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# **AusNet Electricity Services Pty Ltd**

## **Electricity Distribution Price Review 2022-26**

### **Appendix 3I: Healesville-Bundoora Customer Survey**

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**PUBLIC**





# **AusNet Services Healesville-Bundoora Power Surge - Customer Survey 2019**

**Prepared**

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## Section 1: Summary



## Summary

### Overview

- On 30 June 2018, a significant high voltage event occurred at Healesville; another similar event occurred in Bundoora in 12 February 2019. In both locations, customers were significantly impacted in terms of damage to equipment, loss of power and the way AusNet Services dealt with their issues. A number of Healesville customers provided the Customer Forum with distressing stories of their dealings with AusNet Services. The Customer Forum reported these issues back to the business, and AusNet Services subsequently committed to improving its customer service when such an event occurs
- This survey was requested by the Customer Forum to establish to compare Healesville and Bundoora customers' perceptions and experience dealing with AusNet Services after the power surges to evaluate the impact of AusNet Services changes to procedures on the customer experience and inform ongoing customer experience negotiations
- All 57 affected Healesville customers and all 67 affected Bundoora customers were invited to participate in the independently conducted telephone interview survey, over a month and after multiple attempts 20 Healesville customers and 20 Bundoora customers were interviewed.

### Key findings

- Healesville and Bundoora customers had a similar range of experiences at the time of the event – with power fluctuating then going off and varying consequences to appliances
- While some Healesville customers recalled receiving a card/letter under their door from AusNet Services, none of the Bundoora customers reported receiving a card
- Both events were clearly concerning to a majority of customers, to the extent some thought their home was on fire – difficulties communicating to obtain information and lack of information from AusNet Services exacerbated concerns, particularly for Healesville customers
  - Further most customers took action when the event occurred to establish what happened, with 42% of affected Healesville customers and 56% of affected Bundoora customers calling AusNet Services customer service centre at the time of the event



## Summary *continued*

### Key findings *continued*

- Although the event was taken seriously by customers, few customers used the outage tracker, suggesting awareness of this tool needs to increase – subject to the outage tracker providing customers useful and accurate information
- There is some evidence that AusNet Services proactively contacted customers at the time of both events; although few customers recalled receiving the text or recalled the number to call about the event that was included in the text
- There is no evidence calls were answered more efficiently when the Bundoora event occurred, than when the Healesville event occurred – and the wait times for Bundoora customers were generally unacceptable
- There is no evidence that Bundoora customers had a more positive customer experience when they spoke to someone the Call Centre than Healesville customers; although all Bundoora customers felt they were believed by the person who took their call
- Disappointingly, a considerable proportion of Bundoora customers experienced unsatisfactory customer service, to the extent it appears they were more likely to experience worse service than Healesville customers
- Significant numbers of customers continue to indicate their matter has not been resolved to their satisfaction – with nine Healesville customers still dissatisfied more than a year after the event, and most matters are taking longer to resolve than customers expect
  - Customers continue to be dissatisfied with inadequate compensation, lack of information and difficulties contacting AusNet Services to resolve their issues after an event
- Aside from full compensation, the customer experience would be greatly improved with better communication, simplification of processes for customers, timeliness and improved manner of staff
- Somewhat ironically, overall, Bundoora customers were more likely to be satisfied with their experience dealing with AusNet Services in relation to the February 2019 event than Healesville customers in relation to the June 2018 event



