

Customer Family Violence Policy

Responsible group or department	Customers, Community & Strategy
Approved by	General Manager Customers, Community & Strategy
Responsible position	Manager Customer Experience
Compliance	All employees
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Version	4
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Policy Statement

Barwon Water is committed to providing confidential and respectful assistance to customers experiencing family violence.

Family Violence is a complex issue that Barwon Water takes seriously. We recognise that family violence impacts the communities in which we operate. We acknowledge that family violence is complex, challenging, and personal, and if it affects you, we are committed to supporting you.

Any enquires or feedback relating to this policy should be referred to the responsible position outlined above on 1300 656 007 or via info@barwonwater.vic.gov.au. Matters of a sensitive and confidential nature will be managed with care and in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures.

Purpose

Barwon Water has developed this policy for customers experiencing family violence, with the safety of our customers and employees being paramount.

It is now widely recognised that Government, corporate and community sectors all have a responsibility to work together to support those experiencing family violence. A collaborative and integrated response is essential to effect long term systemic change.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Privacy can be critical to your safety in any family violence situation. We will treat any information you give us about your situation and your personal circumstances with confidentiality. Depending on individual circumstances, we can:

- keep your contact information on our systems secure and confidential,
- manage how your personal information is shared with other parties, and
- identify safe ways to communicate with you.

Precautions we take when communicating with you may include:

- a mutually appropriate time to talk;
- determining whether it is safe to send text messages or leave voice messages on the phone and;
- if you are a joint account holder, we may need to send information to two different mail or email addresses.

Scope

This policy sets out the support for customers who experience family violence and is applicable to all Barwon Water employees. It sets out the level of awareness we expect of our employees – supported by training - to understanding family violence. It also confirms our commitment to upholding your rights as a customer, to privacy and support.

Definitions

Term	Description
"Family violence"	<p>Behaviour by a person towards a family member if that behaviour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is physically or sexually abusive, • emotionally or psychologically abusive, • economically abusive, • coercive, or • in any other way controls or dominates the family member and causes them to feel fear for their safety or wellbeing or that of another person, • or causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of the above behaviour.

Policy/Guidelines

Customer rights

Barwon Water’s role is to ensure that your rights as a customer are upheld. If you are a customer experiencing family violence you have the right to:

- expect and receive confidential and respectful conversations;
- be assured that all personal information will be kept confidential in line with Barwon Water’s policies and relevant privacy legislation (the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014) and regulatory guidelines (the Essential Services Commission Water Industry Standard - Urban Customer Service 2024) and this may involve the use of extra-level data security mechanisms;
- tell your story one time only and receive a continuity of service;
- request one point of contact within the Customer Centre team and be provided with that officer’s direct phone line;
- feel safe, have time to consider your options and have your privacy protected;

- automatically enter into Barwon Water's Customer Support program, and be supported by our family violence process;
- suspension of payment, reduced payment instalments and/or waiver of part or all of your debt at Barwon Water's discretion;
- be exempt from debt collection processes and any associated costs;
- have any charges that are linked to a joint account with another customer managed in a considerate manner;
- receive information about financial support and assistance available and be provided with links to specialised support networks;
- receive access to a free interpreter service if required (telephone 131 450) and;
- receive a copy of this policy upon request.

Barwon Water is committed to ensuring your safety and the confidentiality of your transactions. When there is a joint account, Barwon Water will not share private information between account holders without express permission. If one account holder is experiencing violence, Barwon Water will strive to offer that individual a connection to specialist supports.

Available support

Barwon Water recognises that customers may be experiencing complex issues. A variety of financial assistance options exist in relation to your water account, underpinned by our Customer Support Program.

In a circumstance where you disclose family violence, Barwon Water will;

- LISTEN closely, with empathy and without judgment;
- ACKNOWLEDGE your disclosure;
- ASSIST you regarding your initial query, considering any Barwon Water support programs you are eligible for;
- offer REFERRAL onto appropriate external support agencies; (Refer to *Resources*.)
- minimise the information you are required to provide and the number of times you need to disclose the same information;
- where possible, enable you to connect with the same staff member each time;
- provide copies of documents to you without charge to help resolve matters or for legal purposes and;
- refer you to a qualified, independent interpreter to assist with communication, if needed via the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450.

If you are experiencing serious risks related to your personal safety, additional action may be considered, such as immediate referral to emergency services.

Training and Awareness

- All Barwon Water staff are provided with family violence awareness training.
- All Customer Centre leaders and front-line staff are trained in identifying and responding to the complex issues associated with family violence, so that they can assist you in a respectful and appropriate manner.
- All staff are trained in the internal processes Barwon Water undertakes to protect your privacy and safety.

Keeping up to date

- The Customer Family Violence Policy and associated programs are reviewed every two years (or as needed) to ensure that they remain appropriate and adequately support customers.
- Barwon Water works closely with local community agencies and financial counselling partners to develop appropriate, customer-focused support for all customers experiencing family violence.

Resources

Contact details for Barwon Water

If you need help with your services or bill, please contact us on 1300 656 007. At Barwon Water, we offer support for financial hardship when your circumstances can make it difficult to meet your financial commitments.

At times you may need additional help to get your finances back on track. For free, confidential, independent financial advice, you can call the National Debt Helpline on 1800 007 007.

