

# CHOICE

## ANNUAL REVIEW 2023–24

### Co-Chairs' report



Anita Tang, Co-Chair.



Nic Cola, Co-Chair.

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The year got off to a sad start with the resignation of our CEO of 11 years, Alan Kirkland. Fortunately for Australian consumers he was moving on to take up the role of a Commissioner at the Australian

Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC). Alan has been a fierce advocate for Australian consumers and strong leader of the organisation. While we were sad to lose Alan, we were reassured that he is moving to another role where he will continue his commitment to consumer rights.

Our long-term executive team member Ian Morgan, Director, Growth & Experience, stepped up to act as interim CEO while the Board undertook one of the most consequential tasks a Board faces – the search for, and appointment of, a chief executive officer.

After an exhaustive search we were delighted to appoint Ashley de Silva, formerly CEO of ReachOut, to the role. Ashley joined us in March. It is clear already that Ashley is the right person to lead CHOICE through the next stage

of our journey and the Board looks forward to working with him.

On the Board we said goodbye to Alexandra Kelly, who stepped down before the end of her term, and welcomed Melissa King in her place. Melissa is a practised CEO, senior executive and adviser, with experience spanning corporate, government, the arts and nonprofit sectors with organisations including Sydney Opera House, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet – APEC Taskforce, the Governance Institute and the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA). Alex has been a wonderful colleague and source of advice to the Board and we wish her well, while also welcoming the hugely experienced Melissa to the Board.

As well as the search for a new CEO, the Board has been focussed on developing a new strategy for the next three years, investment in the new technology strategy (Evolve27) and reducing costs in line with revenue.

To develop the new strategy, the Board and management undertook a rigorous process of analysis, diagnosis and response – a process which began in April 2023 and continued through to May 2024. At the heart of this strategic diagnosis is the recognition that the way we deliver impact and serve Australian consumers is working well – we are respected by decision makers and trusted by consumers. In addition, while we remain committed to the

We at CHOICE acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we work, and pay our respects to the First Nations people of this country. CHOICE supports the First Nations people's Uluru Statement from the Heart.

For an accessible version of the CHOICE Annual Review 2023–24, visit [choice.com.au/annualreview](https://choice.com.au/annualreview)

membership model, there is a close link between membership revenue and the performance of the wider economy as a whole. Continued economic instability and ongoing rapid changes in the technology and digital landscape, such as AI, mean we need to prepare for an uncertain future with a more robust technology platform and less reliance solely on membership revenue. The response to this diagnosis made up the new three-year strategy, which was rolled out in July 2024.

The successful delivery of the Evolve27 program of work is critical to positioning the organisation for the future. Given the size of the investment, the scope of the work and the recent challenges with the CMS project, the Board paid very close attention to the design of the program, setting up a temporary advisory Committee of directors, supported by an external member with deep tech-change experience, to oversee the work. We are confident we have learned the lessons of past technology projects and look forward to the benefits the new foundation will bring CHOICE, but we will remain vigilant.

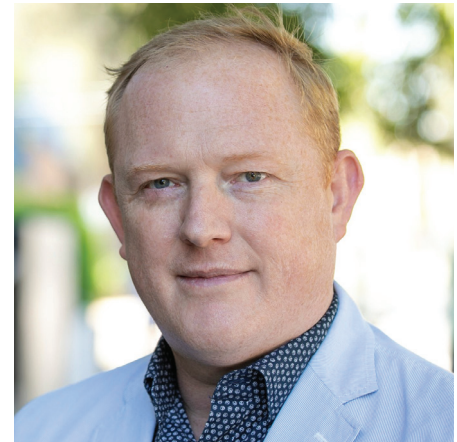
One of the first challenges for Ashley when he started in March was to work with the Board and executive to ensure our organisation is financially sustainable for the future. Despite the better-than-expected membership revenue

performance, a poor year for CHOICE Recommended and the impact of inflation on salaries and other expenses led the Board to approve a significant re-design of the organisation in June. This, sadly, meant we had to say goodbye to a number of valued colleagues. As tough as this was to do, we believe it will secure our financial sustainability into the future and set up the management team for the successful delivery of the new strategy.

While these things have been happening behind the scenes, our public impact work has continued as usual. This year, a particular highlight was the announcement by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in January that the government would be funding CHOICE to monitor supermarket pricing to help keep supermarkets competitive and prices down for consumers.

We also celebrated another huge Shonky Awards in November, with awards to Coles and Woolworths for cashing in during the cost-of-living crisis. It was clear from the media response that putting the spotlight on supermarkets really resonated with consumers.

In recognition of the growing threat of scams to consumers, we kicked off a new team focusing specifically on scams, with the goal of securing



Ian Morgan, Interim CEO.

better protections from the key businesses involved, such as banks, telcos and digital platforms. We joined forces with our international consumer organisation partners to issue a joint statement on the need for better protections from online scams.

It has been a busy and challenging year for the Board, management and staff.

As a Board, we want to thank and acknowledge the way in which the team has continued to deliver for members and consumers through a year of change and challenge. We particularly acknowledge Ian Morgan for being a steady hand in leading the organisation through the CEO transition period.



## CEO's report



Ashley De Silva, CEO.

**A**s you can see from the Co-Chairs' report, change has been a strong theme at CHOICE in 2023–24.

We transitioned from one three-year strategy to the next, and changed leadership. We have, in fact, had three different CEOs in 2023–24.

