Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (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.

# Contacts

Name: Department of Communities

Phone: Please contact your relevant utility provider

Email: hugs@communities.wa.gov.au

Web: [www.communities.wa.gov.au](http://www.communities.wa.gov.au/)

# How to 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;
* 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 request your Utility provider to apply 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 26th parallel or $2,500 if north of the 26th parallel); and
* You enter into a payment arrangement to repay the remaining balance.

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

Account holders who do not hold a valid concession card will be referred to the HUGS Service Centre for further assessment of their financial hardship.

Please contact your relevant utility provider to discuss your options to stay connected

AGL 1300 659 925
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 13 24 61
Synergy 13 13 53
Water Corporation 13 13 85

If you require further assistance please contact the Financial Counsellors Association of WA Helpline on 1800 007 007.

# Eligibility

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 26th parallel) you may be eligible to apply.

## 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 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; or
* You live in an Aboriginal community and have your water managed by the Water Corporation.