

Energy experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse people in Canberra

Energy is essential!

Energy affordability is a key cost of living issue. Affordable and efficient energy is essential to ACT residents being able to live well.¹

To achieve the ACT's climate and emissions goals, all ACT residents need to be able to transition from gas to electrical appliances, increase the energy efficiency of their homes, and access sustainable energy sources.²

We surveyed 28 community organisations in the ACT to identify key energy issues for their clients (including culturally and linguistically diverse clients). Respondents indicated the following key energy issues:



- Affordability: 83%
- Difficulty keeping homes warm or cool: 70%
- Lack of control over energy use (especially in rental settings): 53%
- Difficulty understanding bills or plans: 40%
- Appliance issues: 33%

Challenges faced by Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People in the ACT

We want to ensure culturally, and linguistically diverse people can benefit from energy policies and supports in the same way as other Canberrans. However culturally and linguistically diverse people may face challenges in doing so.

¹ ACT Wellbeing Framework.

² ACT Climate Change Strategy

These challenges can arise from several causes:

1. Energy retailers and government policy makers are unfamiliar with cultural perspectives and practices. Therefore, policies and energy products may not meet cultural needs of households and families.
2. Policies and products are often designed based on the values and habits of the dominant culture, but these are treated as if they're just common sense or neutral ideas—when they're not.
3. Information in languages other than English is limited, not available, or hard to find.
4. Culturally and linguistically diverse people may have limited familiarity with existing energy and government systems and services.
5. Culturally and linguistically diverse people are over-represented in the rental market, particularly in the early years of settlement.

What can be done about it?

The ACT Government, energy providers and community organisations all have a role to play to solve these problems.

Cultural awareness

Improved cultural awareness by government and energy providers will help address barriers to energy programs, support and financial assistance. The recommendations below will help ensure culturally diverse populations' needs are considered when developing and implementing policies and programs.

Recommendation One: Increase policy makers and retailers' familiarity with energy norms from culturally diverse populations in the ACT, for example by collecting data and commissioning research.

Recommendation Two: Include culturally and linguistically diverse people and organisations in developing concession and energy assistance policies, energy products and complaints processes.

Engage community organisations, community leaders, and places of gathering such as churches, temples or community halls to host or promote engagement and ask for feedback.

Recommendation Three: Put in place systems to consider impacts of new policies and programs on culturally and linguistically diverse people and communities in the ACT.

Recommendation Four: Review existing concession and energy assistance policies to address harms caused by dominant cultural assumptions being treated as 'neutral'.

Consider barriers to access in current concession and energy assistance policies.

Communication

It is harder for people who do not speak English as their first language to find and understand energy information. Websites often do not make it easy for culturally and linguistically diverse people to find the information they need in relevant languages.

Recommendation Five: Optimise websites so tools such as Google Translate can translate information into languages other than English.

Recommendation Six: Improve visibility of translated materials, translation tools and interpreter services by displaying them prominently on website home pages.

Recommendation Seven: Ensure translated materials, translation tools and interpreter services are appropriately signposted and appear early in English language documents and websites.

Recommendation Eight: Increase accessibility of paper-based information on energy plans, concessions, hardship programs and other relevant energy support programs.

Recommendation Nine: Engage community organisations, community leaders, and places of gathering such as churches, temples or community halls to share paper-based information and information sharing activities.

Recommendation Ten: Include practical information about energy bills, concessions, and efficient appliance use in settlement programs, so migrants and humanitarian entrants are supported from the start.