## Section 2: Research overview



## Survey background

- The mains voltage in homes and most businesses is 230V. Occasionally for a variety of reasons such as a lightning strike or an equipment issue a power surge will occur when homes and businesses receive more than 230V. When a high voltage power surge occurs, appliances that are connected to the power receive more than they can handle, which can lead to those appliances developing a fault or failure; customers will also then lose power until the issue is resolved
- On 30 June 2018, such an event occurred at Healesville; another similar event occurred in Bundoora in 12 February 2019. In both locations, customers were significantly impacted in terms of damage to equipment, loss of power and the way AusNet Services dealt with their issues
- At the time, Customer Forum obtained feedback from a number of Healesville customers who reported major issues with the way they were dealt with by AusNet Services. Consequently, and in response to customer feedback gathered by the Customer Forum AusNet Services agreed to change its procedures for supporting customers during these events, so the experience of affected Bundoora customers was expected to be better
- This survey was requested by the Customer Forum to establish to compare Healesville and Bundoora customers' perceptions and experience dealing with AusNet Services after a power surge to evaluate the impact of AusNet Services changes to procedures on the customer experience and inform ongoing customer experience negotiations
- AusNet Services wrote to all 57 Healesville and 67 Bundoora customers whose properties lost power as a result of the high voltage power surge in their area; with the intent to give all affected customers an opportunity to provide feedback
- The Customer Forum developed the questionnaire with input from AusNet Services
- On behalf of the Customer Forum, AusNet Services formally engaged Field Works to interview customers
  - Interviewing commenced on Monday 27 May 2018 Friday 26 June 2019
  - The average interview took around 14.5 minutes to complete
- Helen Bartley, in her capacity as a member of the AusNet Services Customer Forum, briefed interviewers, monitored the survey progress and prepared this report



## What questions were customers asked?

### A. Customer experience when the power surge occurred

- [Following the survey introduction, in which the customer was reminded of the event in their area when the power went out] *did you recall the incident in their area* [if necessary, prompted with *The incident resulted in a blackout in your area.*]
- *Were you at the property at the time?*
  - If so, *what happened at the time of the event?*
  - If not, *how did you find out something happened?*
- *Were you concerned?*
  - If yes, *what were your main concerns at the time of the event?*
- *At the time of the event did AusNet Services contact you?*
- *At the time of the event did you do anything about it?*
  - If yes, *what did you do?*

### B. Customer experience with AusNet Services outage tracker

- If customers mentioned they checked the outage tracker, *how did you know to check the outage tracker?*
- *Was it easy to find out about the event?*
- *Was the information* [on the outage tracker] *useful?*
- *How could the information on the outage tracker be improved?*



## What questions were customers asked?

### C. Customer Service [asked only of customers who indicated they phoned AusNet Services]

- *How did you know the number to call?*
- *How long did it take to get through to someone?*
  - If more than a minute, *Do you consider this wait time is reasonable?*
- *How would you describe the manner of the person who took your call?*
- *Briefly what was the main reason for your call?*
- *Were they [the customer service staff member] helpful?*
- *Do you feel the person you spoke to accepted what you told them?*
  - If no, *why do you feel that way?*

### D. Further contact with AusNet Services

- Did anyone from AusNet Services visit you after the event to help get your power back on?
- At any time following the event did you have any other contact with AusNet Services?
  - If yes, *Was that in relation to a claim for compensation or some other matter?*
    - If yes, *Has the matter been resolved to your satisfaction?*
      - If no, *What needs to happen to resolve the matter?*
      - If yes, *Was the amount of time it took to resolve the matter more or less than you expected or as expected?*

### E. Overall reaction

- *Overall, how could they improve the way they handled your issues associated with the event?*
- *All things considered, overall if 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent how would you rate your experience dealing with AusNet Services in relation to the event ?*



## Survey participation

- Affected customers were given a significant opportunity to participate in this survey, with multiple attempts made to reach all customers over a month.
- Ultimately 20 Healesville customers and 21 Bundoora customers provided feedback about their experiences related to the event and AusNet Services response – these numbers correspond to:
  - 80% of Healesville customers who interviewers were able to contact
  - 51% of Bundoora customers who interviewers were able to contact

	Healesville	Bundoora
Affected customers	N = 56 (100%)	N = 66 (100%)
Customers with contact phone numbers	n = 42 (75%)	n = 52 (79%)
Customers who could not be contacted over the survey duration (5 attempts made at varying times of day and varying dates)	n = 26 (46%)	n = 19 (29%)
Customers who refused to participate	n = 5 (9%)	n = 21 (32%)
Completed interviews	n = 20 (36% of all customers – 80% of those who could be contacted)	n = 22 (33% of all customers – 51% of those who could be contacted)

