

POLICY STATEMENT

GWMWater is committed to providing respectful and confidential assistance to customers and employees in our community who are impacted by family violence.

Our Family Violence Policy provides the framework which informs our decisions and the actions taken in supporting customers and employees experiencing family violence. It also provides information on the assistance that is available to those who are affected.

A copy of this Policy can be found on our website and be provided to a customer upon request. Upon reasonable request GWMWater can provide a copy of this policy in another language.

To access our Translating and Interpreting Service contact 131 450. Deaf, hearing impaired or speech/communication impaired customers can call the National Replay Service on 133 677.

1. PURPOSE

GWMWater has implemented this policy and related processes to support our customers and employees who are experiencing family violence. A key consideration within the Family Violence Policy is to ensure that all customer dealings are undertaken in a respectful and confidential manner.

We are committed to always considering the safety and wellbeing of our customers and employees. We will provide support by referring to specialised agencies in our community, as well as working with customers in times of debt and payment difficulties.

GWMWater aims to provide a supportive environment where customers and employees can be made aware of the assistance that can be provided to them by GWMWater and then refer to local support agencies for further support.

2. SCOPE

This policy sets out the support for customers and employees who experience family violence and is applicable to all GWMWater employees. It sets out the level of awareness we expect of our employees – supported by training - to understand the impacts family violence. It also confirms our commitment to upholding rights of customers, to privacy and support.

This Policy also outlines the support that is available to employees who are experiencing family violence.

3. DEFINITIONS

Family violence: Family violence can take a number of forms. Victoria's *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as behaviours towards a family member,

including physical, sexual, financial, verbal, emotional and psychological abuse, and behaviour that is threatening or coercive. It also includes any of these behaviours where a child may hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to, the effects of these behaviours. A central element of family violence is behaviour aimed at power and control through fear. Family violence may occur between intimate partners or ex partners, including those in same sex relationships, between siblings, between adolescent or adult children and their parent/s (e.g. elder abuse), or between extended family members, or people in a family-like relationship such as a person providing ongoing caring activities.

4. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

GWMWater understands the sensitivity of family violence situations and promotes the need for the highest degree of confidentiality to be exercised when supporting customers **and employees** who disclose instances of family violence in any form. GWMWater appreciates that respecting confidentiality may be critical to the safety of the customer **or employee**. We are committed to the privacy of **those** who have **made a disclosure of family violence**, however acknowledge that in certain circumstances there may be legal obligations or a judgement made about serious and imminent risk to report acts or threats of family violence to external bodies (i.e. police). Wherever possible, GWMWater will seek the consent of the affected customer **or employee** prior to sharing information with other authorities or agencies.

5. CUSTOMER SUPPORT

GWMWater understands it can be difficult to disclose situations of family violence and is committed to providing an environment **where customers** can feel safe and listened to without judgement. We have measures in place that ensures the customer only needs to tell their story once, **and that we** respond sensitively to disclosures and then refer **customers** to external support agencies.

Case Manager

All customers identified as experiencing family **violence** are assigned a case manager from our Customer Support Team. The case manager works with the customer individually ensuring we understand the situation and what we need to put in place to best support the customer. In the situation where a case manager is on leave or leaves GWMWater there will be a handover to another trained case manager.

Suppression of Personal Details

Personal details including the customer's name, postal address and any contact details are suppressed from our normal billing system. This means only case managers in our Customer Support Team can view the customer's information.

Account Flags

A 'flag' is placed on the customer's water account alerting employees that any enquires need to be directed to the relevant case manager.

Customer Management System

Information such as the customer's contact details, conversations had with the case manager or any other information that may be relevant is kept on a secure Customer Management System that can only be accessed by case managers. We also restrict access to all property files in our Records Management System.

Passwords

Extra security measures may be put in place such as passwords on an account. The case manager would ask the customer for the password before proceeding with any discussions.

Communication

How and when GWMWater will communicate with you is a vital part in ensuring your safety. Your case manager will work with you on preferred methods of contact and when it is best to contact you. They are also trained on picking up signs if it's not safe to continue a conversation. Options for communication include:

- Phone
- Email
- Letter
- Text
- Face to face (At our McLachlan Street office)

Water Accounts and Correspondence

We will issue the customer's water account and any general correspondence by their preferred method of contact.

5.1 Debt Management

We understand the impacts and stress family violence, including any financial abuse can have on customers, especially in the cases of joint accounts. **We understand that seeking financial support** can be difficult, especially when the perpetrator may be withholding financial information.

If customers identify that they are experiencing family violence, all debt collection activity including any interest or service restriction will cease. The assigned case manager will work with the customer to create a support plan that best suits their needs.

As a customer experiencing family violence, you are automatically part of our Customer Support Program. The support can include:

- Ensuring you are receiving any concessions that you are entitled to.
- Flexible interest free payment arrangements.
- Any government grants you may be eligible to receive (Utility Relief Grant, Community Rebate Scheme).
- Bonus Credit Program.
- Waiving of interest and legal fees.
- Referring to financial counsellors and other community support organisations.
- Assess for any potential leaks using digital meters.

