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MEDIA RELEASE

QUEENSLAND FAMILIES STILL UNDER PRESSURE

According to Chris Turner, CEO of the SunnyKids children's charity, QLD and Sunshine Coast families are continuing to come under unreasonable financial pressure with many families unable to maintain adequate shelter, nutrition or essential services. SunnyKids continues to become aware of an increasing number of multiple families sharing inadequate accommodation in order to save costs, as well as numerous families unable to secure affordable accommodation or maintain essential services such as Electricity.

Electricity disconnections in Queensland during the last financial year were still too high says the Queensland Council of Social Service, with data just released from the Queensland Competition Authority revealing complaints about retailers have sky rocketed.

At least 16,000 customers were disconnected due to non payment of bills. The government owned Ergon Energy still reports the highest number of disconnections at over 11,000. Queensland still has one of the highest disconnection rates in Australia.

"There has been a drop in disconnections but there are still way too many," says QCOSS Director Jill Lang. "Electricity is an essential in life. You can't survive without it. QCOSS is still concerned that more needs to be done to promote hardship programs and support disadvantaged families.

"We acknowledge more people have been supported by the government's Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme in the last twelve weeks following improvements in the system. We welcome these moves from the state government.

"QCOSS continues to call for greater promotion of hardship schemes to ensure people that need support get it," says Jill.

The QCA report also reveals complaints increased from 19,507 to 31,377.

"This 60% increase in complaints is an alarming increase," says QCOSS President Karyn Walsh. "It reveals dissatisfaction by electricity consumers. Many of these will be people experiencing hardship and disadvantage.





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"We will see more people experience difficulties next year as electricity prices increase. It is important people experiencing hardship do not suffer further disadvantage as a result of these changes.

"Government also needs to seriously look at concessions, who they are targeted at and if enough people are accessing them. We would like to see concessions offered to all health care card holders and other people experiencing disadvantage.

"A system that imposes daily penalties to retailers for wrongful disconnection has reduced rates interstate. This system could also be considered for Queensland." says Karyn.

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