- At the 95% confidence level the Healesville results are accurate to within 22% and the Bundoora results are accurate to within 18% (for a result of 50%; with the accuracy increasing for survey results closer to 0% or 100%), and assuming the achieved samples are unbiased indicators of customers' experience and perceptions
- Regardless of statistical accuracy, the survey results are evidence of the experience of significant proportions of Healesville and Bundoora customers who were affected by the power surges in June 2018 and January 2019, respectively
- All surveyed customers were residential; three non-residential customers in Healesville affected by the power surge were not contacted



## Section 3: Customer experience when the power surge occurred



## Recollection of the event

Healesville and Bundoora customers had a similar range of experiences at the time of the event – with power fluctuating then going off and varying consequences to appliances

### Healesville customers

- All survey participants recalled the 30 January 2018 event in their area when the power went out
- 50% of Healesville customers (n=10) were at the property when it occurred
- **Those at home reported the following occurred at the time of the event:**
  - The power flickered off and on, and eventually went out
  - The lights went out
  - A strong burning smell
  - “You could hear things blowing up around the house”
  - Appliances “popped”, made loud noises and went “bang”, and stopped working
- They felt:
  - “Most concerned and alarmed”
  - “I thought It was not going to last

### Bundoora customers

- All survey participants recalled the 12 February 2019 event in their area when the power went out
- 68% of Bundoora customers (n=15) were at the property when it occurred – they reported:
- **Those at home reported the following occurred at the time of the event:**
  - The lights started “fluctuating”, “pulsing” turned dim, wouldn’t turn on
  - “All of a sudden we hear a big bang”
  - A small amount of power seemed to be getting through, but eventually the power went out
  - The pool filter blew up
  - A lot of appliances were “burnt out”
  - No air conditioning/cooling
  - Roller doors were stuck
- The impacts varied
  - “I was a bit scared seeing the fire brigade”
  - “It didn’t really affect me very much; I just showered with a candle”
  - “It was a major disruption”



## Recollection of the event

While some Healesville customers recalled receiving a card/letter under their door from AusNet Services, none of the Bundoora customers reported receiving a card

### Healesville

- Those not at home at the time of the event, while they were away:
  - Heard from friend/neighbour family member there had been a power surge
  - Two **received a text message** advising of the outage; but one was **not initially aware the text was from AusNet Services**
- Those not at home at the time of the event, when they arrived home:
  - Went to switch the lights on and they were not working
  - Noticed the garage door was broken, had to open it manually
  - **Found a card/letter from AusNet** under the door explaining there had been an outage and AusNet had to turn the power off

### Bundoora

- Those not at home at the time of the event, while they were away:
  - Two **received a text message** advising of the outage
  - Heard from friend/neighbour family member there had been a power surge
  - Was alerted by security system there had been an outage



## Customers concerns at the time

### Healesville

- **70% of Healesville customers were concerned about the event at the time it occurred**
- Their main concerns were:
  - The house was on fire
  - The transformer caught fire, and the fire could spread
  - Damage to property and appliances
  - Cold weather – no heating (especially concern for older people)
  - “The strange way it happened”, with the lights and power fluctuating before it finally went off
  - Not being able to contact anyone because
    - No internet
    - Mobile phone battery was dead
  - Not being able to access information, **“visited the AusNet website and there was no information, the site was down, under maintenance”**
    - Not knowing what happened
    - Not knowing how long the power would be out

### Bundoora

- **70% of Bundoora customers were concerned about the event at the time it occurred**
- Their main concerns were:
  - The house would catch fire
  - Damage to the customer’s property and appliances
  - Having to replace appliances
  - Health and safety – no heating/cooling no lighting
  - **Not knowing what was happening**
    - How long the power would be out

