

Solar for Low Income Households Trial

Frequently asked questions

Updated January 2020

About the program

Who can participate in the program?

This trial is available for up to 3,000 eligible NSW households located in the North Coast, Central Coast, Sydney–South, Illawarra–Shoalhaven and the South Coast. To participate in the program you must meet the eligibility criteria, which includes receiving the Low Income Household Rebate and holding a valid Pensioner Concession Card or Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card. Please see page 7 of the [program guide](#) for the full eligibility criteria.

What does the program involve?

This trial is designed to help low income households install a solar system to reduce their electricity bills. Through this program, eligible homeowners will receive a free 3 kilowatt solar system installed on their home. To receive this solar system you must meet the eligibility criteria and also agree to:

- stop receiving the Low Income Household Rebate for 10 years
- allow your electricity retailer to send your electricity bills to us
- take ownership of the solar system and be responsible for its maintenance
- notify us if you move house or change electricity retailer in the next 10 years
- enter into a contract between you and the solar installer
- contact your electricity retailer to arrange for a smart meter and pay any associated costs.

I already have a solar system, can I participate in the program?

No. The program is limited to households that do not already have a solar system installed. However, households that have a solar hot water system are eligible to participate.

Does the program include a solar battery?

No. The program does not include a battery. For information on programs in NSW that offer assistance for solar batteries, please see the [Empowering Homes Program](#).

When will the program end?

The program is open until all solar systems have been allocated to eligible NSW households.

Why is my postcode not included?

The program is limited to the [postcodes](#) in the five trial regions. These particular regions were selected because households in those areas are expected to receive the most benefit, based on analysis of the number of potential participants, socioeconomic score and solar system output.

Why do I have to use 3,600 kilowatt hours or more of electricity a year to participate in the program?

Households need to use at least 3,600 kilowatt hours of electricity per year to receive the estimated bill savings of \$600 annually. This is because bill savings depend on the how much electricity you use at home and when you use it. People who use at least 3,600 kilowatt hours per year are more likely to see bill savings after installing a solar system. This ensures participants are better off under the trial, after giving up their annual \$285 Low Income Household Rebate.

You can see your average annual electricity consumption by checking your electricity bill.

Why have certain types of properties been excluded the program?

There are additional costs and complexities when installing solar systems on properties where the land and/or dwelling (such as the roof) are not solely owned by the householder. Because of this, certain types of properties have been excluded from the trial.

This includes:

- properties listed as strata plans or community plans
- rental properties, including where the home is owned but land rented
- retirement villages and residential communities.

Please note there might be some other property types which are ineligible to participate in the program. Contact us at solarforlowincome.program@planning.nsw.gov.au to discuss your situation if you are unsure about your eligibility.

Will the program be extended to other regions in the future?

Not at this stage. Once the program is complete, the Department will assess its success based on outcomes for participants. After this, the NSW Government will decide whether to extend the program to other regions.

Participating in the program

How much can I expect to save by installing a solar system?

The average electricity bill savings from the solar system are approximately \$600 per household per year. As participants will not receive the \$285 annual discount from the Low Income Household Rebate, households are expected to be around \$300 better off per year.

The savings from a solar system depends on your lifestyle and electricity use. You can save more money from a solar system by consuming the electricity produced in your home during the day. The solar electricity not consumed in your home is fed back into the grid and some electricity retailers pay for this (this is called a solar feed-in tariff). Generally, the solar feed-in tariff is less than the amount you pay for the electricity you use from the grid.

Can I engage my own electrician to install the solar system?

No. The NSW Government has selected three solar installation companies to deliver this program. If your eligibility application is approved, one of the three solar installers will contact you. Please see page 6 of the [program guide](#) for the details of the solar installation company in your region.

Will I need to change my electricity retailer?

You do not need to change your electricity retailer to participate in this trial.

Most electricity retailers provide a solar feed-in tariff and the amount paid by retailers can differ. To receive a solar feed-in tariff you could be required to change contracts with your retailer. This may result in you paying a different rate for the electricity you purchase from the grid.

