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# What do Victorians think about gas?

This winter, Environment Victoria volunteers were on the streets conducting surveys and having hundreds of in-depth conversations with their community.

This report outlines the key themes and stories that arose from these conversations. It provides insight into what everyday Victorians really think about gas, the support they need to replace gas appliances and recommendations that can help your community reap the benefits of electrification.



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## The facts are stacking up against gas

Victoria burns more methane gas than any other state, with two-thirds of it used in homes and small businesses.<sup>1</sup> This dependence on gas is a legacy of the cheap and plentiful supply in the Bass Strait. But dwindling supplies means high gas prices are here to stay, and the growth of wind and solar has fundamentally changed the equation in favour of electrification.

**All electric homes are cheaper to run.** Modelling done for the Victorian government shows Victorian homes can save up to \$1,250 per year if they go all-electric.<sup>2</sup> These conclusions have been backed up in recent studies, including research we conducted with Renew showing Victorians can save up to 75% on their winter heating bills by switching from gas to efficient electric heating.<sup>3</sup>

**All electric homes are better for our climate.** The growth of wind and solar means efficient electric cooking, heating and hot water now produce fewer emissions than equivalent gas appliances.<sup>4</sup> And as we get closer to a 100% renewable energy system, the emissions of an all-electric home will continue to fall.

Given 17% of Victoria's emissions come from burning methane gas, home electrification will be a key component of reaching Victoria's nation-leading climate targets.<sup>5</sup>

**All electric homes are better for our health.** Cooking with gas releases nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), and formaldehyde (HCHO) into the air, which can exacerbate respiratory and other health ailments. Up to 12% of childhood asthma cases can be attributed to burning gas inside the home.<sup>6</sup>

## But what do Victorians think?

Over winter, Environment Victoria volunteers held 582 in-depth conversations with everyday Victorians to find out what they think about gas.

The conversations took place in local shopping strips, libraries and sporting clubs, via doorknocking homes, including social housing, and at train stations, markets and local events across the state. Locations included Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Bentleigh, Clunes, Creswick, Dandenong, Frankston, Hastings, Langwarrin, Moe, Mornington, Morwell, Mount Waverley, Somerville, Traralgon and Upper Ferntree Gully.

# 83%

of respondents were  
**supportive of Victoria  
switching away from gas**  
by 2035

Many shared dramatic stories of gas leaks and explosions, asthma and respiratory problems, gas bill shock and stress from rising costs, and growing concern about climate impacts hitting locally and around the world. More than half of respondents had personal experience or knew someone directly impacted by these concerns about gas.

### People's concerns about gas:

## 80%

concerned about **climate pollution** from gas

## 56%

concerned about **gas companies making record profits** at the expense of everyday people

## 54%

concerned about the **health impacts** of burning gas in our homes

## 61%

concerned about **rising gas bills**

# These stories show how gas is impacting the people we spoke to >>



John enjoying a beautiful morning in Central Victoria

## John, Ballarat

**John and his family live in public housing in Ballarat. Like many renters they're stuck using gas appliances until the landlord – in this case the Victorian government – invests in efficient electric appliances.**

"I'd love an all-electric home," said John. "It would lower our bills, be better for our lungs and better for the planet!"

And it appears they're not the only ones who want to electrify John's home. Recently while at home during a storm they heard a loud "BANG" and found that lightning had struck the external unit of their gas heater. Poetic, perhaps, but it left them without a heater.

"I was hoping they would take this opportunity to replace the gas unit with an electric reverse cycle air conditioner, but the technicians came and fixed the gas unit instead."

"I know the government want to upgrade houses like mine to be all-electric. The sooner the better, I say."



Suzy has committed to getting off gas to help our climate

## Suzy, Langwarrin

**Despite the barriers that Victorians currently face getting off gas, some are so motivated to take action to address climate change that they're getting on with it. Suzy is one of those people.**

Suzy made a pledge through Friends of the Earth to ditch gas and has been following through on that pledge. As a full-time carer she currently earns no income but has been using some inheritance money she had invested to make the changes.

She started by adding extra solar to her rooftop and battery storage. Her family of five have now reduced their reliance on the grid and have renewable energy for the evenings and overnight.

