

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 13 March 2013

TAKING THE SHOCK OUT OF ELECTRICITY COSTS

“Electricity prices increased by more than 79% in real terms in NSW over the last five years. Everyone is affected by this,” says Ian Day, CEO of Council on the Ageing NSW (COTA NSW). “But older people – especially those on low or fixed incomes – are facing real financial pressure trying to cover these escalating costs.”

COTA NSW is partnering with the Total Environment Centre (TEC) to host a forum on electricity prices in State Parliament House on Thursday 14 March 2013. Titled ‘Shockproof: taking control of electricity costs’ the forum gives people an opportunity to learn about the changes occurring in the state’s electricity market.

Prices will continue to rise in the foreseeable future, but it’s not all bad news when it comes to electricity costs. Mark Byrne, Energy Market Advocate at TEC, who will present at the forum, points out that there are some positives in the changing market. “New technologies are constantly emerging and some of these offer consumers – and the environment – real benefits. This forum brings together speakers who can provide insight into the technologies you can use, and the behaviour you can adopt, to take more control of your electricity bills.”

“People planning their retirement will get a lot out of this forum,” says Mr Day. “Taking steps to decrease the cost of electricity is an important aspect of financial planning. Many people are well placed to take action so they’re less exposed to rising costs.”

“But we’re concerned about the people who are powerless to reduce their electricity costs. Older people on low incomes – especially people on pensions – are in no position to be proactive. We know these people are suffering. The number of residential customers disconnected for non-payment of bills increased by 25% from 2011 to 2012. This means that last year 23,207 people in NSW had their electricity cut off. This is unacceptable, and we’re calling on government and industry to do more to ensure at-risk people know more about the programs that already exist to assist people to pay their bills. And given these numbers, more needs to be done to support people who are facing destitution.”

A presentation will be given by the Hon Chris Hartcher, Minister for Resources and Energy, as well as Clare Petre, the Energy and Water Ombudsman and Carolyn Hodge of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. The forum will be held from 9.30 a.m. to 12 noon on Thursday 14 March 2013 in the Jubilee Room, NSW Parliament House Macquarie Street Sydney. To RSVP, call Annette Barnes or Ruth Anstice on (02) 9286 3860.

END

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