



**Widespread disruption caused by COVID-19 is being felt across Australia. It won't be long before we have thousands of people trying to survive on a reduced income, worried about whether they can pay their rent or their mortgage, while keeping the lights on and food on the table.**

More than 30 community service organisations around the country are calling on companies providing essential services such as energy, water, finance, rental housing and telecommunications to take additional steps to support their community during the COVID-19 crisis. Many businesses have existing hardship obligations under law or industry codes of conduct, and should now ensure assistance is easily available.

There are three things companies should do as a matter of urgency to provide relief for their customers:

1. **No disconnections.** Companies should continue to offer their services without interruption, including energy, telecommunications, banking and insurance.
2. **Pause debt collection and legal/bankruptcy proceedings.** People shouldn't be evicted or be hassled by debt collectors during this time. Lenders should consider moratoriums on loan repayments.
3. **Waive penalty and late fees, including additional interest charges.** No one should pay extra if they're struggling to pay bills on time.

Community organisations are also calling on governments at all levels to commit to a moratorium on debt collection activities and late payment fees.

We anticipate that — just like during the bushfire emergency in recent months — many businesses are already having these conversations, but we need to see coordinated industry-wide commitments to do the right thing by customers.

Community services and businesses will be trying to meet extra demand, with limited capacity over coming months. These measures will help ensure that resources aren't wasted on avoidable disputes and will support our community during a difficult time

We are calling on all essential service providers to publicly commit to implementing these relief measures — at a minimum. Businesses and governments should not hesitate to go further.

Our organisations are keen to work alongside businesses wherever possible to see these measures delivered to Australians.

**RELATED MEDIA RELEASE: Keep communities connected, urge more than 40 community organisations across Australia**

**RELATED MEDIA RELEASE: Telco companies are failing people in financial hardship**

**RELATED MEDIA RELEASE: No impact on credit files during COVID-19 pandemic a welcome announcement by banks**

## **QUOTES**

*Gerard Brody, CEO of Consumer Action Law Centre:*

“As more and more people self-isolate or practice social distancing in line with health advice, there will be more people at home relying on these essential services. People working from home will need more internet data, and people at risk will need to access health consultations over the phone. We will also see a heavier reliance on household energy.

“Many Australians will find it harder to pay the bills due to disruptions from COVID-19, and it is critical that they are guaranteed continued access to essential services.

“There are people already struggling to make ends meet, soon there will be many more who will suddenly find themselves with no or less income, and it's important we remove any additional barriers to accessing essentials like food or medical care.”

*Craig Memery, Head of Energy and Water Policy, Public Interest Advocacy Centre:*

“These services are essential to the health and wellbeing of the entire community. People's access to them is of critical importance.

“Hundreds of thousands of casual and contract workers are being stood down with little or no pay, and people with small businesses have been hit just as hard. People struggling to pay for rent and food shouldn’t have the additional stress of whether they can keep the lights on or stay in contact with family, friends and support networks. Access to energy and communications isn’t just important, for many it is a lifeline.”

*Emma King, CEO of Victoria Council of Social Service (VCOSS):*

“The Coronavirus will wreak enough havoc by itself. The last thing we need right now is predatory bank bosses, dodgy debt collectors or inflexible business practices compounding the damage and driving people into poverty.”

*COTA Victoria:*

“People need to keep contact with health services and with those they are concerned about such as an ageing parent. We all have a duty of care to others and those that are most vulnerable during this time. This means a person keeping their home and their phone and power must not be cut off.”

*Cassandra Goldie, CEO of Australia Council of Social Service (ACOSS):*

“In times of crisis it is incumbent on companies who are providing essentials services to put people first, to provide relief and a level of comfort during this uncertain and unprecedented period. It’s the right thing to do.”

**END**

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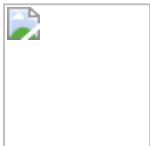
## **SIGNATORIES**

Accountable Income Management Network  
ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)  
Anglicare Victoria  
ARC Justice  
Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)  
Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)  
Brotherhood of St Laurence  
Care Inc  
CHOICE  
Christians Against Poverty (CAP)  
Cohealth  
Community Information and Support Victoria  
Community Legal Centres Australia  
Community Legal Centre Tasmania Inc.  
Consumer Action Law Centre  
Consumer Credit Legal Service (WA)

Council on the Ageing (COTA) ACT  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) Australia  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) Queensland  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) South Australia  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) Tasmania  
Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria  
Djirra  
Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW  
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria  
Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria  
Financial Counselling Australia (FCA)  
Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic)  
Financial Counsellors Association Tasmania  
Financial Counsellors' Association of NSW (FCAN)  
Financial Counsellors' Association of WA (FCAWA)  
Financial Rights Legal Centre  
Fitzroy Legal Service  
Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre  
Gippsland Women's Health  
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand  
Hume Riverina Community Legal Service  
Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network (ICAN)  
Inner Melbourne Community Legal  
Justice Connect  
Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association  
MoneyMob Talkabout  
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA)  
Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania  
NILS Tasmania  
Northern Community Legal Centre  
Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS)  
NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)  
Peninsula Community Legal  
Public Interest Advocacy Centre  
Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS)  
Renew Australia  
Salvation Army Australia  
Samaritans  
Seniors Rights Victoria  
South Australia Council of Social Service (SACOSS)  
South Australian Financial Counsellors Association  
Tenants Victoria  
UnitingCare Australia  
Uniting Vic.Tas

Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS)  
Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS)  
WEstjustice  
Women's Legal Service Tasmania  
Women's Legal Service Victoria

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**WEstjustice**



**GIPPSLAND  
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HEALTH**



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renew.**





 Image result for ncoss



Good Shepherd  
Australia New Zealand



