

Domestic and Family Violence Policy

Version No	V5
Approved By	Board
Approval Date	29 April 2024
Next Review Date	April 2027

Purpose

This policy sets out Westernport Water's commitment to effectively support our customers that may be experiencing, directly or indirectly, domestic and 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 domestic and family violence related concerns, regardless of their current financial capacity.

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.

Regulatory requirements

As required by the Essential Services Commission – *Water Industry Standard*, Westernport Water:

- ensures that all relevant employees have ongoing training to:
 - identify customers affected by domestic and family violence
 - deal appropriately with customers affected by domestic and family violence
 - the domestic and family violence policy and related policies and procedures to customers affected by family violence.
- promotes customer safety by providing for the secure handling of information about those who are affected by domestic and 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 domestic and 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 domestic and 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 domestic and family violence, and provides for continuity of service
- provides a means for referring customers and employees who may be affected by domestic and family violence to specialist domestic and family violence services
- reports any material breaches of this policy or the Water Industry Standard (including obligations relating to domestic and family violence) to the Essential Services Commission with two business days of identification.

Westernport Water also:

- publishes on its website, and keeps up to date, the assistance and referrals available to customers affected by domestic and 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.

Key Responsibilities

Westernport Water is committed to providing leadership in preventing all forms of domestic and 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 domestic and 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 domestic and family violence.
- All employees in the Customer Relations Team are trained to identify and respond to the complex issues associated with domestic and family violence, so that they can work with customers in a respectful and appropriate manner.

Action for Non-payment:

- Customers identified as experiencing domestic and family violence, are referred to the Customer Care 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 domestic and 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 domestic and 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.

Customer Experience

Customers experiencing family violence in any form can expect understanding, privacy, and assistance whenever they contact Westernport Water. The following table is intended to illustrate what each customer can anticipate when they seek assistance.

UNDERSTAND		Understand - You can request to speak to our dedicated customer care officer without disclosing any details. - Alternatively, we will direct your call or email to our customer care officer. Any details that have been already been provided (written or verbal) will be handed over to the officer. - Our customer care team has been trained on how best to support you. - You will not be asked to repeat details of what you have already provided. - We will listen to your circumstances.
SECURE		Secure - Access to all case notes and shared information relating to your circumstances will be secure. - Only members of the Customer Care Team (Customer Care Officer, Revenue Manager, Customer Relations Manager, General Manager Corporate & Customer) will be able to access these details. - Your account will have a generic prompt in our system to ensure that any account enquiry or action is directly managed by our Customer Care Team. Hence, you will be directed to our customer care officer to manage or facilitate an answer to all future enquiries.
ASSIST		Assist - Westernport Water is open to all avenues to support you. This may include grants, waivers and payment flexibility. - There will be no debt recovery action on your account. - For joint accounts, we will work with you to identify alternative contact options that do not require you to provide the details of a secondary place of residence.
TRANSACTION		Payments and support Individual grants or debt waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis and consider illness, disability, debt, capacity to pay, and recent changes to your financial or living situation.

Review Date

This policy is to be reviewed every three years and approved by the Board. The Policy will continue until replaced by a later version or rescinded.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

Policy Owner – General Manager, Corporate & Customer

Responsible Policy Officer – Manager, Customer Relations