MITCHAM residents are among thousands of South Australians missing out on millions of dollars a year in unclaimed money owed to people or businesses over the past decade.

However, it has returned only $13.6 million to the rightful owners. The money comes from a variety of sources, such as overpaid bills, unclaimed rebates, payments to farmers and contractors, and proceeds of the sale of properties for unpaid council rates.

In the first two months of the year, hills and southern suburbs’ residents were owed nearly $600,000. Under the Unclaimed Moneys Act, companies and other organisations have six years to find the people they owe money to. If that fails, the companies hand the money to the Treasury Department. The department publishes the names of those owed money in the Government Gazette. People and businesses can also search the department’s website – treas-sa.gov.au/search-um – to see if they are owed money. If the money isn’t claimed within a further two years, the government keeps it. About 15,000 people and businesses were added to the list in the first two months of this year.

Government bodies are also missing out, with Origin Energy owing $8040 to Mt Gambier’s Mulga Street Primary School, $2290 to the SA Ambulance Service and $60 to the SA Housing Trust. Opposition Treasury spokesman Rob Lucas and independent MLC John Daley have called on the government to better promote the unclaimed money website and make it easier to use.

A Treasury spokesman said the website was easy to use and the department had not received any complaints about it this financial year. He said there were no plans to change the website or the Unclaimed Moneys Act.

Mitochondria