

Shock to the System: energy consumers' experience of the Covid-19 crisis

The Numbers



Research methodology

Fieldwork: 02/06/20

Sample size: n=1,059

Prepared by: Essential Research

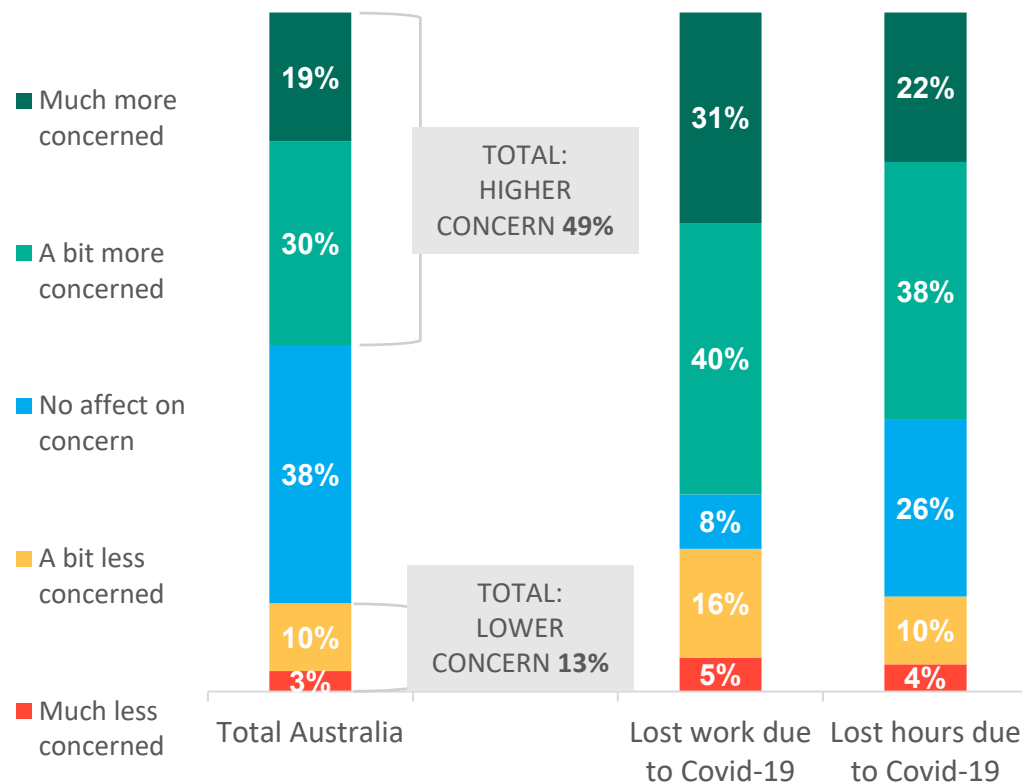


Our researchers are members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society.

- This report summarises the results of a fortnightly omnibus conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics. The survey was conducted online from 28th May to 31st May 2020 and is based on 1,059 respondents.
- Most of the questions in this survey were asked of people who described themselves as main (49%) or joint (41%) decision-makers in their household for energy products and services.
- The methodology used to carry out this research is described in the appendix at the end of the report.
- Note that due to rounding, not all tables necessarily total 100% and subtotals may also vary.

Concern about household bills has increased for half of people and is higher among those who have lost work or hours

