

Power Dependency Forum Report

Wednesday 15 November 2017, 1.00-3.00pm

Health Consumers Alliance of SA Inc

Level 1/12 Pirie Street, Adelaide

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Executive Summary

Health Consumers Alliance of SA Inc (HCA) hosted a forum on Power Dependency on Wednesday 15 November 2017, from 1.00 – 3.00pm. Four people participated.

The forum had two key objectives including:

1. to review the proposed Power Dependency Strategy and associated messaging to inform the development of a Communications Plan, and support processes for potentially vulnerable people and their carers and/or families.
2. to identify what consumers should do to prepare for and manage an outage.

Kathy Mickan, Manager Consumer Engagement, HCA, welcomed participants and outlined the forum program.

Julie Hartley-Jones, Group Executive Director for Statewide Clinical Support Services, Central Adelaide Local Health Network (CALHN) presented the background on the black event that occurred in September 2016, and subsequently led to this work taking place. While no lives were lost during that event, work is now occurring across government and the community to ensure that vulnerable people who depend on power to maintain their health are able to remain safe in the event of a power outage.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. this report is provided to SA Health for consideration.

1. Introduction

Health Consumers Alliance of SA Inc (HCA) hosted a forum on Power Dependency on Wednesday 15 November 2017, from 1.00 – 3.00pm. Four people participated.

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1. to review the proposed Power Dependency Strategy and associated messaging to inform the development of a Communications Plan, and support processes for potentially vulnerable people and their carers and/or families.
2. to identify what consumers should do to prepare for and manage an outage.

Kathy Mickan, Manager Consumer Engagement, HCA, welcomed participants and outlined the forum program.

Julie Hartley-Jones, Group Executive Director for Statewide Services, Central Adelaide Local Health Network (CALHN) presented the background on the black event that occurred in September 2016, and subsequently led to this work taking place. While no lives were lost during that event, work is now occurring across SA government and the community to ensure that vulnerable people who depend on power to maintain their health are able to remain safe in the event of a power outage.

Kathy Mickan led the participants in round table discussions addressing their thoughts on the Power Dependency Strategy and associated messaging, including:

- *What do you like about the proposed Power Dependency Strategy and messaging?*
- *Are there things you would change/ add/ delete from the Power Dependency Strategy and messaging?*
- *What do you think consumers could do to prepare for and manage a power outage?*
- *What support processes would assist potentially vulnerable people and their carers/ families to prepare for, or manage an outage?*
- *Do you have any other comments or feedback?*

2. Background

The Power Dependency Strategy is being developed in response to the Black Event that took place in September 2016, disrupting power supply across South Australia, in some areas for several days.

SA Health is aware of around 2,500 people who are dependent on power to maintain their health. People dependent on power to sustain their life or health are grouped into three tiers.

Tier 1 includes people who are absolutely dependent on power to survive, including around 60 South Australians who are dependent on ventilators. This group have good backup systems, and are registered with SA Power Networks. Tier 1 could also include people could have life threatening complications resulting from a lack of work, such as people who are bed-bound with beds that are electrically controlled to manage pressure injuries. This group are less likely to have backup systems to support them through power outages.

Tier 2 includes people who are on home dialysis or use continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) or bilevel positive airway pressure (BiPAP) machines to manage sleep apnoea. This group are less likely to have backup systems in place in case of power outages.

Tier 3 includes people who are dependent on medications that require refrigeration, and people who are being treated for addictions. This group are also less likely to have backup systems in place in case of power outages. There are many people in Tier 3 who SA Health would not be aware of, and who are managed quite appropriately by their General Practitioners (GP).

SA Health wants to ensure consumers dependent on power to run lifesaving medical equipment in the home, and consumers that require access to critical pharmaceutical medications are provided with the information and resources they need to enable them to be prepared and supported effectively during a planned or unplanned power outage.

SA Health, other government and non-government agencies deliver a range of services to support power dependent consumers.

Medical equipment suppliers can direct or encourage consumers to register with SA Power networks. Medication suppliers can provide ice packs and fridge bags to consumers who are dependent on refrigerated medications. This happens more where the medications are very expensive.

SA Power Networks are a key strategic partner in this work, as they have the most comprehensive list of power dependent residents in SA. They have a role in communicating with these residents to enable them to manage during planned power outages, including load-shedding, and they also determine and implement the reinstatement of power.

The Telecross Redi program provided by Red Cross is another important program that vulnerable consumers can sign up to. Through this program, consumers can have their needs assessed and develop a plan to prepare for extreme weather events or power outages. All registered consumers are contacted by phone during these extreme events, and emergency contact people are contacted or an ambulance called if the consumer does not answer the phone.

3. Forum Presentations

Julie Hartley-Jones, Group Executive Director for Statewide Clinical Support Services, Central Adelaide Local Health Network (CALHN), presented background on the black event that occurred in September 2016 that has led to this work taking place. While no lives were lost during that event, work is now occurring across government and the community to ensure that vulnerable people who depend on power to maintain their health are able to remain safe in the event of a power outage.

Roxanne Clarke, Project Officer, Safety and Quality, then shared the SA Health Power Dependency Strategy and the *Does your life depend on power?* brochure for feedback.

4. Discussion

Kathy Mickan, led the participants in round table discussions addressing their thoughts on the Power Dependency Strategy and associated messaging. The questions and participant responses follow:

What do you like about the proposed Power Dependency Strategy and messaging?

- It is clear and easy to read.

Are there things you would change / add / delete from the Power Dependency Strategy and messaging?

- Include phone numbers in addition to websites for TeleCross REDI and SA Health.
- Add website and phone details for connecting to Power@MyPlace.
- Remove the helix from the inside page of the brochure. It makes it really difficult to read.
- Indicate that TeleCross REDI is a free service.
- Encourage consumers to connect with friends, family or neighbours who may have power access through solar batteries or generators, or still be connected in other regions.

What do you think consumers could do to prepare for and manage a power outage?

- Tier 1 consumers seem to manage this reasonably well. Tier 2 and 3 consumers should be encouraged to put plans in place. For example, they should register with SA Power Networks and TeleCross REDI, identify someone they could stay with that lives in a different region, and have an icepack and freezer bag for keeping medications cool. GPs, pharmacists and equipment providers could be part of the process for informing consumers.

What support processes would assist potentially vulnerable people and their carers/families to prepare for, or manage an outage?

- Installing a solar system with battery storage.
- Encouraging people to be frugal with power to reduce demand on the system as much as is reasonable. For example, stay cool, but air-condition one room rather than the whole house, or get together with friends/neighbours and air-condition one residence rather than multiple.
- For more vulnerable consumers, TeleCross REDI will provide great support to help people make plans and prepare for power outages. For more independent Tier 3 consumers, an online and paper-based form may be useful (such as with bushfire action plans).

Do you have any other comments or feedback?

- Find out how long mobile towers / phone access lasts. Having this knowledge can help people plan, calling for help while they still have phone access.
- Connect with Sleep Disorders Australia for additional information.
- SA Health also needs to consider the safety of discharging vulnerable community members during blackouts or extreme weather events.
- SA government should consider the management of vulnerable consumers who may be travelling on trains and trams, particularly if the blackout coincides with extreme heat.
- Some people will still use generators, and many people will use these safely, however some sort of campaign that can be activated in the days preceding extreme hot weather events about the dangers of using generators indoors could save lives.

5. Conclusion

Keeping vulnerable consumers safe during power outages requires input from across government, non-government, medical equipment providers, General Practitioners, pharmacists, friends, families and neighbours. Sharing information, making plans, and working together as a community to take care of each other will be the most effective strategy for keeping people safe.