The Hardship Utility Grant Scheme (HUGS) commenced on the 4th August 2008 as part of the State Government’s commitment to improve the delivery of utility essential services to individuals and families experiencing financial and/or social disadvantage. The Scheme provides financial assistance to people in financial hardship to pay their utility accounts so as to avoid being disconnected or restricted from supply.

HUGS is administered by the Department for Child Protection (DCP). It addresses electricity, water and gas service provision.

**Applicant Eligibility**

For a person to be considered eligible to apply for a grant, the following conditions must be met. The applicant:

- Has been assessed by the utility according to their hardship policy as possibly experiencing utility hardship.
- Has agreed to contact a HUGS Registered Financial Counselling Service (“HUGS Registered FCS”) as referred by the utility, to allow a grant application to be progressed.

**Grant Limits**

A HUGS grant is limited to 85% of the outstanding amount shown on the utility account up to a maximum of $450 for those living south of 26S (geographical area south of Carnarvon) or $750 for those living north of 26S (Carnarvon and geographical area north of the town). The minimum grant amount to be provided is $100.

**Application Process**

The utilities use their hardship criteria to identify eligible applicants and refer them to HUGS Registered FCSs for an application to be progressed. To apply for a HUGS grant, an applicant must first be referred by the utility to a HUGS Registered FCS for an assessment to be conducted. If the application meets the criteria, the FCS will notify DCP for the grant payment to be processed.

If applicants cannot visit a HUGS Registered FCS in person due to personal health/disability/transport issues or the fact that a HUGS Registered FCS is not available in their local geographical area, they can contact their local or nearest HUGS Registered FCS or Financial Counsellors’ Association of Western Australia Financial Counselling Hotline on 1800 889 364 for an application to be progressed on the telephone.
Assessment Criteria

Financial counsellors will use the following criteria to assess HUGS applications:

- The applicant has satisfied the eligibility criteria as outlined above.
- The applicant’s ability to pay the account, particularly through the utility’s instalment payment plan.
- The applicant’s explanation as to why recent and current committed expenditure does not allow their electricity and/or water account to be paid.

If the applicant’s financial hardship situation is considered likely to be long-term, the financial counsellor will suggest the applicant to have further financial counselling in order to assist them towards financial stability.

Further Information

- Prospective applicants should contact the utility’s Contact Centre to enquire about their eligibility for a grant. If they are considered eligible by the utility, they will be referred to a HUGS Registered FCS.
  - Synergy Contact Centre 13 13 53
  - Horizon Power Contact Centre 1800 267 926
  - Water Corporation Contact Centre 13 13 85
  - Alinta 13 13 58
  - Busselton Water 9781 0500
- Third Party Agencies can assist by advising their clients to contact the utility’s Contact Centres to enquire about HUGS or by contacting the utilities as advocates on behalf of their clients.
- Contact the DCP HUGS Unit:
  - Telephone: (08) 9222 2739
  - Email: HUGS2@dcp.wa.gov.au