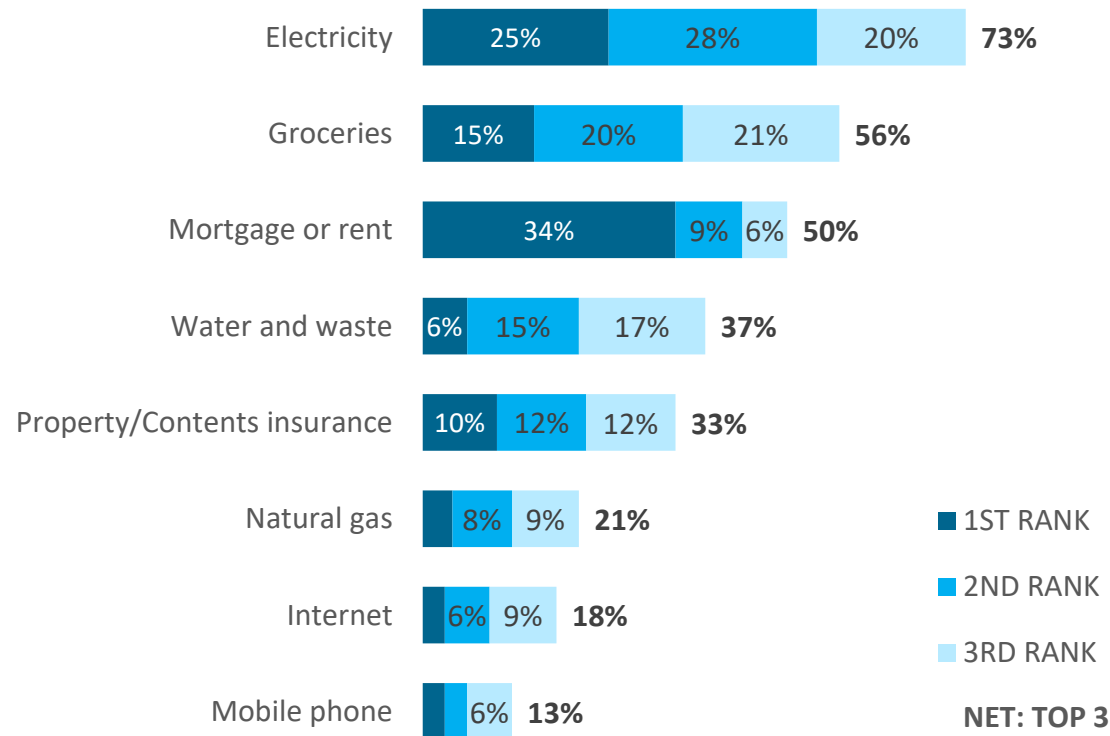
Concern with paying bills (%)



- 49% of people say they are more concerned about their ability to pay household bills since before the Covid-19 pandemic. This is made up of 19% who say they are much more concerned and 30% who claim to be a bit more concerned.
- Those who are no longer in paid work due to Covid-19 are more likely to be concerned (71%) than those who are still in paid work but are doing fewer hours (60%).
- Those on a lower household income have the most concern about being able to pay household bills. A quarter (25%) of those with an annual household income of under \$52k say they are much more concerned about being able to pay household bills. This is lower among those with a mid-income (16%) and high annual income (17%).
- Concern about paying bills is higher among those aged 18-34, with 24% saying they are much more concerned (compared to 11% of those aged over 55).

Electricity bills are the bill most people have concerns about paying

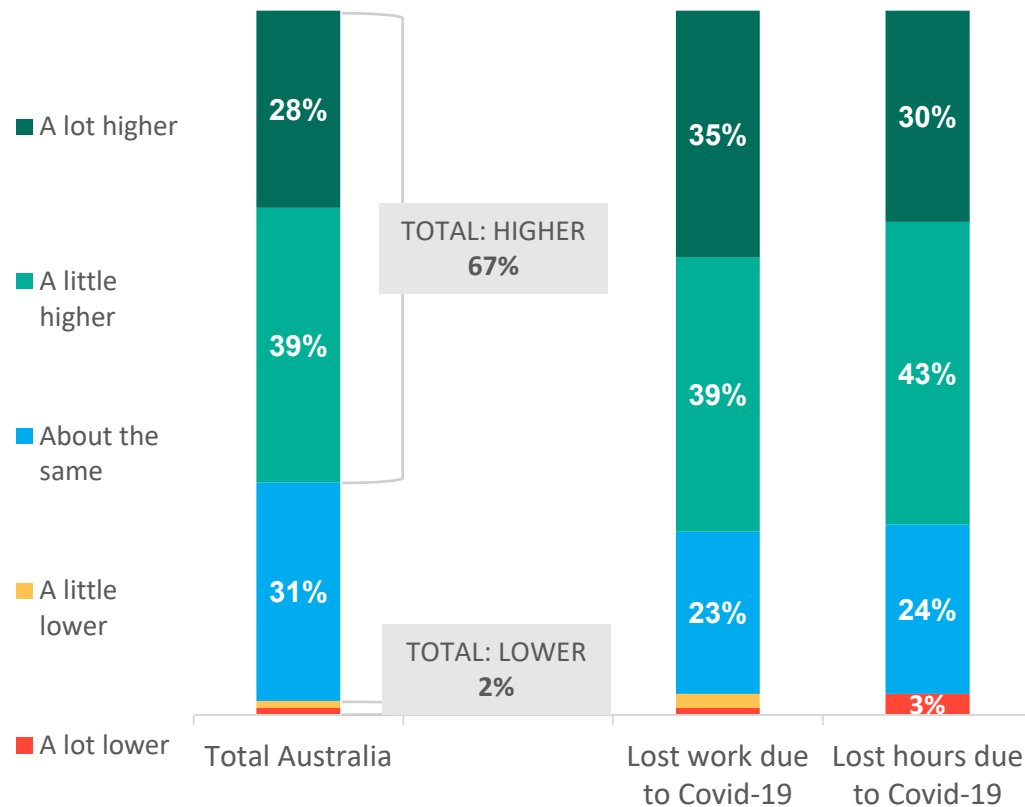
Household bills of highest concern (%) TOTAL: Top 3



