



# POLICY POSITION ENERGY EQUITY FOR TERRITORIANS

***Access to reliable and affordable energy is a basic need. Yet many households in the Northern Territory—particularly in remote and very remote communities—cannot afford the power they need for safe, healthy, and comfortable living. The convergence of poverty, extreme heat, poor housing, overcrowding and chronic disease has reached critical levels and requires immediate action.***

## 1 – ENERGY GOVERNANCE

The Northern Territory lacks the governance frameworks to effectively monitor, understand and address energy insecurity. A lack of mandatory disconnection reporting in remote communities obscures the extremity of energy poverty in the NT. Furthermore, a lack of protection and rules around disconnection and complaints processes place vulnerable populations at high risk. Research from the Australian National University highlights that prepayment customers in most remote NT communities lack access to basic consumer protections.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **NTCOSS recommends:**

- Adoption of mandatory electricity disconnection reporting for prepayment meters as well as post payment metres through the Electrical Industry Performance Code.
- Ensuring disconnection protections for people with chronic disease.

## 2 – ENERGY SECURITY

Energy consumption is particularly high in the NT due to extreme weather and poor-quality housing. This increases households' reliance on energy to heat and cool the house to safe temperatures. According to the Household Expenditure Survey (2017), NT households spend the highest amount on domestic fuel and power per week.<sup>[2]</sup>

[1] This includes:

- Disconnection protections for life support users
- Rules for unplanned interruptions
- Mandatory electricity disconnection reporting
- Clear and independent complaints processes
- Guidelines for rooftop solar connection

[2] Notably, this survey excludes households in very remote areas, where both electricity usage and per kilowatt-hour (kWh) charges are often higher.



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Poverty rates are also significantly higher than national averages. It is estimated that between 50–75 per cent of Aboriginal households in remote NT live below the poverty line.<sup>[3]</sup>

## **The intersection of high energy consumption in the NT with high levels of poverty means that many households cannot afford the power they need to live safely.**

This is particularly problematic in remote Aboriginal communities, where most households use prepaid electricity meters, so when residents cannot afford credit, they are involuntarily disconnected from power.<sup>[4]</sup> Analysis of data from 3,300 households in 28 remote Aboriginal communities found that 91 per cent experienced at least one disconnection in a year, and 74 per cent were disconnected more than 10 times.<sup>[5]</sup>

Power is essential for cooling, refrigeration, hygiene, and performing everyday tasks. Disconnection from power leaves residents—especially those with chronic illnesses—extremely vulnerable.

### **NTCOSS Recommends:**

- Extending electricity concessions under the NT Concession Scheme to all Centrelink Health Care Card holders and other low-income groups currently excluded.
- Increasing energy concessions based on the number of concession holders in the household.
- Working with energy providers and community organisations to ensure all eligible customers—prepaid or account holders—can access and maintain access to concessions and hardship support programs.
- Reducing the per kWh tariff for prepaid meters to at least match the cost of postpaid meters.
- Introducing mandatory grace periods preventing disconnections and the accrual of energy debt during extreme weather events.

[3] Francis Markham, 'The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention', 12 February 2024

[4] Frances Markham, 2024

[5] Longden, T. et al (2022) 'Energy insecurity during temperature extremes in remote Australia', Nature Energy, Vol. 7 (p.43–54) [weblink](#)

[6] The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction that does not require houses to have six-star Housing Energy Rating Scheme. NT homes must only reach five stars.



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## 3 – ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Poor housing quality and inefficient appliances contribute to higher energy consumption and consequently increases the risk of energy insecurity.

Across the Territory and particularly in remote NT, housing is generally poorly insulated, lacks passive cooling design, good ventilation and does not meet current national building code standards.<sup>[6]</sup> This makes regulating the temperature to thermally safe levels more expensive and less effective, and sometimes unachievable. In addition, many low-income households rely on old, inefficient appliances that increase energy use and costs.

This leads to higher rates of disconnection—especially during extreme heat when power is most essential. Disconnection from power can lead to serious health issues like respiratory problems, heat stress, sleep disruption, and the exacerbation of existing medical conditions due to poor indoor temperatures.

### **NTCOSS Recommends:**

- Adopting the National Construction Code 2022 7-star energy efficiency standard for all new housing under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing NT.
- Implement minimum energy standards in rental accommodation and social housing.
- Implementing a retrofit/refurbishment program to improve the energy efficiency of low-income households.
- Supporting low-income households to replace inefficient appliances and fittings.
- Establishing an NT government unit that focusses on energy efficiency.

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## 4 – RENEWABLE ENERGY

The NT has enormous potential for solar energy, yet many remote communities remain dependent on diesel generators. Diesel generation is not only expensive—it is also harmful to health and the environment. Emissions from diesel combustion contribute to poor air quality and have been linked to heart disease, respiratory illness, cancer, and more. However, current solar incentives do not benefit social housing residents or low-income households, or renters generally.

### **NTCOSS Recommends:**

- Planning and implementing programs to expand access to solar energy for communities, low-income households, and public buildings, ensuring cost saving is passed onto consumers.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Addressing regulatory barriers to solar infrastructure in remote and low-income areas and for prepayment meter users.
- Aligning local energy productivity programs with the proposed National Low-income Energy Productivity Program, and the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy.
- Develop and implement a plan to increase the supply of renewable energy in the Northern Territory.

[7] For example, capitalising on Commonwealth Government funding to adapt housing, install solar and improve energy efficiency.