In addition, we kicked off the largest investment in technology CHOICE has ever made with Evolve27, and undertook the most significant organisational redesign in at least 20 years, if not ever.

Despite this, the team stayed focussed on delivering the final year of the 2021–24 strategy. The three key strategic goals being:

- We drive big changes and more people know us for it.
- Our membership is larger and more engaged.
- We are an organisation that people want to support and work for.

### We drive big changes and more people know us for it

One of the highlights of the year was the way our Shonky Awards for Woolies and Coles captured the mood of the nation and drove a record year for website visits and media visibility. As well as the great exposure it brought for us, it also prompted the federal government to take action to help consumers out.

Winning the government contract to monitor grocery prices for the next three years was a significant moment for CHOICE. Not only did it secure funding to allow us to work to keep prices down for consumers, but the show of faith in CHOICE and the work we do from the Prime Minister on the national stage was a huge lift for the team and validation for all the hard work they do.

Similarly, a number of investigations by our journalists into banks and how they need to do more to protect consumers, particularly around scams, has pushed the issue to the forefront of the national conversation and we expect changes will follow.

### Our membership is larger and more engaged

Although we did not manage to grow the overall number of paying members during the course of the year, the total held up surprisingly well: we started the year with 200,740 paying members and finished the year with 197,782, a decline of 1.4%. It is never ideal to see fewer members at the end of the year than at the start, but given the economic uncertainty, and compared to a drop of 2.8% last year, it was a strong result.



Across the three years of the strategy we have achieved our goal and grown the number of members from 196,685 on 1 July 2021 to the current number. At the start of the strategy period many were turning to CHOICE during COVID-19 and we experienced strong growth as a result. To finish the three-year strategy period in a stronger position overall is an accomplishment.

We also managed to engage more people with our email list of campaign supporters and interested consumers growing to over 300,000 this year. This



NAIDOC Week AbSec Family Fun Day: L-R, Jodi Bird, Soraya O'Malley, Melanie Stopic, Elaine Chang, Megan Chambers.

means we are able to reach and engage with over half-a-million Australian consumers at any given time.

### We are an organisation that people want to support and work for

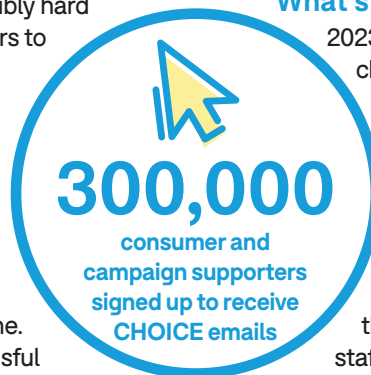
At the heart of CHOICE is its people and we have worked incredibly hard over the past three years to improve our workforce diversity so it better reflects modern Australia, and to a large extent we have achieved that. There is more work to be done, but we are proud of how far we have come.

A particularly successful project has been the progress of our staff-led Reconciliation Action Plan. After only a couple of years, we have already had our *Innovate* plan approved and the team is developing a detailed plan for the next phase.

Another example of the commitment of our staff to good work is our Social Impact Committee, which focuses on raising money for local, community-based causes and this year contributed over \$60,000 in donated products and cash donations.

### What's next?

2023–24 was a year of big change for CHOICE. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Ian Morgan, who did an excellent job as Interim CEO and was instrumental in helping me transition into the role. I also want to thank the Board, management, staff and our members for all their support. It has been a challenging period, but I am confident the upheaval has been worth it as we look forward to the next chapter in the story of CHOICE – and another successful 65 years fighting for Australian consumers.



# Campaigns and investigations



Former CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland, Director of Campaigns and Communications Rosie Thomas and Editorial Director Mark Serrels present the 2023 Shonky Awards.

## 2023 Shonky Awards

The annual Shonky Awards are an opportunity to showcase our work, to raise the profile of CHOICE and contribute to our mission to make markets fairer, safer and more just for consumers.

In 2023, we once again found no shortage of contenders, with a wearying number of businesses and products that had disappointed, dismayed and duped consumers. Our list of worthy winners included an Xbox novelty fridge that didn't cool anything, an entire category of products – personal alarms – that promise peace of mind but simply don't deliver, a Kogan subscription trap that surprises many with an unwanted \$99 charge, and data-gouging RentTech targeting people desperate to find a home.

But amid this dismal batch, it was the Shonky we awarded to Woolworths and Coles for cashing in during a cost-of-living crisis that really captured the nation's attention. Both companies boasted profits of more than \$1 billion in the previous year – profits attained as record numbers of Australians told us of their worries about the cost of groceries. More than 60% of our nationally representative sample

of shoppers believed price increases at the duopoly were not simply due to higher costs, but from the relentless price hikes they'd seen at the checkout.

Naming and shaming Coles and Woolworths certainly captured attention, with media from across the country eager to discuss this Shonky in particular.

## Supermarket comparison

In January 2024, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that the government would fund CHOICE to conduct surveys of supermarket pricing over the coming three years, telling the National Press Club, "We are backing CHOICE – renowned for their



Current CHOICE CEO Ashley de Silva presented our first supermarket survey to media.

commitment to consumer fairness – to provide clear and regular information on prices across a basket of goods.”