- 25% say that electricity is the bill they are most concerned about, while 73% rate it in their top 3.
- 34% say the ability to pay the mortgage or rent is what they are most concerned about, with 50% putting this in their top three.
- Over half of people rated their grocery expenditure as a top 3 concern (56%).
- Concern about internet and mobile bills was relatively low.

Two-thirds of households are expecting an increase to electricity bills due to Covid-19

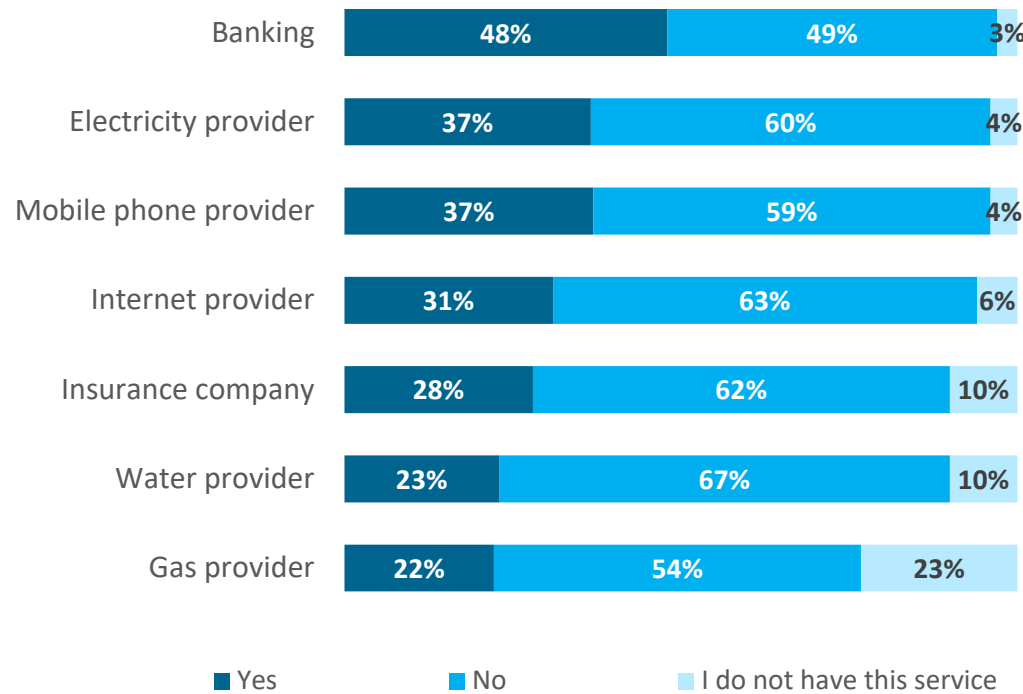
Expected impact on electricity bills (%)