We can also refer you to external support networks and resources if requested by you including:

Table 1: Immediate support

Resource	Description	Contact
Safesteps	National family violence support service available 24/7 with safety planning, risk assessment and further support services. Can arrange refuge for women.	Phone: 1800 015 188 (24/7 crisis support in Victoria) www.safesteps.org.au Has a 'quick escape' button.
1800 RESPECT	National counselling helpline available 24/7 with support services and resources, available in 28 languages other than English.	Phone: 1800 737 732 (24/7 crisis support) www.1800respect.org.au Has a 'quick exit' button.
inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	Victorian multilingual multicultural support service and resource centre for women from	Phone: 1800 755 988 www.intouch.org.au

	culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.	
Lifeline Geelong	Lifeline Geelong can provide help for family violence and abuse situations through a 24/7 telephone crisis support service or face to face crisis support offered at the Geelong Barwon Region base. Fact sheets and tool kits are available to apply to your own personal situation.	Phone: 13 11 14 (24/7 crisis support) Phone: 1300 152 854 (General queries) 1 MacKillop Street, Geelong www.geelonglifeline.org.au
Mensline Australia	Mensline Australia is the national telephone and online support, information, and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. Mensline provides 'male-friendly' counselling both online and by telephone	Phone: 1300 789 978 (24/7 telephone counselling service) www.mensline.org.au
The Orange Door (Barwon)	Specialist family violence and general family services for adults or children experiencing family violence.	Phone: 1800 312 820 (9-5 M-F) www.orangedoor.vic.gov.au 83 Moorabool Street, Geelong OR 2-28 Connor Street, Colac

Table 2: Generalist counselling and information

Resource	Description	Contact
Djirra – Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service	For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria to access culturally safe and appropriate support services and resources.	Phone: 1800 105 303 (9-5 M-F) www.djirra.org.au
Another Closet — LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence	National website for LGBTIQ people in relationships who are or may be experiencing domestic and family violence.	Phone: 1800 656 463 (24/7 crisis line) www.ssdv.acon.org.au
Safe and Equal (Formerly the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria)	Victorian support service and resource centre, with a clickable map of support services and resources in different regions in Victoria. Provides a 'quick exit' button redirecting to Google.	Phone: 8346 5200 (9-5 M-F) www.safeandequal.org.au Has a 'quick escape' button.
The Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre (Barwon)	The Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre (Barwon) provides free and confidential specialist counselling to adults,	Phone: 1800 806 292 (24/7 crisis line) Phone: 03 5222 4318 (M-F enquiry line)

	young people and children who have experienced sexual assault or for women and children who have experienced family violence.	59 Spring Street, Geelong West www.safvcentre.org.au
Meli	Meli offers a broad range of high-quality support services to children, families, and individuals, including family violence support and financial counselling and support.	Phone: 5278 8122 (9-5 M-F) www.meli.org.au 16 Ballarat Road, Hamlyn Heights
Men's Referral Services (No to Violence)	The MRS takes calls from Australian men dealing with family and domestic violence matters. They offer anonymous and confidential telephone counselling information and referrals to help men.	Phone: 1300 766 491 (crisis line) Phone: 03 9487 4500 (M-F enquiry line) www.mrs.org.au
Q Life	A dedicated contact line for LGBTQIA relationship support.	1800 184 527 Webchat available https://qlife.org.au (3PM – 12AM)

Table 3: Legal and financial assistance

Resource	Description	Contact
Cultura (formerly Diversitat Financial Counselling)	Cultura provides financial counselling as a free service available to all residents in Geelong and surrounding areas. Qualified and trained to provide information and options regarding your financial situation. Assistance and information are available over the phone or face to face. Priority is given to situations where people are vulnerable or disadvantaged.	Phone: 03 4210 0000 (M-F enquiry line) www.cultura.org.au Northern Community Hub 25-41 Arunga Avenue, Norlane
Department of Human Services	Centrelink can provide extra financial support if you are in, have left, or are preparing to leave a situation where you are affected by domestic and/or family violence. Call to speak to a Centrelink social worker, or find out about extra financial support.	Phone: 132 850 www.servicesaustralia.gov.au Search "family violence" Has a 'quick exit' button on the page.
WIRE	Provides support, information, and referrals to women throughout Victoria who may be experiencing any type of issues in their	Phone: 1300 134 130 (9-5 M-F) www.wire.org.au

	households: domestic violence, health, relationships, family, housing, legal and money issues. It is a free and confidential service; they will listen and provide support where needed.	Has a 'quick exit' button on the page.
Women's Legal Service	National network of community legal centres specialising in women's legal issues. They aim to promote a legal system that is safe, supportive, non-discriminatory, and responsive to the needs of women.	Phone: 1800 133 302 www.womenslegal.org.au Has a 'quick exit' button on the page.
National Debt Helpline	National Debt Helpline is a not-for-profit service that helps people tackle their debt problems. Their professional financial counsellors offer a free, independent, and confidential service.	1800 007 007 (M – F 9.30am to 4.30pm) Live Chat via website (M-F 9.00am -8.00pm) https://ndh.org.au
Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline	A dedicated helpline for abuse of older people and adults with a disability.	1800 628 221