That has enabled Suzy to put on the reverse cycle air conditioner for heating in the evenings, and start the next step of putting in more split systems so she can do away with gas ducted heating. Then she plans to replace the instantaneous gas hot water system with a heat pump.

"It has been a steep learning curve, but there is help out there if you look," said Suzy. Her advice to others is "use a spreadsheet to compare solar quotes."

"My aim is to fully retrofit and electrify my house, and I will use the remainder of my savings if I have to. That money is better invested in lowering my energy bills, making the family home healthier, and addressing climate change."



Lulu and Lynne sporting big grins, despite the hardship they've been put through

## Lynne and Lulu, St Leonards

**Lynne and her daughter Lulu have had their world flipped upside down by a faulty gas heater in their home where they rent.**

"We have been unwell with symptoms consistent with exposure to carbon monoxide for some time," said Lynne. "After multiple doctors' visits failed to find the cause, I deduced there may be an issue with the ducted heating vent, so I requested a safety check."

The technician advised that part of the exhaust flue had melted which allowed carbon monoxide to leak and enter the house through draughty walls and floorboards.

The impact this has had on them is considerable. Carbon monoxide poisoning can have long-lasting tissue damage, and symptoms can re-emerge even after the exposure has ceased. There is no known treatment.

"Lulu has missed out on a lot of school and has had to repeat year 6. I have struggled in caregiving and have been unable to return to work due to extreme fatigue, loss of brain function, immune issues and exacerbation of other medical conditions. It's been a really isolating experience."

Sadly, this horror story is not uncommon. Lynne and Lulu are just two of the many people we surveyed who have suffered from leaky gas appliances.

Lynne would like sweeping reforms to address this issue, including mandatory carbon monoxide alarms in all rentals, regular servicing of ducted gas heaters, reporting of poisoning incidents and better research into the long-term health impacts of carbon monoxide.

"I'd also like to see policy changes so landlords are encouraged to transition investment properties from gas to rooftop solar and all-electric homes."



Liz's kids practicing their cooking skills on the portable induction cooktop

## Liz, Ballarat

**After a long journey, Liz and her family have ditched gas in favour of an all-electric home. When they started nearly all their appliances – heating, hot water and their stove – were gas.**

"We've just paid our last ever gas bill," said Liz. "That's one less bill coming in!"

Although they had always planned to electrify, the switch was brought forward by a water leak. The damaged flooring needed to be replaced, so 'why not ditch the ducting gas heating and get rid of the draughty holes in the floor at the same time,' they thought. Several efficient reverse cycle air conditioners were installed in different rooms, keeping their house toasty and lowering heating costs.

Then the gas hot water service died. Finances were tight, but Liz knew an electric hot water service would pay off in the long run. They got another loan to make it happen.

It hasn't been easy financially. Throughout this process they were getting behind on their gas bill.

"We were grateful to receive the Utility Relief Grant to pay our gas bill," said Liz, thankful that this grant exists. "It made me feel like we might catch up on our bills." They don't yet have the money for a modern induction stove but found an affordable interim solution – a portable induction hot plate. That's allowed them to cap the gas and ditch those bills for good.

"We're very happy our little ones can now practice their cooking skills without the risk of flame burns or gas contributing to asthma."

Liz hopes that the government will expand their subsidy offers and help make it much easier for everyone to ditch gas.

# What support do Victorians need to electrify?

The message from Victorians is clear – they want to see their representatives step up to get us off gas.

When we asked people what would be most helpful in switching their community off gas, the solutions most commonly chosen were:

- **Financial support** like rebates and interest-free loans for electric appliances (66%);
- **More accessible information** about how to make the switch (48%); and
- **Measures to make sure companies pay their fair share of tax** (50%).

Other popular solutions that people mentioned were community bulk buys of electric appliances, grants, community solar and microgrids, removing gas disconnection fees, community education on the alternatives to gas and the health risks surrounding gas use, and access to trusted people who could give independent advice on electrification.

