

Family Violence Policy

Version No: 3
Approved By: Board
Approval Date: 20/04/2021
Next Review Date: 05/2024

1 Purpose

This policy sets out Westernport Water's commitment to effectively support our customers and employees that may be experiencing, directly or indirectly, family violence.

Westernport Water actively promotes gender equality and respectful relationships. The organisation has a zero tolerance to violence in all its forms.

Westernport Water seeks to empower customers to request assistance due to family violence related concerns, regardless of their current financial capacity.

2 Policy application

Westernport Water accepts the definition of Family Violence as stipulated in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) as:

Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:

- is physically or sexually abusive
- is emotionally or psychologically abusive
- is economically abusive
- is threatening
- is coercive
- in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person
- behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to above.

3 Regulatory requirements

As required by the Essential Services Commission – *Customer Service Code for Urban Water Businesses*, Westernport Water:

- ensures that all relevant employees have ongoing training to:

- identify customers affected by family violence
 - deal appropriately with customers affected by family violence
 - apply the family violence policy and related policies and procedures to customers affected by family violence.
- identifies support for employees affected by family violence, including any training, leave, external referrals and counselling available
 - promotes customer safety by providing for the secure handling of information about those who are affected by family violence, including in a manner that maintains confidentiality
 - specifies Westernport Water’s approach to debt management and recovery where a customer is affected by family violence, including, but not limited to:
 - the recovery of debt from customers with joint accounts
 - the circumstances in which debt will be suspended or waived.
 - recognises family violence as a potential cause of payment difficulties and as an eligibility criterion for access to hardship arrangements
 - provides for a process that avoids customers and employees having to repeat disclosure of their family violence, and provides for continuity of service
 - provides a means for referring customers and employees who may be affected by family violence to specialist family violence services.

Westernport Water also:

- publishes on its website, and keeps up to date, the assistance and referrals available to customers affected by family violence and how customers may access such assistance
- provides a copy of the policy to a customer upon request
- provides for a periodic review mechanism of the policy and its associated procedures.

4 Key responsibilities

Westernport Water is committed to fostering a culture where employees affected by family violence are supported. Furthermore, any Westernport Water employee who perpetrates violence and abuse will be subject to disciplinary action. This includes, but is not limited to, telephone, mail, email, internet or social media.

Westernport Water is committed to providing leadership in preventing all forms of family violence, in order to create a safe, inclusive and respectful community. Westernport Water commits to the following:

Employee Training:

- All employees are trained to gain awareness and understanding of issues that are related to family violence and Westernport Water processes.
- All frontline employees receive additional training around the internal processes we undertake to protect the privacy and safety of customers who may be experiencing family violence.
- All employees in the Customer Relations Team are trained to identify and respond to the complex issues associated with family violence, so that they can work with customers in a respectful and appropriate manner.

Employee Support:

- Westernport Water offers support to all employees experiencing family violence, enabling employees experiencing family violence to continue to participate in the workplace.
- Westernport Water maintains a supportive work environment where employees are comfortable in requesting assistance for family violence related concerns.
- When returning to work after leave due to family violence related issues, employees are encouraged to talk to their manager regarding any ongoing safety concerns they may have.

Action for Non-payment:

- Customers identified as experiencing family violence, are referred to the Hardship Officer, where they will be case managed. Water supply will not be restricted and no legal action or additional debt recovery costs applied, while the customer is engaging with the Customer Relations Team.

Information Management:

- Westernport Water manages an internal process to identify potential customers experiencing family violence and ensure their details are managed with the highest degree of privacy and sensitivity. All employees in the Customer Relations Team are trained to look for identifiers and indicators of family violence.

External Support and Assistance:

- Customers may be referred to external support networks for further assistance. Westernport Water is committed to developing strong relationships with external support networks to fully assist our customers and employees.

5 Responsible officer

Policy Owner – General Manager, Customer and Community
Responsible Policy Officer - Manager, Customer Relations