

Background

In May 2024, Greater Western Water (GWW) introduced a new billing system that replaced two older systems. This transition resulted in several billing problems, including delays in issuing quarterly bills. For many customers who were already managing financial or personal pressures, these delays added an extra burden.

After looking into these issues, the Essential Services Commission (ESC) accepted an enforceable undertaking from GWW on 31 October 2025. As part of this formal commitment to improving how customers are supported, GWW engaged Uniting Vic.Tas (Uniting), a community services organisation that works closely with people experiencing vulnerability, to complete an independent review of how the organisation identifies and supports customers who may be facing stress or other challenges.

About this review

Uniting's review examined GWW's hardship grant process, its approach to reaching out to customers who may need assistance, and opportunities to strengthen and expand its overall response to vulnerability.

This public summary outlines Uniting's key findings and recommendations.

Uniting conducted the review between January and March 2026. The review focussed on how GWW staff identify, respond to and support customers who may be experiencing vulnerability or financial difficulty. In examining this, Uniting considered:

- how well staff understand different types of customer vulnerability
- how staff work with people experiencing complex or stressful situations
- how customer conversations are managed
- how accessible and clear GWW's policies and processes are for staff
- how consistently those policies are applied
- how customers are connected to support, such as concessions, Utility Relief Grants, payment plans and hardship grants
- how GWW proactively reaches and engages with customers who may need assistance and support.

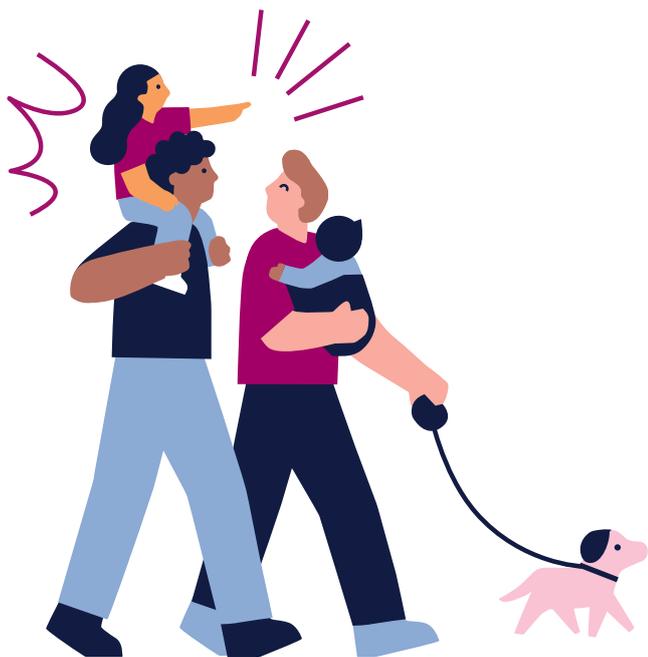
What Uniting observed GWW is doing well

- **A committed and caring workforce.** Staff across GWW demonstrate a genuine commitment to supporting customers, which provides a strong base to build from.
- **An effective two-step support model.** GWW's Customer Connect and Community & Care team structure provides a sound approach for early identification and specialised support.
- **Strong specialist practice.** GWW's Community & Care team shows consistent, empathetic and high-quality customer support, reflecting strong capability in complex situations.
- **Evidence of trauma-informed capability.** Organisation-wide family violence training demonstrates GWW's ability to build and embed trauma-informed practice.

Where GWW can improve to help customers more

- **Strengthen consistency across the organisation.** Strengthen internal systems and skills so staff across all areas can respond with confidence and consistency, especially when customers are experiencing pressures or changes in their lives that mean they need a little more support.
- **Build capability to identify vulnerability earlier.** Invest in capability building and training across all teams, especially frontline, new and temporary staff, to support earlier recognition of customer needs and offer proactive support sooner, rather than only when payment difficulties arise.
- **Deliver more consistent support for customers experiencing vulnerability.** Develop a consistent approach across GWW. This includes clearer tools to identify when customers may need help, regular reviews of how support is working, and a more consistent decision-making approach.
- **Adopt a more personalised, human-centred approach.** Enhance processes so support is fair, respectful and tailored to each customer's circumstances, rather than relying on standardised pathways.

- **Strong practice in specialist teams that can be strengthened across the organisation.** Apply elements of Community & Care’s empathetic, best-practice approach across all customer interactions to ensure opportunities to identify vulnerability or connect customers with specialised services are not missed.
- **Enhance systems, governance and feedback loops.** Improve internal systems, regular oversight, and ongoing review mechanisms to measure effectiveness and ensure continuous improvement.



Next steps

Uniting has provided GWW with a series of recommendations to strengthen its overall approach to vulnerability and hardship. These aim to enhance systems, staff capability, communication and governance so customers receive safe, fair and reliable services and support.

The findings build on earlier improvement work undertaken by GWW following the 2024 billing incident and outline the next steps needed to strengthen support for customers experiencing hardship, as well as overall customer experience.

Uniting recognises that GWW has already begun implementing several improvements, with further initiatives planned to uplift communication practices, strengthen processes for supporting vulnerable customers, and enhance data, governance and oversight.

While these changes will take time to embed, Uniting understands that GWW is committed to progressing this work and continuing to rebuild trust with customers, community and stakeholders.

About Uniting Vic Tas

Uniting is the largest provider of community services in Victoria and Tasmania, supporting people across a wide range of areas including family services, disability, mental health, employment, alcohol and other drug services, housing, family violence and early learning. Through this extensive service footprint, we work alongside people experiencing vulnerability every day.

This deep connection to lived experience gives Uniting unique insight into what individuals, families and communities need from the systems that support them. Drawing on this expertise, we help organisations strengthen their capability through diagnostic reviews, staff training, and lived experience informed engagement. Our approach combines sector knowledge, frontline understanding and better practice frameworks to support organisations to meet regulatory expectations, improve practice, and deliver better outcomes for the people they serve.

Learn more
unitingvictas.org.au