The following quotes demonstrate some of the key themes that arose in our conversations:

*"Supported independent living facilities for the disabled, mentally ill and elderly often have gas appliances. I would like to see these places supported to transition to efficient electric appliances for the safety of residents and staff."*

*"More incentives for landlords to switch from gas to electricity."*

*"Better targeting of incentives and rebates so that they actually encourage electric uptake rather than just like for like replacement."*

*"Info sites about how to switch off gas need 'people' you can talk to, not more pages of guff on the net. Improving these sites is important."*

It is clear there is support for transitioning off gas, but targeting incentives is needed to support people in different living situations and with different means.

**Renters and low-income Victorians are among the key groups that require targeted solutions to unlock household electrification.**

119 respondents were renters. Many pointed to the urgent need for solutions targeting landlords and rental properties, including creating new rules and incentives for landlords to electrify properties.

This sentiment is backed up by a recent survey of 236 low-income Victorians by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.<sup>7</sup> They found more than two-thirds of respondents supported a transition away from household gas and toward cleaner energy sources, but that renters face especially high barriers to electrification because of a lower awareness of the opportunities to electrify and their inability to choose appliances.

**76%**  
of respondents  
want the Victorian  
government to help  
households electrify



# How you can help your community enjoy the benefits of electrification

The Victorian government's *Gas Substitution Roadmap* and recent decision that new homes requiring a planning permit must be all-electric from 2024 is a good base to build from, yet to match the scale of the energy and climate crises Victorians face right now, the plan needs to go further.

**The revised *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, due in December 2023, must have strong goals and timelines for electrification and ensure Victorians can access affordable and renewable alternatives to methane gas.**

We call on you to commit to supporting all households across the state to switch to efficient electric appliances, with an electrification program at the scale of what is needed to match the urgency required.

## We need the Victorian Government to:

### 1. Strengthen the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* to include an ambitious household electrification plan that:

- a. Sets specific goals and timelines for reducing gas use and ensure households are off gas within the decade.
- b. Outlines how the 2 million plus homes connected to gas will be retrofitted with efficient electric appliances.
- c. Clarifies how the upfront cost of switching appliances – by far the biggest barrier to home electrification – will be addressed.

### 2. Stop the problem from getting worse by:

- a. Phasing out the sale of gas appliances by 2025.
- b. Stopping the expansion of the gas distribution network or further gas exploration from happening in Victoria.

### 3. Lead by example, and rapidly electrify government buildings, including public and social housing, government offices, schools and hospitals.

### 4. Make it easy and affordable for Victorians to switch away from gas appliances by:

- a. Lowering or removing the cost barriers so all households and small businesses to electrify, whether owned, rented, apartments and regardless of location across the state.
- b. Prioritising workforce development, including a local manufacturing supply chain and retraining programs for plumbers and gas fitters to take up electrification jobs.

### 5. Educate the public about the dangers of burning gas in homes and how electrification is the answer, and ensures public information is communicated and shared equitably by appropriate methods with all communities in Victoria.

## Thank You

We will be keeping the conversations going with residents in your electorate and urge you to be a champion for strong action to get Victoria off gas.



## Further information about gas in Victoria:

1. Environment Victoria & Renew (2023), 'IT'S A GAS: How ditching gas this winter can cut heating bills by 75%. Environment Victoria & Renew'.
2. Grattan Institute (2023), 'Getting off gas: Why, how, and who should pay?'
3. Brotherhood of St Laurence & Life Course Centre (2023) 'Enabling electrification: Addressing the barriers to moving off gas faced by lower-income households'

## Endnotes

1. AEMO (2023), 'Victorian Gas Planning Report', p18.
2. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2022), 'Embracing electricity to cut your bills at home'.
3. Environment Victoria & Renew (2023), 'IT'S A GAS: How ditching gas this winter can cut heating bills by 75%. Environment Victoria & Renew'.
4. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2022), 'Victoria's Gas Substitution Roadmap', p29.
5. Environment Victoria (2023), 'Gas sector emissions and Victoria's new 2035 climate targets'.
6. Knibbs, L. et al (2018), 'Damp housing, gas stoves, and the burden of childhood asthma in Australia.' Medical Journal of Australia, (7): 299-302.
7. Brotherhood of St Laurence & Life Course Centre (2023) 'Enabling electrification: Addressing the barriers to moving off gas faced by lower-income households'



# ENVIRONMENT VICTORIA ACTION NETWORK



LITTLE  
BUT  
FAST