**Both events were clearly concerning to a majority of customers, to the extent some thought their home was on fire – difficulties communicating to obtain information and lack of information from AusNet Services exacerbated concerns, particularly for Healesville customers**



## Actions when the event occurred

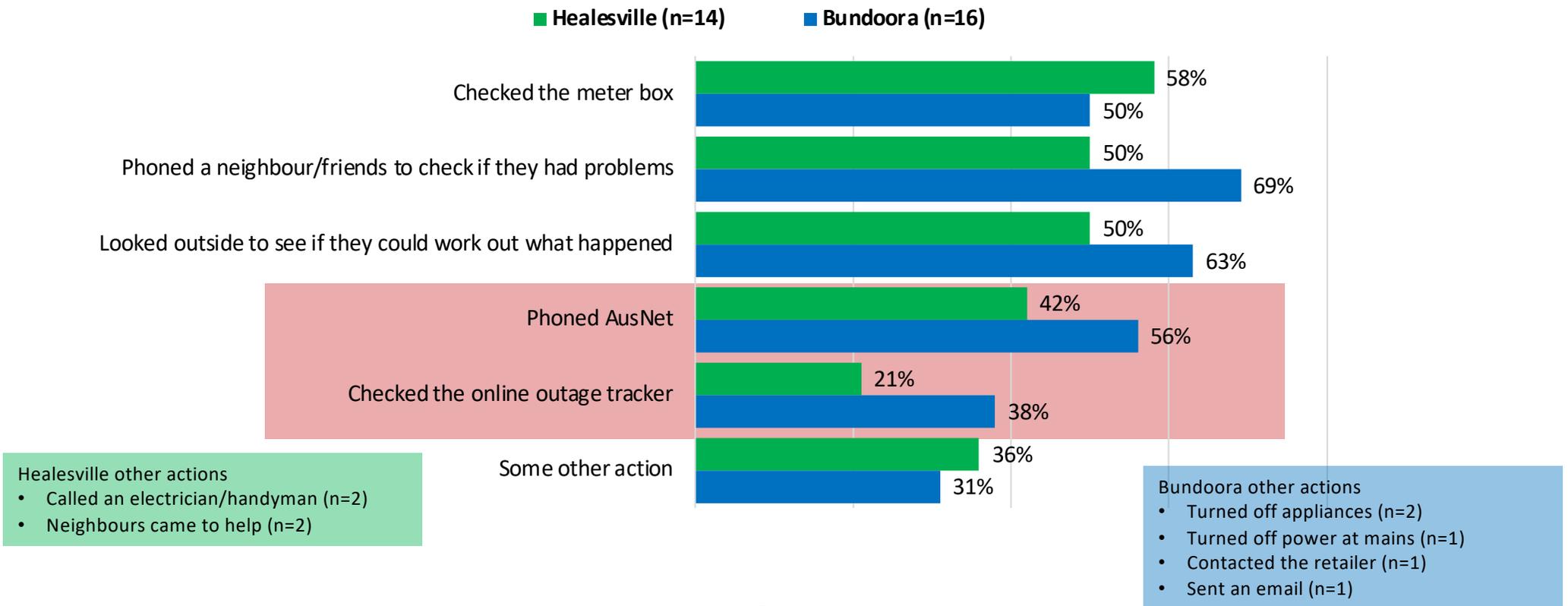
Given most customers reacted to the event when it occurred, indicates they recognised the event was serious

### Healesville

- 55% of Healesville customers indicated AusNet Services contacted them at the time of the event
- 70% of Healesville customers took action at the time

### Bundoora

- 41% of Bundoora customers indicated AusNet Services contacted them at the time of the event
- 73% of Bundoora customers took action at the time





