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Lights out for middle Australia

Coordinator of the Queensland Electricity Users Network Jennifer Brownie said the Queensland Government seems to be ignoring how many Queensland homes with working families are having their electricity disconnected.

The Queensland Government today announced an extension of time for Queenslanders with a Commonwealth Health Care Card to apply for a \$330 rebate on their electricity bill.

“Unfortunately Australian Energy Regulator statistics show that around 75 percent of homes disconnected due to the non-payment of their power bill do not have a concession card,” Ms Brownie said.

Consumer welfare organisations are finding that the demographic of people needing assistance is changing. More middle income families are seeking assistance to pay their power bills and energy stress is not limited to traditionally socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

There are now more than 42,000 Queensland homes that can’t pay their overdue power bills and have been placed on payment plans by their electricity retailer.

“Clearly energy poverty is alive in middle Australia and spreading.”

Ms Brownie said “The biggest jump in payment plans are customers of the 100 percent Queensland Government owned electricity retailer Ergon Energy. Whilst southeast Queensland payment plans jumped 33 percent in three months, customers served by Ergon Energy in regional Queensland jumped a massive 49 percent.”

In addition to homes on payment plans there are also nearly 20,000 Queensland homes on hardship programs. Customers on hardship programs have been identified as experiencing chronic and severe difficulties in paying their power bills.

“For thousands of homes in middle Australia who have had their power cut off, they have made a difficult decision to pay their rent or mortgage and live without electricity rather than live on the street. This has devastating social and safety consequences.”

Business customers do not receive electricity rebates nor can they access hardship programs.

“If a business has its power cut off, unemployment rises yet again. Every regional job is valued and one of the main ways the Queensland Government can secure and create jobs is to immediately reduce business power bills by a substantial amount”, Ms Brownie said.

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