



Media Release

Push to retrofit low-income housing to reduce energy bills

More than 90 Community and business organisations including ACOSS, GetUp, CHIA and the EEC have come together calling for an ambitious energy performance retrofit package for low-income housing in the budget.

The groups have signed an open letter to Assistant Climate and Energy Minister Jenny McAllister, who is driving the government's important energy performance strategy, highlighting such a package will both address climate change and provide urgently needed cost of living relief.

Right now hundreds of thousands of people on low incomes in Australia are struggling to afford soaring energy bills and living in homes that are dangerously hot in summer and cold in winter.

Millions of houses waste energy, are expensive to power and exacerbate the climate crisis by burning gas for heating, hot water and cooking.

Retrofitting low-income homes would involve swapping gas-fired stoves and heaters for electric devices, installing rooftop solar, and upgrading insulation among other improvements.

ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie said:

“Despite living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, people in Australia on low incomes are going without food and getting sick because they cannot afford their energy bills.

“By prioritising low-income homes for efficiency and electrification, this Budget can provide much needed and long-lasting relief while also tackling the climate crisis.”

GetUp CEO Larissa Baldwin-Roberts said:

“We are living with strong economic pressures, with no long-term vision in place to switch our lives and communities to renewable energy solutions.

“Labor has an opportunity to provide Australians struggling to pay their bills with a much needed stopgap to our current energy crisis.



“What’s not being considered is how important this is in terms of getting Australians off gas. We cannot continue to rely on a resource that destroys Country, bulldozes Traditional Owner consent and pollutes our environment.”

CHIA CEO Wendy Hayhurst said:

“The electrification and efficiency revolution is ramping up in Australia but without government action people in social housing will miss out on the financial and health benefits it brings.

“Retrofitting the older and energy-inefficient housing stock community housing organisations manage is an obvious way to save residents money, make their homes more comfortable, and reduce emissions.”

ECC CEO Luke Mezel said:

“There is a compelling case for targeting direct support for energy performance upgrades towards vulnerable households. First and foremost, it will ensure these folk don't get left behind as our energy system transitions.

“But it will also help build the ecosystem of skills and supply chains we need to upgrade millions more poorly performing homes right across the country.”

Upgrading low income homes also has strong support among the public with more than 16,500 people signing two petitions, one by [ACOSS](#) and one by [GetUp](#).

Comments available from people who live in low-income homes

Lisa, who receives JobSeeker (South Australia).

“I can only lie on my bed with the fan on when it gets really hot, as I can't afford to run the reverse cycle air conditioning.

“The Government needs to build much more social housing, using all the latest energy efficient technology with solar panels. It should be a right for everyone to live like this, not just the wealthy.” –

Linda, who receives Austudy (Victoria).

“Moving into this house, I did not have proper curtains, only the thin strip curtains so they do not keep the heat in in winter or the heat out in summer.



"I don't believe there is any insulation in the walls and it gets very cold in winter, and I did have a huge winter bill, so I am too scared to use the aircon to keep it cool.

"If I do put it on, it will only be for a very short time when it is well over 30 degrees. Lucky the sea breeze has been saving me most days so far this summer. It is very hard to stay focused and study online."

A recent ACOSS survey of people on low incomes revealed the extreme measures taken to restrict energy use to lower bills. About 65% are cutting back on heating and cooling; 59% are limiting the use of lights and almost 60% are going without essentials like food and medication to afford bills. This summer, as many as 62% struggled to keep their home cool, with 30% requiring medical care due to heat stress.

In 2022, there was a 15 per cent increase in customers participating in energy hardship programs, half of hardship customers could not meet current energy costs, and the number with energy debts above \$2,500 increased 39 per cent.

The hardship will only get worse with electricity prices expected to increase between 20 and 30 per cent in July 2023.

ACOSS, Getup, CHIA, EEC and lived experience expert, Leilani will be meeting with the Assistant Minister on Monday May 8 to present the letter and petition.