## Section 4: Outage tracker experience



## Outage tracker experience

- Only three customers (all Healesville customers) checked AusNet Services outage tracker
  - They knew to check it as all had used it before
- None of three customers found it easy to find information about the event
- Three eventually found information
  - Two indicated the information was useful
- Suggested improvements to the Outage Tracker from these customers were:
  - *Generally speaking it's not accurate, but just the other day we had one, but it was on for a half an hour later [than the outage tracker indicated]. I understand if trees come down it's difficult to predict how long it's going to take; it tells you how many houses are affected and tells you if it's an equipment failure or due to trees.*
  - *Have people available to answer the phone. [They're] expecting people to go on the outage tracker to track the information. The outage tracker didn't tell me that my kitchen smelt like fire, it didn't tell me that there had been a sustained overvoltage incident which occurred at 9:30 in the morning and had the potential to do significant damage to the property. The first we heard of this was the text at 5pm in the evening.*
  - *We knew it wasn't isolated to this house. I'm not sure how it could have been improved, it was an extraordinary incident where they couldn't easily say it was a couple of hours, it was a significant event.*

**Although the event was taken seriously by customers, few customers used the outage tracker, suggesting awareness of this tool needs to increase – subject to the outage tracker providing customers useful and accurate information**



## Section 5: Customer service experience



## Finding the number to call

There is some evidence that AusNet Services proactively contacted customers; although few customers recalled receiving the text or referenced the number to call about the event that was included in the text

### Healesville

- **Five Healesville customers phoned AusNet Services at the time of the event**
- They knew the number to call because they:
  - Called the number before (n=1)
  - Found the number on their bill (n=1)
  - Had a fridge magnet with the number on it (n=1)
  - **They received a text notification that included the phone number to call (n=1)**
  - (One could not recall how they knew the number to call)

