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## Rising telco costs adding to financial strain for Mallee families

Paying for a phone or internet connection is becoming another source of financial strain as cost-of-living pressures continue to grow for many people across the Mallee.

Mallee Family Care supports an average of 77 new clients per month through its Financial Counselling Program, many of whom are struggling to keep up with telecommunications bills on top of soaring costs for essentials like food, rent, mortgages, petrol and utilities.

These experiences are echoed in the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's (TIO) new report *Keeping Connected – Experiences of telco consumers in financial hardship*, which highlights how some telcos are failing to support customers and, in some cases, making financial stress worse.

The TIO report calls on telcos to:

1. Understand, recognise and respond to financial hardship – and treat customers seeking help with empathy and respect.
2. Review practices and processes to ensure they are complying with obligations to help consumers in financial hardship.
3. Identify and address ways their actions contribute to financial hardship.

Mallee Family Care is reiterating these calls, with many clients requiring payment plans to cover essential expenses like telecommunications.

“Food, rent, mortgages, petrol and utilities have all increased to the point where some clients simply cannot make a budget balance – it’s in the negative before they even begin,” Mallee Family Care CEO Teresa Jayet said.

“This means people are going without essential medication, skipping meals, or facing disconnection notices for utilities.”

Mallee Family Care is reminding community members struggling to pay for essentials to reach out for support.

“Free, confidential financial counselling is available for anyone experiencing financial difficulty,” Ms Jayet said.

“Our qualified Financial Counsellors provide information, advice, support and advocacy to help people get back on track. We operate from Mildura, Swan Hill, Kerang and Dareton, with outreach to Robinvale, and phone appointments are also available.”

For more information about Mallee Family Care’s Financial Counselling program visit [malleefamilycare.org.au](http://malleefamilycare.org.au) or call 1800 632 263.



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