It is important to talk to your electricity retailer about installing a solar system before applying for the program. It may also be beneficial to shop around for the best electricity plan, smart meter offer and solar feed-in tariff. [NSW Energy Switch Service](#) is a useful comparison tool to identify the best electricity plan.

Do I have to give up the Low Income Household Rebate indefinitely?

No. You can reapply for the Low Income Household Rebate after 10 years.

When will my Low Income Household Rebate payments stop?

Payments will stop after the solar system has been installed at your house. The Department will notify you when the Low Income Household Rebate payments will stop.

Do I have to give up other NSW energy rebates?

No. You do not need to give up any other NSW Government energy rebates.

For more information about NSW Government rebates and savings, you can access the NSW Government's Cost of Living campaign where you can easily browse more than 70 rebates and savings to find out what types of support you may be eligible for. More information about the savings and rebate options visit [Service NSW cost of living](#).

Will I have any upfront or ongoing costs?

There are no upfront costs to receive the 3 kilowatt solar system. However, you must have a smart meter installed in your home as part of this program. Some electricity retailers provide smart meter installations at no charge. Contact your retailer to discuss the potential cost and options.

If you wish to upgrade your solar system size, you will be required to pay for the additional cost. This will be invoiced to you separately by the installer. Please refer to page 12 of the [program guide](#) for more information on upgrading.

Once you take ownership of the solar system you will be responsible for its maintenance.

Why is an installer checking my wiring?

The installer needs to check your electrical wiring is safe for a solar system or smart meter installation.

During this check, there is a chance the installer could find an electrical issue with your wiring. Although unlikely, if they discover a major issue with an imminent safety risk, they may be required to disconnect your house's power supply until the issue is resolved. When this happens, you are responsible for organising and paying for an electrician to fix the electrical issue. You will also need to pay for your power to be reconnected.

What solar system monitoring will be available?

You can monitor your solar system through your inverter and smart meter. This will help you get the most out of your system and maximise your bill savings.

Check your inverter's digital screen or look at your inverter's online account to see what time your solar system produces the most electricity. Use your major appliances during this time to get the most bill savings.

You may also consider investing in a third-party solar monitoring system, although this is not provided as part of the program. If you are interested, discuss the benefits and costs of having a monitoring system with your installer or your electricity retailer.

What is a smart meter and why do I need one?

A smart meter (also known as a digital meter or 'type 4' meter) is a device that digitally measures when and how much electricity is used at your home. A smart meter sends this information back to your energy retailer remotely, without your meter needing to be manually read by a meter reader.

You must have a smart meter installed in your home as part of the program. This allows you to consume your own solar electricity first before purchasing electricity from your retailer. The meter also measures the unused solar electricity that is fed back into the grid. This allows your retailer to provide you a solar feed-in tariff.

Many retailers will install your smart meter free, or as part of your contract. Before applying for the trial, it is important to check with your electricity retailer to ask:

- a) if they will install a smart meter at your home
- b) what are the changes to your electricity contract
- c) what is the cost of the installation (if any).

For more information about smart meters, visit the [Energy Saver website](#).

Applying

What is the application process?

Please see page 11 of the [program guide](#) for an overview of the steps involved.

These steps include checking your eligibility, completing an application, having your house assessed and getting your solar system installed. You may also be required to contact your retailer to arrange for a smart meter to be installed.

What information will I need to provide as part of the eligibility application?

You will need to provide evidence you meet all the eligibility criteria, including:

- a Council rates notice to confirm that you own the home
- a recent electricity bill to confirm your household consumption meets the annual 3,600 kilowatt hour minimum and you are receiving the Low Income Household Rebate
- an image of your concession card (i.e. Pensioner Concession Card or Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card) to confirm it is valid and in date.

Can I have a larger solar system installed?

Yes. You can choose to upsize your system to a maximum of 6 kilowatt, but you will need to pay the difference between the NSW Government supported 3 kilowatt system and the larger system.

Installers for the program are not allowed to actively upsell you to a larger system. If you are interested in upsizing, you can request further information from your installer when you complete your solar system application.

More information

For more information see the [program guide](#) or our [website](#).

If you have questions please contact us via email at solarforlowincome.program@planning.nsw.gov.au or you can talk to someone at Service NSW by calling 13 77 88.