

PROCEDURE

Family Violence - Customers

1. Purpose

Family violence is a serious and widespread issue that affects an individual's health and wellbeing and ultimately the whole community. Our region of south west Victoria experiences a higher incidence of family violence as compared to the whole of Victoria¹.

Wannon Water's vision to go 'beyond water for strong communities' recognises our role in the broader health and wellbeing and economic prosperity of people in our region. As an essential service provider, Wannon Water actively works to support customers experiencing family violence, with the safety of our customers being paramount.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all Wannon Water customers who experience family violence, or provide indications they may be experiencing family violence, and who require assistance.

3. Procedure

This procedure outlines the support available to all customers who may be experiencing family violence. It acknowledges that customers may or may not choose to directly disclose their current or previous experience of family violence. It also acknowledges that some customers might provide indications that family violence may be occurring during interactions with Wannon Water staff, particularly in relation to bill payment.

This procedure outlines the support available to all customers experiencing family violence, regardless of their current financial capacity. Furthermore, Wannon Water seeks to create a supportive environment where customers are comfortable in requesting assistance for family violence related concerns and are aware of the support available to them.

This procedure:

- (a) Recognises that family violence is unacceptable in any relationship.
- (b) Ensures that customers impacted by family violence are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.
- (c) Regards the safety of victims and their children as a priority.
- (d) Recognises that the process of leaving a violent relationship is often a long and gradual one.
- (e) Ensures that customers who indicate or disclose family violence are able to access support from Wannon Water regardless of their current financial capacity.
- (f) Ensures that with any disclosure Wannon Water will take great care to treat the customer with sensitivity and ensure confidentiality.

This procedure is one of three Wannon Water documents relating to family violence and satisfies the Essential Services Commission's Customer Service Code requirement to have a Family Violence Policy. The other two documents are the Family Violence Procedure – Employees and Family Violence Guidelines – Managers and Leaders.

¹ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal>

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3.1. Types of support for customers

Customers experiencing family violence are eligible to access the wide range of supports available in our Customer Support Policy. Wannon Water offers a variety of supports for customers experiencing family violence including:

- (a) Referral to a member of the Customer Support Team.
- (b) Confidentiality and respectful treatment of the issues discussed.
- (c) Financial assistance will be tailored to the individual's needs including an affordable payment arrangement, advice and assistance with Utility Relief Grant Scheme and concessions, debt relief options and referral to independent financial counselling services.
- (d) Accounts in joint names – even if only one account holder is affected by family violence, we will immediately pause all debt collection activity, including no additional debt collection costs or interest. We will also ensure that the water supply is not restricted because of the debt. We will take steps to ensure confidentiality is protected from other persons on the account and that customers can access support, including placing the outstanding amount on hold or waiving part or all of the outstanding debt, without having to contact the perpetrator.
- (e) Debt relief – once a customer identifies as being impacted by family violence, we may waive or suspend all or part of the debt based on a number of factors, including:
 - The amount of the debt
 - The circumstances in which the debt was incurred – including if it was incurred as a result of financial abuse
 - Whether the debt should have been raised
 - What payment assistance options have been, or could be, effective
 - The customer's personal circumstances and capacity to pay the debt.
- (f) Offer to refer to family violence support agencies with customer's consent, including communicating with agencies to avoid the customer needing to repeat their circumstances. *See Support Service Phone Numbers.*
- (g) Providing customers with family violence support agency contact details so customers can self-refer. Refer to the document titled *Support Service Phone Numbers.*
- (h) Exemption from water restriction actions.
- (i) Exemption from legal action and cost recovery processes.
- (j) Referral to other agencies and authorities that can assist customers.
- (k) If the customer is also an employee, they will be provided with details of the Family Violence Procedure for Employees.
- (l) The processes set out in Wannon Water's Customer Support Policy and Financial Assistance Procedure are to be considered to help guide the approach to debt management and recovery where a customer is affected by family violence.

3.2. Safety and Confidentiality

Where the customer discloses that they are experiencing family violence and with the customers consent, the account will be made secure in our billing system so that only a limited number of employees in our customer support team are able to access the account. This significantly reduces the number of employees that have access to view the account and also ensures that when the customer makes contact with Wannon Water, the customer will be transferred to a member of the

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customer support team, removing the requirement for the customer to repeat disclosure of their family violence.

3.3. Evidence Requirements

Wannon Water recognises that family violence is a complex and sensitive issue for customers to discuss with their service provider. In order to prioritise customer safety and privacy, Wannon Water does not require customers to provide evidence of family violence.