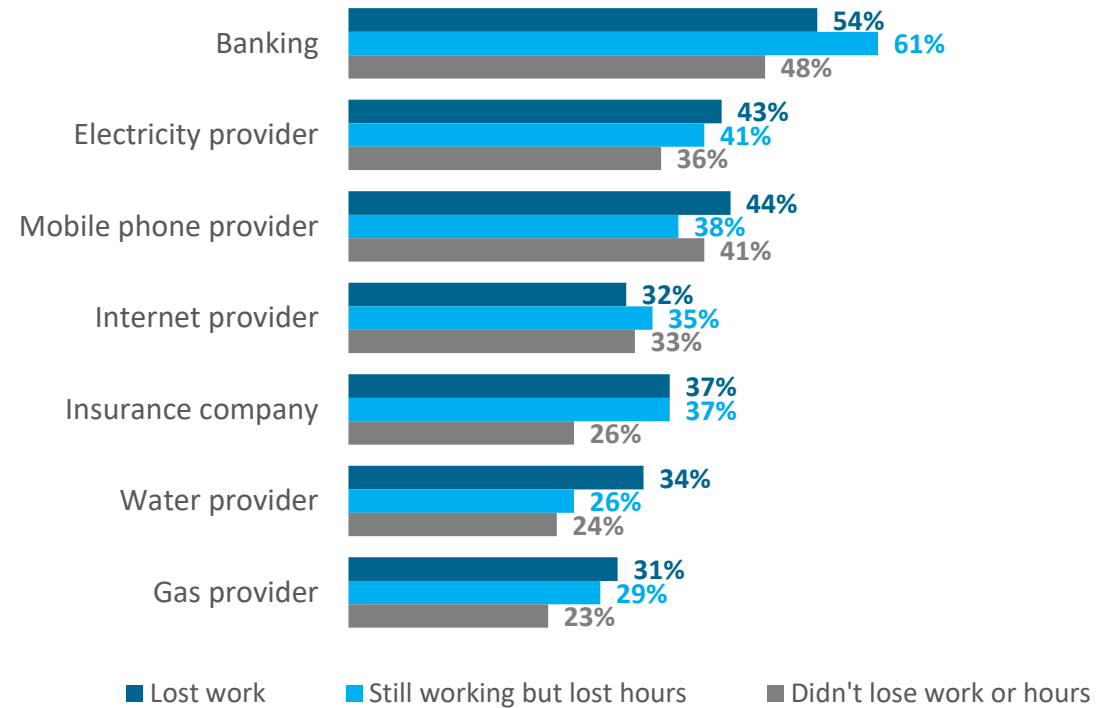
- 67% of energy decision-makers expect an increase in their electricity bill this year.
- Whether or not people were in paid work prior to Covid-19 appears to influence expectations for bills. 71% of those who are currently in paid employment say their bills are likely to be higher, as do 74% of those who were in paid work before Covid-19 but are not anymore. By comparison, 58% of those who are retired say they are expecting an increase in their bill.
- This observation almost certainly reflects many of those who were in paid work before the outbreak spending more time at home (either because they are no longer in paid work or because they are working from home more often).

Those who have lost work or hours are more likely to recall receiving information from most service providers

Received information from service providers (%)



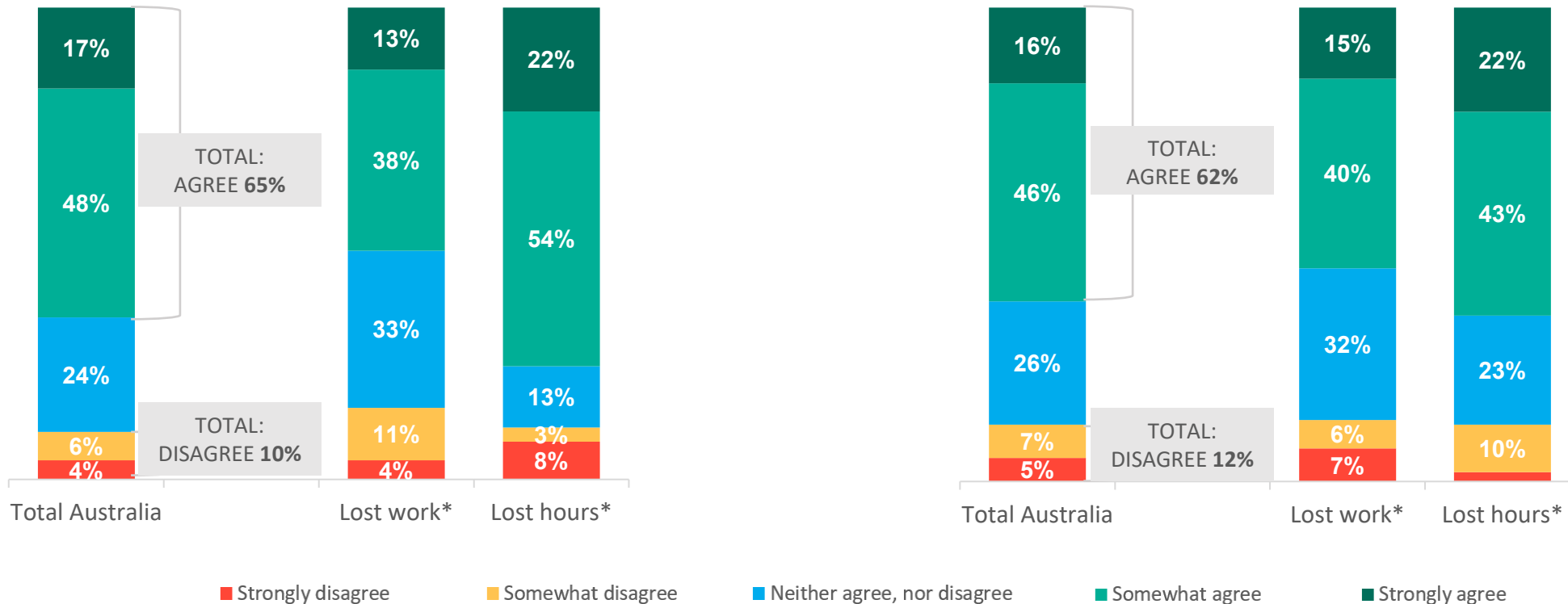
Received information from service providers (%)



