bill must still be more than \$300 but less than \$1,750 (or \$2,500 if you live north of the 26th parallel).

How much can I apply for?

The amount of the grant you are eligible to apply for will depend on where you live:

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

When am I ineligible for HUGS?

You may not be eligible to apply if:

- You have used all 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 to owner-occupiers of residential properties; or
- You live in an Aboriginal community and the Water Corporation manages your water.

What if I am already disconnected?

If your utility supply is currently disconnected, you may still be eligible for HUGS if:

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

You may use HUGS to help you pay the minimum upfront payment required by your utility provider.

How to apply?

All applications are made through your utility provider.

To apply for HUGS, firstly contact your utility provider to discuss your financial hardship and your options.

Your utility provider will:

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

After 180 days, if you have complied with the payment arrangement, and you have avoided disconnection or a restriction notice, you may ask with your utility provider to consider applying for HUGS on your behalf.

The telephone numbers of all utilities participating in HUGS are listed below.

For further information contact or check out:

Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA) Inc.

Website: www.cclswa.org.au

Advice line number: (08) 9221 7066

Department of Communities

Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Telephone: (08) 6217 6888 or Country free call 1800 176 888

Participating Utility Providers

AGL -	1300 001 190
Aqwest:	(08) 9780 9500
Alinta Energy:	13 13 58
Busselton Water:	(08) 9781 0500
Esperance Gas Distribution Company	(08) 9072 1422
Horizon Power:	1800 267 926
Kleenheat Gas:	13 21 80
Origin Energy	13 24 61
Synergy:	13 13 53
Water Corporation:	13 14 50