Additional debt relief can be provided to those customers experiencing family violence. We may waive or suspend part or all of your debt depending on a number of factors. These include:

- The amount of debt.
- Customers’ personal circumstances and capacity to pay.
- **Whether** the debt **was incurred** without **the customer’s** knowledge.
- **Whether (and if so, the extent to which)** payment assistance has been utilised.

5.2 Joint Accounts

In the circumstances of joint account holders, no legal action or service restriction will take place where the customer is identified as experiencing family violence. Where legal action or service restriction may have commenced, this action will be ceased as soon as practicable. GWMWater will take into consideration a number of factors including if both parties live at the property, if the property is a rental or if the property is owner occupied. Depending on the situation we may issue an account individually.

5.3 Resources and Referrals

GWMWater will connect the customer to specialist family violence services who can provide further support and advice. Below is a list of external support agencies and resources.

If you are in immediate danger please call 000

You can find more specialist services here: <https://www.gwmwater.org.au/billing/get-help-to-pay-your-water-bill>

<p>1800RESPECT 1800RESPECT is the national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service 24/7 Call: 1800 737 732 Website: 1800respect.org.au</p>	<p>Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Culturally specific assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors or family violence and sexual assault Call: 1800 105 303 Website: fvpls.org</p>	<p>Safe Steps (Vic only) Providing specialist support services for anyone in Victoria who is experiencing or afraid of family violence 24/7 Call: 1800 015 188 Website: safesteps.org.au</p>
<p>With Respect- LGBTIQ+ For members of the LGBTIQ+ community. They offer telecounselling and support to those who are at risk or are experiencing family violence. Tuesday 9 am to 8 pm Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday 9 am to 5 pm Call: 1800 542 847 Website: withrespect.org.au</p>	<p>The Rainbow Door Everyday 10 am to 5 pm Call: 1800 729 367 Website: rainbowdoor.org.au/getsupport Email: support@rainbowdoor.org.au SMS: 0480 017 246</p>	<p>InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence InTouch specialises in working directly with migrant and refugee women who have experienced family violence and their communities. 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Call: 1800 755 988 Website: intouch.org.au</p>

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6. EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

GWMWater recognises that employees may be amongst those affected by situations of family violence. We will provide support to all employees experiencing family violence, enabling employees experiencing family violence to continue to participate in the workplace and maintain their employment.

Accessing Support

We understand it can be difficult to disclose family violence. GWMWater provides a range of avenues for employees to reach out and seek support.

Employees can speak with:

- Their immediate supervisor or manager; or
- Their manager's direct manager; or
- A member of the **People, Culture & Legal** team; or
- A Union delegate; or
- The GWMWater Employee Assistance Program to discuss their situation and access support; or
- GWMWater employees who have been trained as family violence or Equal Employee Opportunity contact officers.

Support is available to employees who are the victim of family violence and to any employees who may be supporting someone experiencing family violence. These support options include:

- Family Violence Leave.
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Flexible work options.
- Safety plans.
- No adverse action when disclosing family violence.
- Ongoing support.

7. TRAINING AND AWARENESS

GWMWater understands the importance of training our employees in identifying and responding to family violence. We provide training and resources that can assist in identifying, responding and managing cases of family violence. This includes:

- All employees that have customer interactions undergo online or face-to-face training on recognising the signs of family violence and how to respond.
- All employees receive online training on our Family Violence Policy and Procedures, the policy is reviewed every two years or as needed.
- Selected employees are trained as Family Violence Contact Officers to assist with supporting colleagues and referring them to specialist support agencies if required.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Head of Customer Support is responsible for directing, reviewing and reporting upon the implementation of the Family Violence Policy regarding customers.

Case Managers are responsible for working with customers experiencing family violence to understand their situation and support them.

The Manager **People, Culture & Legal** is responsible for directing, reviewing and reporting upon the implementation of the Family Violence Policy regarding employees.

Family Violence Contact Officers and Equal Employee Opportunity Contact Officers are responsible for assisting with supporting colleagues and referring them to specialist support agencies if required.

All employees are responsible for reporting disclosures of family violence to the Head of Customer Support (customers) or Manager **People, Culture & Legal** (employees).

9. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- a) [CMS/763 Customer Support Policy](#)
- b) Urban and Rural Customer Charters
- c) [CMS/3483 Customer Account Manager Work Instruction](#)
- d) [CMS/579 Privacy Policy](#)
- e) [CMS/1847 Instruments of Delegation](#)
- f) Debt Collection Policy
- g) [CMS/3344 Workplace Family Violence Policy](#)
- h) [CMS/3340 Workplace Family Violence Procedure](#)
- i) [CMS/3240 Guide for Employees Experiencing Family Violence](#)
- j) [CMS/3241 Guide for Managers Supporting Employees Experiencing Family Violence](#)

10. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

That GWMWater customers and employees who are affected by family violence are treated respectfully and confidentially while receiving appropriate support.

11. DOCUMENTATION

Essential Services Commission Water Industry Standards March 2023.