



8 March 2024

Citizens Advice Bureau New Zealand (CABNZ) Ngā Pou Whakawhirinaki o Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Options to support Consumer plan comparison and switching.

About the CAB

1. CAB is a nationwide, and locally based, community organisation that provides a free, confidential, and independent service of information, advice, and advocacy. We work to empower people to resolve their problems, and we use the insights gained from our work with clients to advocate for fair policies and services for all New Zealanders.
2. Our service is provided from over 80 locations around Aotearoa New Zealand by our 2,000 trained CAB volunteers. In the past financial year, the CAB helped with around 300,000 client interactions across the range of issues that affect people in their daily lives, including electricity issues. Our aim is to help people know and understand their rights and feel empowered to act on them.

Submission

3. We support the approach of the Electricity Authority to proceed with Option 4 of the web based options but recommend making powerswitch work better by allowing people to input their own actual electricity use data
4. We support Options A, B and C of consumer choice support options.
5. In relation to Option B, we recommend that the community sector is involved in the design of this service. In the past, the CAB partnered with the Electricity Commission on 'WhatsMyNumber campaign. We provided person to person support and advice for people and have insights and learnings from this that we would like to share. For example the service we provided benefitted from the fact that our volunteers could help people with related issues and to help people enforce their rights and to take a complaint where necessary. It would be beneficial if the Community Advisers were trained to do more than just help comparison and switching. They should also be trained to help enforce the Consumer Care Guidelines, ie identify when companies are not following the new rules and help people make complaints. We found because the high level of trust in the CAB enabled us to reach clients who might otherwise never consider switching because of lack of knowledge or lack of confidence. In particular we are effective in reaching clients who do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to use the internet as well as clients who struggle with the English literacy. Consideration of this would need to be included in any service design.
6. We support the Electricity Authority requiring companies to inform customers of the best plan for their usage and think that this should happen at least every three months.

7. We support requiring companies to include standard information on all electricity bills to enable comparison, as suggested by the Consumer Advocacy Council.
8. We encourage the Electricity Authority to investigate ways to ensure everyone can access affordable electricity, including a range of post-pay plans, regardless of credit history.

We would welcome further discussion with the Electricity Commission in relation to this submission.

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