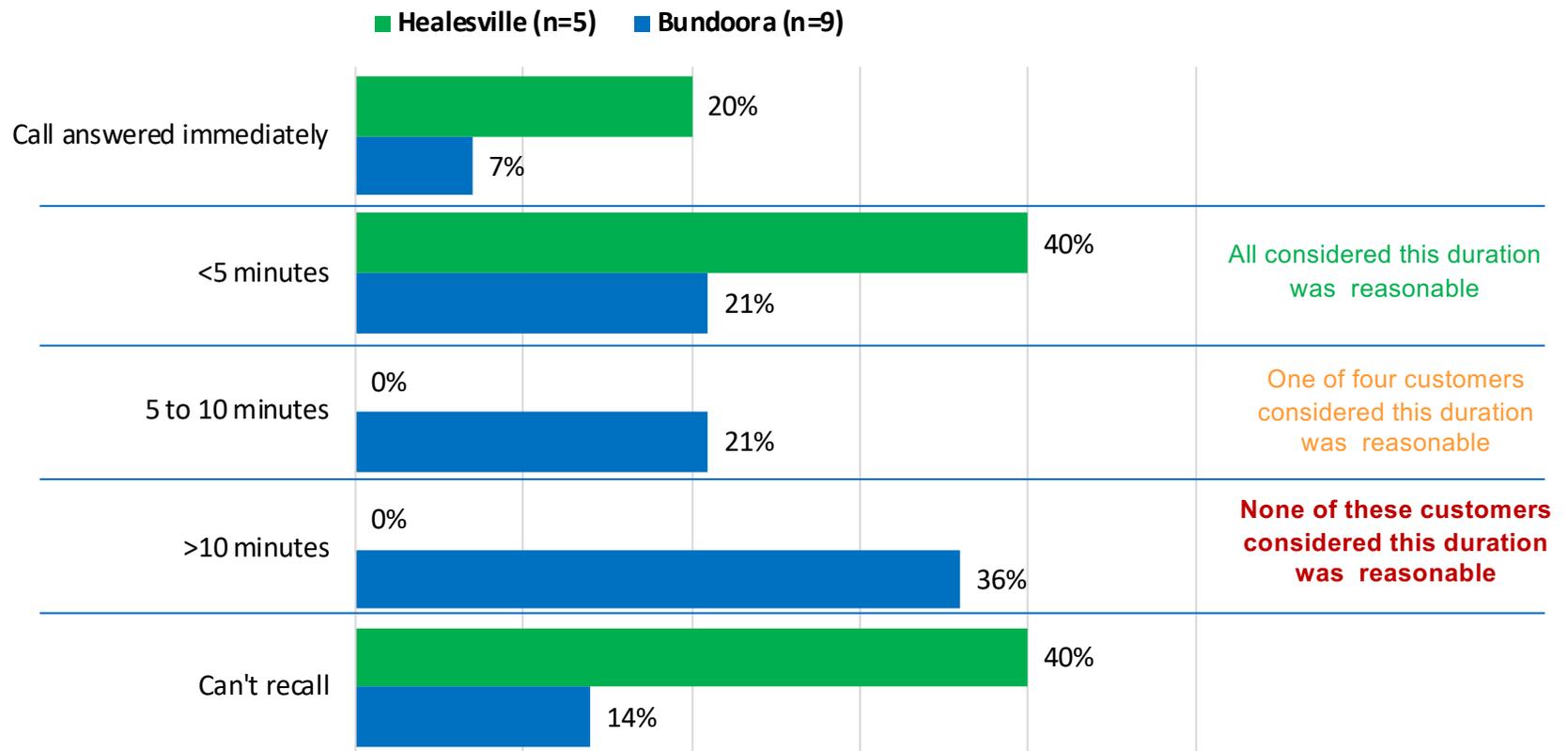
### Bundoora

- **Nine Bundoora customers phoned AusNet Services at the time of the event**
- They knew the number to call because they:
  - Found it via an internet search (n=4)
  - Called the number before (n=2)
  - Found the number on their bill (n=2)
  - **They received a text notification that included the phone number to call (n=1)**



## Getting through to speak to someone

There is no evidence calls were answered more efficiently when the Bundoora event occurred, than when the Healesville event occurred – and the wait times for Bundoora customers were generally unacceptable





## Customer service manner

There is no evidence that Bundoora customers had a more positive customer experience when they spoke to someone the Call Centre than Healesville customers; although all Bundoora customers felt they were believed

### Healesville customers

Of the five customers who phoned the Call Centre:

- Four indicated the Call Centre staff were helpful
- Three felt the person they spoke to accepted what the customer said
  - One customer could not get through to speak to the right person
  - One customer indicated they were not believed when they explained the fuse had been removed
- In terms of their **manner**
  - **Positive**
    - Professional (n=1)
    - “No problems at all” (n=1)
  - **Neutral**
    - Non-committal (n=1)
    - “Fine, we were frustrated” (n=1)
  - **Negative**
    - Rude, arrogant, dismissive (n=1)
    - Incompetent, did not understand what the customer said (n=1)
  - Can’t recall (n=1)

### Bundoora customers

Of the nine customers who phoned the Call Centre:

- Only two indicated the Call Centre staff were helpful
- However, all felt the person they spoke to accepted what the customer said
- In terms of their **manner**
  - **Positive**
    - Responsive, helpful (n=3)
    - Professional (n=1)
    - Pleasant, friendly (n=1)
    - Concerned (n=1)
    - “Informative and calm” (n=1)
    - No problems at all (n=1)
  - **Neutral**
    - “Fine, we were frustrated” (n=1)
  - **Negative**
    - Rude, arrogant, dismissive (n=3)
    - Blunt but precise (n=1)
    - Not compassionate (n=1)
    - Unable to help (n=1)
    - “Different answer from different people”
  - Can’t recall (n=1)



## Reason for the call and staff manner

Disappointingly, a considerable proportion of Bundoora customers experienced unsatisfactory customer service, to the extent it appears they were more likely to experience worse service than Healesville customers