We recruited a team from across the organisation to create a core list of essential grocery items, identify stores across the country from a cross-section of socio-economic areas, brief the mystery shopper agency, conduct fieldwork and produce our first report, which we released in June 2024 to massive success, with strong media coverage and a huge amount of engagement from industry and consumers.

## “We are backing CHOICE – renowned for their commitment to consumer fairness”

– Prime Minister Anthony Albanese

With the nation’s attention captured by this issue, we started campaigning for better pricing practices. We are calling for the government to require supermarkets to provide fair, transparent pricing information instore and online, and have contributed to several government inquiries. Thanks to the members and supporters who contributed to this campaign by finding examples of dodgy specials. The fight for change continues!

## A new focus on scams

With scams a rising threat, CHOICE launched a cross-functional anti-scams team to advocate for stronger protections for consumers. Together they devised a strategy to highlight the problems and hold key businesses, such as banks, telcos and digital platforms, to account.

CHOICE joined forces with consumer organisations across the world to create a global statement calling on governments to require social media and other tech companies to implement stronger protections against the growing risks of online scams. The statement, signed by over 20 consumer groups from 19 countries, called for preventative measures, disruption and detection strategies and appropriate responses to, and support for, scam victims.

CHOICE also carried out survey research into the journeys of bank transfer or debit card scam victims

to produce the report *Passing the Buck: How businesses leave scam victims feeling alone and ashamed*, which detailed how victims carry the burden of scams, while the businesses facilitating the criminal activity of scammers face virtually no consequences.

CHOICE articles and investigations in support of the report helped to shift the narrative away from victim-blaming and consumer education, to supporting victims and holding the businesses – who have the means and expertise to do much more – to account.

We continue to work closely with other Australian consumer advocates to ensure the federal government’s proposed framework for mandatory industry scam codes is as strong as possible and provides meaningful rights for consumers. It’s critical that these codes establish strong mandatory obligations for banks, telcos and digital platforms to protect consumers from scams.

## Insurance in a changing climate

In August 2023, CHOICE, in partnership with the Climate Council, Financial Counselling Australia, Financial Rights Legal Centre and the Tenants Union of NSW, released our report *Weathering the Storm: Insurance in a changing climate*. The report was informed by 21 interviews with homeowners and renters across Australia, a policy roundtable discussion and separate interviews with 10 key organisations, as well as nationally representative research on insurance premiums and policies. Representatives from each of the organisations, as well as a participant of the report who had experienced the floods in Victoria, came together to launch the report at Parliament House in Canberra.

The issues of insurance affordability and claims-handling in the face of more frequent extreme weather events have gained momentum since the report’s release. The Insurance Council of Australia is drafting an industry-wide



In Canberra with the report into unaffordable insurance, L-R: Former CEO Alan Kirkland, Senior Policy and Campaigns Advisor Bea Sherwood and former Head of Policy Patrick Veyret.

standard approach to third-party assessor and expert reports, government is considering standard cover and standard definitions for home insurance, and there is greater focus on the General Insurance Code of Practice review.

The report received the Consumers Federation of Australia Consumer Advocacy Award at the 2024 ACCC Consumer Congress.

## Saving Sorry Business

For almost 30 years, the Aboriginal Community Benefit Fund (ACBF), later trading as Youpla, aggressively sold poor-value funeral plans to First Nations people across Australia. When the fund collapsed in 2022, tens of thousands were left unable to access funeral plans they had paid for.

In response, First Nations financial counsellors, advocates, policyholders and consumer groups including CHOICE, formed the Save Sorry Business coalition. Following fierce advocacy, the government announced the new Youpla Support Program to support those affected.

This resolution was made possible thanks to the support of over 20,000 people who signed the open letter calling on the government to Save Sorry Business or emailed their MP and key government ministers. It will help relieve immediate financial hardship for many, provide certainty around Sorry Business for others, and enable thousands of families to move on with their lives.

## People power

Supporter action remains a crucial part of our work. In 2023–24, over 68,000 supporters signed petitions, shared their stories and helped find dodgy supermarket specials.

- We delivered our travel petition with 31,000 signatures.
- 26,775 people signed our scams petition.
- Our privacy petition reached more than 30,000 signatures.
- Over 11,000 people shared their thoughts on Shonky supermarket specials, and over 1500 signed up to help find examples of dodgy supermarket specials.



## Award-winning journalism

At CHOICE, it's our core mission to fight for just, fair and safe marketplaces for Australian consumers and hold companies to account for the products and services they provide.

Scams have been in focus for CHOICE in 2023–24, and the investigations team amplified that work with world-class reporting. We investigated scam ads running on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, who actively profit from advertising revenue taken from scam ads intended to steal money from their users. We think that's unacceptable and companies like Meta need to do more to prevent this.

Our team also called out the major banks. We believe they're not doing enough to protect customers from scams or absorb the impact when they are impacted.