Participants who have lost work are less likely to agree information provided by an electricity retailer was clear or the support offered would be useful

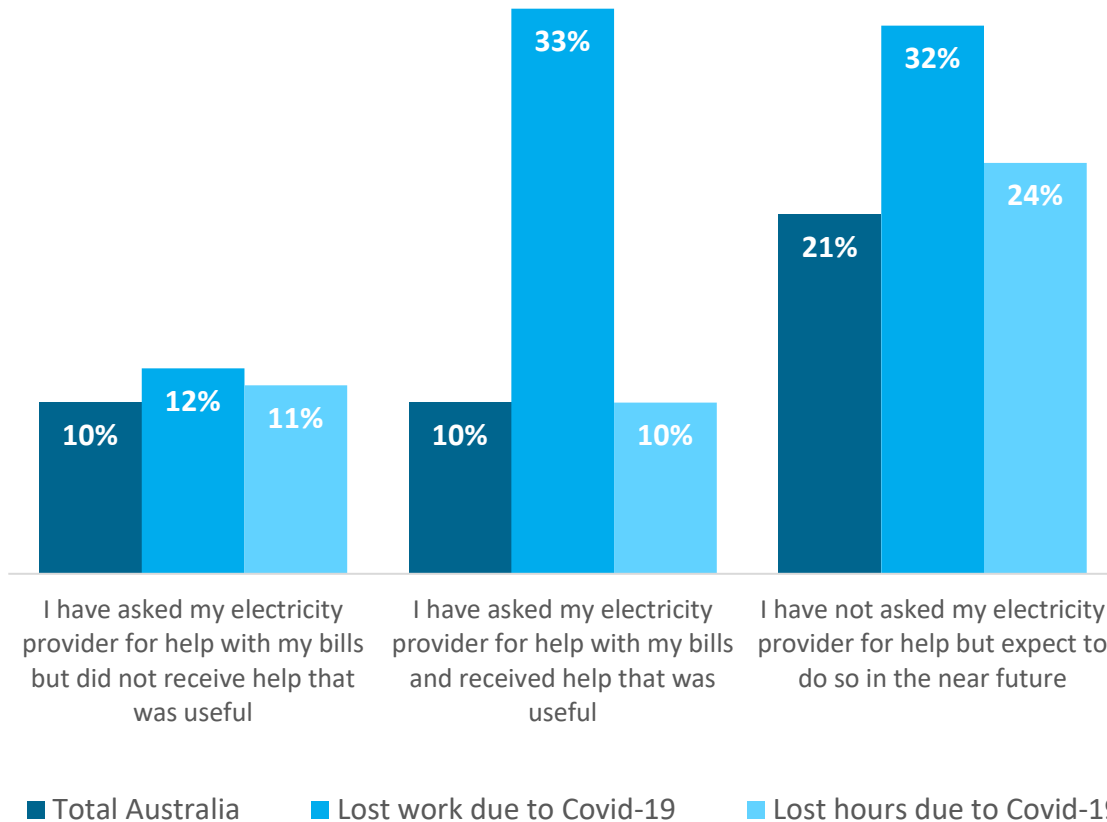
The information was clear and easy to understand (%)

The support offered would be useful if I needed help (%)