Location	Reason for call	Call Centre manner
Healesville	To find out when the power would be back on	Can't recall
	To find out when the power would be back on and enquire about compensation	Non-committal
	To find out when the power would be back on	Fine, we were frustrated
	To find out what happened	Rude, arrogant, dismissive incompetent, did not understand
	Following instructions to restore power	No problems at all
Bundoora	To find out what happened and when the power would be back on	Professional
	To find out what happened, outlets needed fixing when the power went and needed an electrician	Combination of two calls: responsive, helpful, concerned, incompetent did not understand, unable to help
	To find out what happened and when the power would be back on	Responsive, helpful
	To find out what happened and when the power would be back on	Rude, arrogant, dismissive
	To find out what happened and when the power would be back on	Can't recall
	To find out what happened and to see if others were affected	Blunt but precise
	To find out what happened and to see if others were affected	Informative and calm
	To find out when the power would be back on and enquire about compensation	Different answer from different people
	To find out when the power would be back on	Not compassionate



## Section 6: Further contact with AusNet Services



## Further contact

Significant numbers of customers continue to indicate the matter has not been resolved to their satisfaction – with nine Healesville customers still dissatisfied more than a year after the event, and most matters are taking longer to resolve than customers expect

### Healesville customers

- 60% (n=12) of Healesville customers indicated they received a visit to help get the power back on
- 65% (n=13) had other contact with AusNet Services after the event
  - 12 had contact regarding a claim
  - 1 was trying to restore the power (two days after the event)

Only three customers indicated the matter was resolved to their satisfaction – **nine customers indicated the matter was not resolved to their satisfaction (12 months after the event)**
- Of the three customers who indicated the matter had been resolved to their satisfaction:
  - **All indicated it took more time to resolve their issue than they expected**

### Bundoora customers

- 86% (n=19) of Bundoora customers indicated they received a visit to help get the power back on
- 64% (n=14) had other contact with AusNet Services after the event
  - 11 had contact regarding a claim
  - 1 was trying to restore the power
  - 1 was calling for a neighbour who lost appliances
  - 1 was calling to arrange an inspection of appliances for damage

Nine customers indicated the matter was resolved to their satisfaction – **five customers indicated the matter was not resolved to their satisfaction**
- Of the nine customers who indicated the matter had been resolved to their satisfaction:
  - **Five indicated it took more time to resolve their issue than they expected**
  - Three indicated it to the amount of time they expected
  - One indicated it took less time than expected



## Unresolved customer issues

Customers continue to be dissatisfied with inadequate compensation, lack of information and difficulties contacting AusNet Services to resolve their issues after an event

	Healesville customers	Bundoora customers
Difficulties lodging a claim/complexity of the process	X	
AusNet not accepting responsibility for the event	X	
The time required for AusNet to process a claim	X	X
<b>Not receiving full compensation /being out of pocket</b>	X	X
Being “forced” to accept an unsatisfactory offer for compensation	X	
Having to sign the waiver saying a claim is finalised then other appliances malfunction as a result of the event	X	
Lack of transparency of processes/lack of information	X	X
Difficulty contacting AusNet Services/customer having to take all the action to contact AusNet	X	X



## Suggestions to improve handling of customer issues

Aside from full compensation, the customer experience would be greatly improved with better communication, simplification of processes for customers, timeliness and improved manner of staff

	Healesville customers	Bundoora customers
Be able to fully compensate customers for their losses	n = 7	n = 5
Show empathy towards customers and their circumstances, staff need improve their manner	n = 6	n = 2
Help the customer work through the claim process (e.g. get quotes, arrange repairs, help with paperwork)	n = 5	n = 2
Simplify the claims process so it is less time consuming (e.g. don't expect customers to supply model numbers and receipts for older items)	n = 3	n = 1
Be more transparent about the claims process, improve claims information	n = 3	
Take less time to process claims	n = 2	n = 2
Accept responsibility	n = 2	
Keep customers informed when a major event occurs	n = 1	n = 4
Make it easier to contact them - not to be kept waiting on hold		n = 3



## Section 7: Overall satisfaction



## Overall satisfaction

Somewhat ironically, overall Bundoora customers were more likely to be satisfied with their experience dealing with AusNet Services in relation to the February 2019 event than Healesville customers in relation to the June 2018 event

All things considered, overall if 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent how would you rate your experience dealing with AusNet Services in relation to the event ?