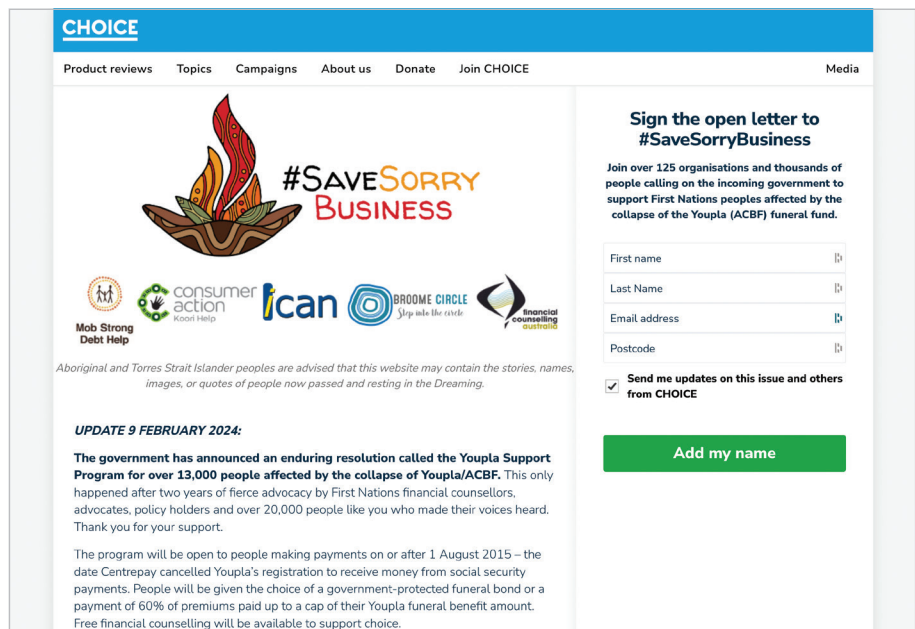
We published several investigations into some of Australia's biggest and best-known

banks who unwittingly allowed scammers to set up or take control of bank accounts and transfer stolen funds. When this occurs, banks almost always force victims to bear the costs. We think that needs to change.

Discrimination against Indigenous Australian consumers has long been a topic of concern for CHOICE. We reported on the First Nations people missing tens of millions of dollars in lost superannuation and travelled to the regional town of Mildura in Victoria to look into rental discrimination there.

Data privacy has been another focus in 2023–24. Major companies are storing and selling personal data with relative impunity and consumers have little control over how that data is used. Facial recognition is in use at major stadiums, medical centres coerce patients into sharing data, and the cars we drive are tracking fuel, odometer, location and other types of driving data.

Thanks to clauses in privacy policies that no one has time to read, your data can be sold to finance and insurance companies, promotions and market research organisations, debt collection agencies and information technology service providers. We think more transparency and regulation is needed and our journalism reflects this. CHOICE investigative journalist Jarni Blakkarly received a NSW Civil Liberties Journalism Award for a series of articles on this subject published earlier this year.



## The government announced the Youpla Support Program in response to the Save Sorry Business campaign.

- Over 2500 supporters nominated issues they want CHOICE to work on.
- Over 1000 supporters nominated a Shonky.
- More than 9000 people shared their experiences with airline cancellations and delays.

# Operations

## Membership

It was another tough year for consumers, with inflation continuing to cause cost-of-living problems for many. Falling consumer confidence means a drop in retail sales, and dropping retail sales usually means we don't see as much desire from people to take out a subscription to CHOICE.

However, thanks to the great work of the team, we managed to hold the total number of memberships up better than expected.

The media and marketing work we do around events like the Shonky Awards, and sales periods including end-of-financial year, Boxing Day, and now also Black Friday and Cyber

Monday, helped keep us front-of-mind for consumers. Whether we're in the mainstream media talking about the grocery basket survey or on social media engaging with Australians about the latest scam, we are always striving to reach and help more consumers.

We also continued our push to always add value to membership to ensure it pays dividends for our members. New tools like our end-of-life checklist ([choice.com.au/end-of-life](https://choice.com.au/end-of-life)), electric vehicle guide ([choice.com.au/electric-vehicle-guide](https://choice.com.au/electric-vehicle-guide)), home energy saver tool ([choice.com.au/promotions/home-energy-saver](https://choice.com.au/promotions/home-energy-saver)) and re-release of our insurance reviews provide valuable resources for our members that reward their loyalty and financial support.

It takes a team effort to achieve this. The combination of product reviews, consumer advice, tools to save money, campaigning and advocacy and investigative journalism remains powerful in the fight for consumer rights and shows our members that CHOICE is as relevant as ever.

**CHOICE**

### Navigating the end? Here's your roadmap

Navigating the end of life can be overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be. We can help you plan the final chapters for yourself or a loved one.

- End-of-life checklist**  
A personal checklist made for you
- Post-loss checklist**  
Your guide after loss

**End-of-life planning simplified**

**CHOICE** Log out

## Can you save on energy?

Start making savings for the planet and your pocket

- ✓ Ideal for homeowners
- ✓ Easily find energy savings on your house
- ✓ Find the most energy-efficient appliances, energy plans and more

Take the quiz to get started Start quiz

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**CHOICE** You deserve better, safer and fairer products and services. We're the people working to make that happen.

[About us](#)
[Media](#)
[This site](#)
 CHOICE Community

Our online tools respond to consumer needs. Top: Help in difficult times with the end-of-life checklist; and above, our energy-saving tool.



CHOICE test coordinator Matthew Tung prepares robot vacs to be put through their paces in the CHOICE labs.