3.4. Employee Training and Support

All Wannon Water employees will undertake family violence training relevant to their role. In particular, Customer Support employees are required to complete specific training designed to ensure employees understand our family violence procedure and related documents and assist them to identify and respond to issues associated with family violence. The training will ensure that employees are equipped to work effectively with customers and ensure any issues they disclose are treated with respect and confidentiality. Employees will also develop awareness of external organisations that support individuals experiencing family violence to enable them to make appropriate referrals when required.

Ongoing training will be provided to Customer Support employees at least every two years.

Employees will also be encouraged to identify customer behaviour and attitudes that reinforce family violence. Where a customer expresses concerns about their behaviour towards family members, it is expected that customer service employees will acknowledge the issue and provide referral to an appropriate support agency.

Employees will be actively encouraged to discuss any concerns with their team leader or manager. Additionally, employees all have access to family violence contact officers in the organisation and the employee assistance program should they need personal support following on from dealing with customers experiencing family violence.

3.5. Resources

In an emergency or crisis situation, encourage the caller to end the call and contact the Police immediately on 000. If there is a direct threat to the customer, it may be appropriate to contact emergency services on their behalf.

Customers can be referred into external support networks and resources. See Support Services Phone Numbers.

We will provide a copy of this procedure to any customer upon request. Customers can visit one of our contact centres or call us on 1300 926 666 and we will provide a copy.

Wannon Water offers a variety of support avenues for employees experiencing family violence as set out in our Family Violence Procedure – Employees, and summarised below:

- (a) Access to 20 days per year of paid special leave for medical appointments, legal proceedings and other activities related to family violence
- (b) Individual support such as temporary or ongoing changes to span or pattern of work hours or temporary or ongoing relocation to suitable employment
- (c) Access to our employee assistance program for free and confidential counselling services
- (d) Implementation of safety plans to improve the safety of the employee and their colleagues

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- (e) Ongoing support when returning to work after leave due to family violence related issues
- (f) An employee disclosing family violence will not have adverse action taken against them
- (g) We will take appropriate action, which may result in disciplinary action, against employees perpetuating family violence in the workplace
- (h) Training and support resources will be provided to employees in relation to family violence:
 - Managers, team leaders and the leadership team will be provided with training on recognising the signs of family violence and responding appropriately.
 - All employees will undergo online or face to face training on recognising the signs of family violence in colleagues, and responding and supporting them appropriately.
 - Managers can refer to the Manager – Family Violence Support Guidelines when they have an employee disclose family violence or they suspect are experiencing family violence.

4. Roles and responsibilities

Position	Roles and responsibilities
Branch Manager Customer Services	Responsible for regular review of procedure for clarity, ensuring the procedure reflects required and actual processes
Customer Support Coordinator (Collections)	Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researching and considering the views and requirements of those who will use and be affected by the procedure • documenting details of changes to the procedure ensuring that new and revised documents are appropriately approved, disseminated and understood
All employees	Responsible for following the processes set out in this procedure while carrying out daily activities and duties

5. Definitions

Term	Means
Family or Domestic Violence	<p>Family or domestic violence is behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) is physically or sexually abusive; or (b) is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or (c) is economically abusive; or (d) is threatening; or (e) is coercive; or (f) 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; or <p>behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear, witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of the behaviour referred to above.</p>
Family	It is important to note that when referring to “family” this may include current or former partners, and does not necessarily mean partners who live together.
Customer Support Team Member	A member of the Customer Support Team is an employee that has received additional training to assist and work with customers experiencing family violence.

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6. Governance

Parent policy/standard	N/A
Associated procedures/standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wannon Water Privacy Procedure. • Wannon Water Customer Support Policy. • Wannon Water Financial Assistance Procedure. • 2018 Wannon Water Financial Inclusion Action Plan. • Wannon Water Gender Plan. • Wannon Water Inclusion and Diversity Plan. • Wannon Water Family Violence Procedure – Employees. • Wannon Water Family Violence Guidelines – Managers and Leaders. • Essential Services Commission Customer Service Code (Family Violence). • Support Service Phone Numbers • AquaRate Release 12.30 Family Violence.
Relevant legislation	N/A
Approval	Branch Manager Customer Services
Procedure owner	Branch Manager Customer Services
Content enquiries	Customer Support Coordinator (Payments)

7. Document version history

Version	Changes made to document
2	Content Approved 03AUG2020
3	Updated to the new so:control template
4	Updated to provide additional clarity of support available where accounts are held in joint names, support for debt relief, making account secure in our billing system and support provided to our employees.