One in five have already requested support from their electricity

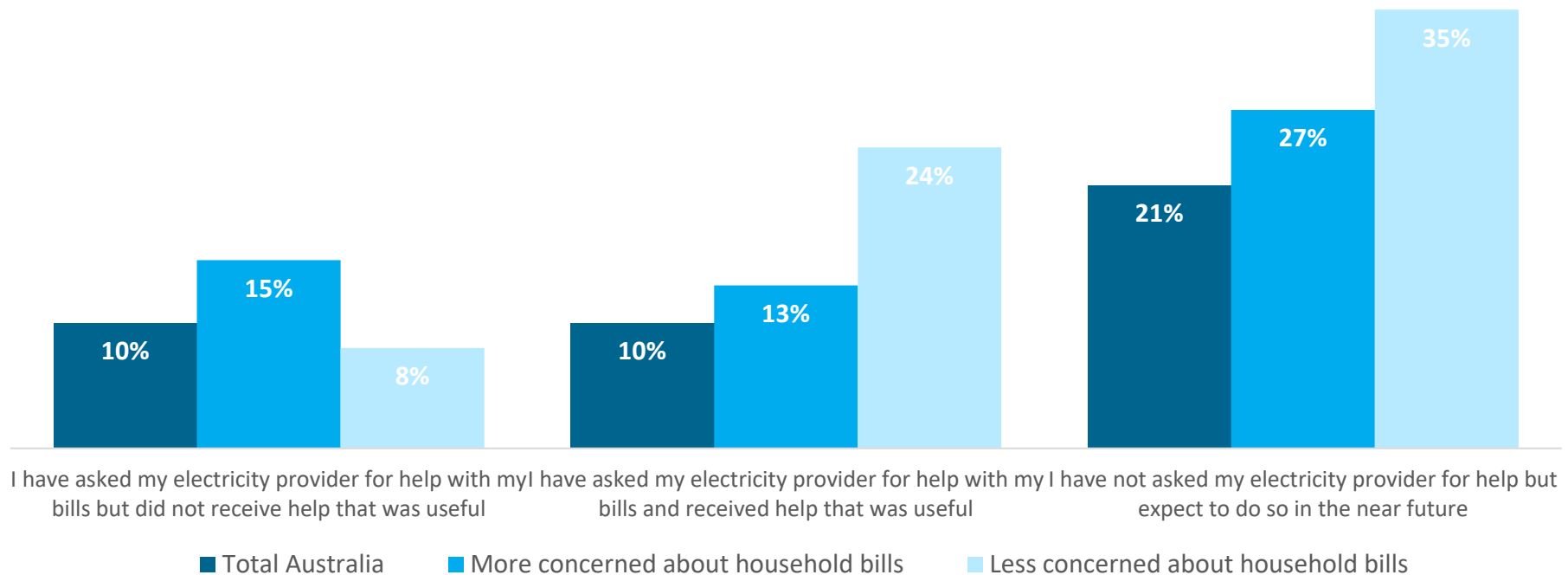
Expectation for electricity bill assistance (%)



- 20% of energy decision makers say they have already requested financial assistance to pay their electricity bill. Of these half (10%) received help which was useful, and half (10%) did not receive help that was useful.
- Those who have lost work are just as likely to seek help as those who have lost hours – but are more likely to say this help was useful (33%).
- Younger people are more likely to have asked for (36%), or expect to require assistance from (32%), their provider to pay electricity bills.
- Those living in capital cities (24%), in paid employment (27%) and households with dependent children (27%) are most likely to have already required assistance.
- The majority of people (59%) do not expect to require assistance, particularly those without dependent children (65%), retired people (86%) and those living in regional areas (68%).

Those who are more concerned about their bills are most likely to have already asked for help – and say that help wasn't useful

Expectation for electricity bill assistance (%)



Appendix

Methodology, margin of error and professional standards

The data gathered for this report is gathered from a fortnightly online omnibus conducted by Qualtrics.

Every two weeks, the team at Essential considers issues that are topical, and a series of questions are devised to put to the Australian public. Some questions are repeated regularly (such as political preference and leadership approval), while others are unique to each week and reflect current media and social issues.

The response rate varies each week, but usually delivers 1000+ interviews. In theory, with a sample of this size, there is 95 per cent certainty that the results are within 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire population had been polled. However, this assumes random sampling, which, because of non-response and less than 100% population coverage cannot be achieved in practice. Furthermore, there are other possible sources of error in all polls including question wording and question order, interviewer bias (for telephone and face-to-face polls), response errors and weighting.

The online omnibus is live from the Wednesday night and closed on the following Sunday. Incentives are offered to participants. Essential Research uses the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyse the data. The data is weighted against Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

All Essential Research staff hold Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) membership and are bound by professional codes of behaviour.