**Reviews and testing**

**FINANCIAL SERVICES LICENSE**

For several years, CHOICE has been working towards an Australian Financial Services License (AFSL), which gives CHOICE the capacity to publish CHOICE Expert Ratings and other scores on general insurance policies. It was finally granted by ASIC to CHOICE subsidiary, ACA Insight, at the end of 2023. Since May 2024, we have published these scores on home and contents insurance and car insurance reviews. We are very pleased to be able to offer these reviews to members again and, in the coming year, we will continue to review and publish scores on travel insurance and contents insurance for renters.

**ELECTRICITY IN THE CAPITAL**

In 2023–24, we supplied product scores to the ACT Government to help the residents of Canberra transitioning to an all-electric household. The ACT government expanded their needs to

encompass product scores for air conditioners, induction cooktops, freestanding ovens with induction cooktops, ceramic cooktops and heat pump hot water systems. CHOICE staff members have also presented at various ACT councils

to provide tips and tricks for transitioning to all-electric appliances.

**UPDATE ON ACCREDITATION**

CHOICE test labs had a successful NATA (National Association of Testing Authorities) audit in July 2023 for our fridge, laundry and calibration laboratories. We continue to be accredited under ISO 17025. 2024–25 will see us audited for our 3601 NATA accreditation, which covers much of the baby and kids’ products that we test.

**PRODUCTS TESTED**

Each year we make sure to expand our product categories where possible. In 2023–24, we received many requests to test some brand new categories on the market, and to update some older categories.

New products tested in 2023–24 included:

- Vacuum sealers
- Ice cream makers
- Supermarket ready meals
- Freestanding ovens with induction cooktops
- Christmas hams
- Frozen chips
- Chicken nuggets
- Hard floor cleaners
- Electric bikes
- Mobile power banks
- Language translators.

Products we updated in 2023–24 were:

- Electric shavers
- Electric toothbrushes
- Kitchen knives
- Hair dryers.





## RESPONDING TO THE BICYCLE BOOM

Around 1.5 million bicycles were sold in Australia in 2022 and almost two-thirds of those were sold at big-box retailers like Kmart and Big W. So we partnered with Revolve Recycling to investigate bicycle longevity, comparing bicycles purchased from a big box store (Kmart) with those purchased from specialised bicycle stores.

We found that, within six months, bicycle repairers were reluctant to repair bicycles from big-box stores because they were often poorly designed – with heavy parts, rust developing over short periods of time and parts that could not be replaced at all.

The research highlighted important issues around the right to repair and product safety, and once again helps people to make an informed choice on what can be a substantial purchase.

## Evolve27: A new technology strategy

It has been recognised that the technical infrastructure that currently supports both the CHOICE website and our staff is outdated and no longer meets our needs. Over time, many of our systems were modified and customised to address specific issues as they arose. This resulted in a situation where changes now require significant resources and effort.

To address these challenges, we conducted a thorough review of our systems and developed a new three-year technology strategy. The Board

approved this strategy, called Evolve27, in November 2023, and we began implementing it in February 2024.

Evolve27 is designed around our core business of consumer advocacy enabled by digital publishing. Overall, it is about transforming our technology to better serve our needs, reduce costs and improve efficiency across the organisation.

The strategy consists of a series of projects aimed at progressively reviewing and replacing the majority of our business systems and platforms. The goal is to streamline our processes, making them more efficient and less

reliant on heavily customised, outdated systems. By adopting modern practices and technology, we will have systems that work as intended, without the need for extensive modification.

In addition, some of our systems have become more expensive to maintain, so we are examining them to find cost savings. This may involve renegotiating contracts with current vendors or replacing systems with more cost-effective alternatives. Through this process, we have already achieved significant savings in the total cost of ownership for several key systems.

When all the projects outlined in Evolve27 have been completed we will have reduced our databases to a single instance, simplified the flow of data between systems, reduced the complexity associated with collecting payments from subscribers and have a leading-edge reporting and business intelligence solution.

And, while the emphasis on technologies and systems is critical, the people are equally important. The strategy includes clarifying roles and responsibilities within the technology team, developing a new collaborative operating model and ensuring alignment between work efforts and business needs. Moreover, there is a strong focus on training and mentoring to empower the team for success.



# Partnerships



## CHOICE Recommended UNLOCKING THE POWER OF CHOICE'S INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

While members enjoy the detailed product tests and reviews published in our magazines and on [choice.com.au](http://choice.com.au), we are constantly exploring other ways to help even more consumers with their day-to-day purchasing decisions.

One way we do this is by allowing the manufacturers of products that perform above our benchmarks for recommendation to use the CHOICE Recommended logo in advertising, packaging or at point of sale. This gives CHOICE control over the way that manufacturers refer to our test results, while ensuring fair compensation for use of our intellectual property. Most importantly, it creates a powerful incentive for businesses to do the right thing by their customers by creating products that are good enough to earn CHOICE recommendation.

Because this scheme is a by-product of our testing, if we find that not many products meet our performance thresholds, then we can't award the licences – and that is as it should be, to ensure our independence.

The downside of this is that in 2023–24, when fewer brands met our standards, we experienced a significant decline in licensing revenue. Despite a 26% drop, it remains our second-largest source of income, and is crucial in supporting our financial sustainability.

## Affiliate program

### A LOGICAL WAY FOR CONSUMERS TO PURCHASE RECOMMENDED PRODUCTS

In 2019, CHOICE implemented our affiliate program, and we have kept the program going primarily to help members find better pricing for products and services and to be able to purchase them immediately when they're ready to do so.

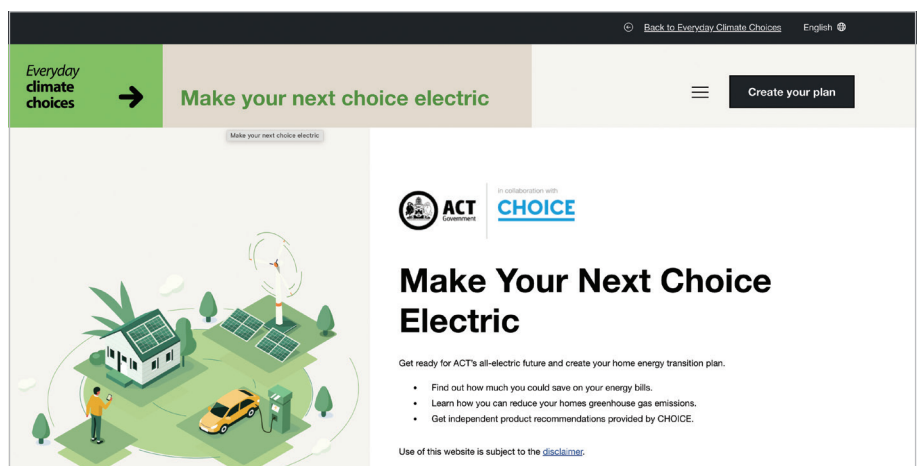
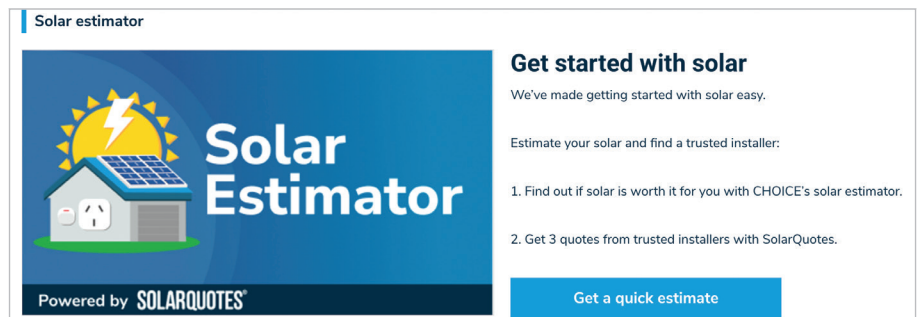
We conduct an appliance retailer satisfaction survey every few years to understand which retailers and providers our members find best to shop through, whether shopping online or instore. We then use this information to identify and partner with these preferred retailers, using affiliate links for our recommended products. The affiliate program provides information to CHOICE, as we learn what people are purchasing via our website, for example dehumidifiers and printers have been popular in 2023–24.

Our affiliate income is a very small part of our revenue but helps our members with the purchase process, as we better understand which stores

have the best price at time of publishing. When we can't find an affiliate with better pricing, we try to link recommended products to retailers that still have high satisfaction among our members.

We also have partnership programs with **SolarQuotes**, a solar installation service; **Bill Hero**, an energy switching subscription service, and **WhistleOut**, an NBN switching service. The revenue from these programs is, again, quite small, but the model helps people when making a decision to switch.

In 2023–24, CHOICE partnered with the ACT Government as part of their energy transition program, **Canberra is Electrifying**. CHOICE provides content covering five product categories – air conditioners, induction cooktops, ceramic cooktops, freestanding ovens and heat pump hot water systems. This information helps people make decisions about which products to purchase when they are ready to transition to an all-electric household. The ACT Government has renewed this contract with CHOICE through to 2026.



Our solar estimator tool provides information, estimates and quotes from trusted installers.



## Social impact and diversity

### Diversity

CHOICE continues its commitment to a diverse workforce that reflects Australia's population to allow us to work in the interests of all consumers. This year, we revised a range of policies to support inclusion, including updates to psychosocial wellbeing, flexible working and respect at work.

In accordance with the requirements of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, CHOICE lodged its annual public report with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in June 2024.

The report adds to national data on gender equality in the workplace, the aim of which is to achieve broadly equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men. Some key findings from the 2023–24 report were:

- the gender composition of CHOICE's non-management workforce was 50% female and 50% male
- 45% of our management was female
- CHOICE provides staff with most of the key flexible work practices suggested by WGEA to support gender equality, highlighting our support for employees

- overall, the gender pay gap at CHOICE increased by 2.1%, compared to the 2023 WGEA reporting period.

### Social Impact Committee

During a year of ongoing economic uncertainty for many Australians, our




The rainbow cake has become a tradition in the CHOICE office for our Pride Morning Tea.



**\$5000**  
raised in  
Walk for WAGEC

with the First Nations community via AbSec. CHOICE also continued to donate products from our testing program to the Women’s and Girls’ Emergency Centre (WAGEC), with over \$50,000 in products provided to help women and children in need this year.

We put on our trainers to join in the Walk for WAGEC and Fred’s Big Run events, raising over \$5000 and \$3000 respectively, while staff raised over \$1950 for Loaves and Fishes Restaurant at the Exodus Foundation, WAGEC and AbSec through our end-of-year lunch.



**\$3000**  
raised for the  
Fred Hollows  
Foundation

staff-led Social Impact Committee provided valuable support to our partner charities and welfare groups. Staff used paid volunteer leave to donate blood and plasma, looked after the environment through Bushcare initiatives and worked

**Reconciliation Action Plan**

Over the past year we have continued our work on our Reconciliation Action Plan

(RAP), officially launched in October 2022. After completing the initial *Reflect* stage of the plan we have recently been granted provisional approval to commence the *Innovate* stage of the RAP. Over the past year we have been working on:

- identifying partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- formalising how we acknowledge and show respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- reviewing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities and researching procurement opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations
- formalising principles for how CHOICE can best learn from, listen to and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.



Members of the CHOICE Bushcare group, Soraya O’Malley, Tony Harrison, Megan Chambers and Andrea James tend to the parkland near the CHOICE offices around the Cooks River.

CHOICE


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## First Nations people more likely to get poor financial hardship service

Recently released numbers from the financial ombudsman also show a rise in complaints about scams and insurance.





Jarni Blakkarly

Last updated: 29 November 2023

**Our investigative journalism has exposed a number of systemic issues and businesses unfairly targeting First Nations people.**

We've continued to provide online cultural awareness training for staff and embedded this in our induction program for new employees. We have also hosted a morning tea as part of National Reconciliation Week, where an episode of *The Australian Wars* was screened and a sneak preview of our Innovate Artwork created by staffer Gene Ross/Wuri Wuri was unveiled.

We have continued with our workplace donations charity partner, AbSec – the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation, which is based close to our office in Marrickville. Members of the RAP committee assisted AbSec with its annual NAIDOC Family Fun Day, a popular community event.

Our investigative journalism team has exposed a number of systemic issues and businesses unfairly targeting First Nations people, including poor financial hardship service, missing superannuation, and inaccessible electricity and rooftop solar in the Northern Territory. We continue to seek opportunities to highlight and campaign on issues disproportionately affecting First Nations communities.



Gene Ross and Jim Hook at a RAP committee NAIDOC week event.

# Financial results

The 2023–24 financial year was another challenging year for consumers facing sustained cost-of-living pressures. Being a predominantly subscription-driven model, CHOICE was also impacted by inflation and other cost pressures. As the Board looks ahead to ensure our long-term financial sustainability, management comprehensively reviewed our operations to ensure our cost base is sustainable and in line with future revenue projections. This led to a redesign of the organisation, and as such, this year's result incorporates associated one-off restructure costs. It also reflects our significant investment in implementing the technology strategy and roadmap (Evolve27) that is also critical to our future impact.

## This year's result incorporates one-off restructure costs

In terms of financial performance, our major revenue line – membership – held up well thanks to the support of loyal members like you and the hard work of the CHOICE team. This was a positive result, especially given lower levels of consumer confidence that persisted through the year. Our CHOICE Recommended licensing scheme didn't perform as expected in part because we had several test categories that did not result in a 'Best Brand' winner. Although this has a financial impact on our commercial outcomes, we see it as a healthy show of our principles and independence in action: we will not licence our brand to a product unless it's backed by strong results. The effects of cost-of-living pressures also impacted brand promotion budgets, even those awarded Best Brand status. As a reflection of the sustained cost-of-living pressures faced by our members a decision was made not to increase the price of membership for existing members and to only do so for new members.

Total revenue decreased by 2.8% to \$23.8m in 2023–24 versus \$24.5m in 2022–23. This result is predominantly



attributable to a year-on-year decline in CHOICE Recommended revenue. Total operating revenue decreased by 4.3% to \$21.5m, down by \$1.0m year on year. Membership revenue experienced a decrease to \$18.6m compared to \$19.0m the previous year. CHOICE Recommended licensing revenue of \$1.7m was down by 26.1% (\$2.3m in 2022–23).

In addition to the organisational redesign, the management team made a range of savings to operating expenditure during the past year to offset the decline in revenue. We did, however, provide a 3.5% increase in salaries. As noted earlier, we also continued to invest in Evolve27 which will deliver a more streamlined approach to our ways of working and ensure we

can continue to deliver a great service to our members. Planned completion for this large-scale technology upgrade is by the end of June 2026.

Total operating expenses increased by \$1.5m to \$23.9m or 6.6% year on year. This includes \$1.4m for organisational restructure expenses and \$484k related to Evolve27.

This combination of economic factors and exceptional items resulted in a deficit of \$2.7m for the year. Our cash and investments balance at 30 June 2024 was \$10.7m, which is well above the cash reserves target set by the Board. This, combined with our lower cost base due to the restructure, will allow us to continue to fund our ongoing technology works until completion while maintaining an annual surplus.

	YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024	YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2023
Revenue	\$22,661,354	\$23,776,097
Other income	\$1,179,009	\$760,406
Less: Direct costs	(\$1,544,158)	(\$1,448,299)
Less: Operating costs	(\$23,126,613)	(\$22,249,747)
Net result before exceptional items	(\$830,408)	\$838,457
Organisational restructure & Evolve27 costs	(\$1,848,378)	
CMS costs		(\$1,399,929)
Net Result after exceptional items	(\$2,678,786)	(\$561,472)
Current assets	\$12,260,397	\$13,867,875
Non-current assets	\$7,385,397	\$7,798,027
Current liabilities	(\$9,684,336)	(\$8,881,127)
Non-current liabilities	(\$851,259)	(\$995,790)
Net equity	\$9,110,199	\$11,788,985

## Meet our Board



### Anita Tang – Co-Chair

Anita has a strong background in public policy reform and community organising across a range of social justice and community service areas. She is currently community organising director at the Centre for Australian Progress, building the capacity of civil society for

systems change, following five years running her own advocacy and campaigning consultancy. Her other experience includes more than a decade at Cancer Council NSW where she led the transformation of its advocacy work, and senior roles in the statutory bodies and Parliamentary Committees. Anita has completed nonprofit

leadership programs at Harvard and at Stanford and served on the Boards of numerous nonprofits that focus on rights and justice particularly in the disability and racial justice areas. She is a longstanding member of CHOICE, and while at the Cancer Council, led a number of collaborative projects with CHOICE, including campaigns against junk food advertising to children and the regulation and eventual ban of commercial solariums. Anita joined the Board in March 2017 and was appointed Chair in 2020, and in 2021, became part of an inaugural new leadership model of Co-Chairing. She is also Chair of the Impact Committee and a member of the Governance, Culture and Ethics Committee.



### Nic Cola – Co-Chair

Nic is currently the CEO of RMIT Online and also acts as Chair of Picaluna, a disruptor in the funeral industry. Nic has over 25 years of CEO experience in high growth, with expertise in delivering revenue and share growth across a diverse range

of business models in traditional and digital media, education, and e-commerce. His key strengths are strategy, mergers and acquisitions, operations, digital transformation and change management. His previous roles have included General Manager of Retail and Digital at Helloworld Ltd, CEO of Open Colleges

and CEO of Marketplaces at Fairfax Media where he was one of the founding executives of Fairfax Digital. Nic was active in building the digital industry in Australia having been on the Board of the Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA) as well as serving as Chairman of the Australian Internet Advertising Bureau. He has a Bachelor of Business from UTS and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors course. Nic joined the CHOICE Board in November 2019 and from November 2022 stepped into the Co-Chair role, alongside Anita. Nic is also Chair of the Membership Growth & Engagement Committee and a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.



### Samantha Challinor

Samantha is a non-executive director, with more than 20 years' experience in senior accounting and leadership roles. This includes Interim CEO at Arthritis NSW, Director Corporate Services at the Agency for Clinical Innovation (NSW Health), Deputy CEO

at Sydney North Shore and Beaches Medicare Local and Chief Accountant at Lexmark International (Australia). She is adept at bringing financial, information technology, risk and project

management oversight and governance to organisations through expertise gained in the commercial, for-purpose and public health government sectors. Sam is a director of Sydney North Health Network, RSL LifeCare, and the National Affordable Housing Group. She also chairs the Finance, Audit and Risk Committees of these organisations. She holds a Bachelor of Business (Accountancy) from QUT, is a Fellow of CPA Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Sam joined the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is Chair of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.



### Katherine George

Kat has extensive experience in consumer advocacy and policy and is currently Associate Director, Research, at Energy Consumers Australia. She has worked across the government, private and nonprofit sectors, driving significant policy reform projects

to promote economic and social inclusion and system reform,

especially in relation to delivering equitable, human-focused outcomes in essential services markets. Currently, Kat is Chair on the Board of Hope Street Youth and Family Services, a youth homelessness service operating in the northern and western regions of Melbourne. Kat was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is a member of the Impact Committee and Chair of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee in 2024.



### Fiona Guthrie AM

Fiona has over 30 years' experience in consumer advocacy, including a number of years on the executive of the Consumers' Federation of Australia. Her main interest has been in advocating for people on low incomes or in vulnerable circumstances to get a fair

go, particularly in the financial services marketplace. Fiona is the CEO of debt relief charity, Way Forward. She was previously the CEO of Financial Counselling Australia, the peak body for financial

counsellors for 15 years. She has held directorships on Energen Retail Pty Ltd, the Insurance Ombudsman Service and the Financial Ombudsman Service, and was previously chair of ASIC's Consumer Advisory Panel. Fiona is currently a member of the board of the Queensland Competition Authority. She holds a BA, LLB and MBA. Fiona was made a member of the Order of Australia in 2017 for her work in social welfare and financial counselling. She joined the Board in November 2015 and is a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee and Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.



## Fiona Jolly

Fiona is a lawyer with significant senior executive and non-executive director experience who works with boards and businesses undergoing change and growth and operating in highly regulated areas.

She brings government experience along with expertise in communications, traditional and digital media advertising and marketing, stakeholder engagement and international trade. Fiona is a director of Goodwin Aged Care Services, Rural Financial Counselling Service (NSW), the ACT

Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority, Freshmark Fresh Produce, Australian Institute of Building Surveyors, and is an elected Councillor for HCF. Fiona has previously served as president of the YWCA of Australia and the chair of Australian Business Volunteers. Fiona's executive career spans significant work on regulation reform with both the government and private sector. Fiona was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and is a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee; Technology Committee; and the Membership Growth & Engagement Committee.



## Melissa King

Melissa is a practised CEO, senior executive and advisor, with experience spanning corporate, government, the arts, sport and nonprofit sectors with organisations including Surf Life Saving Australia, Sydney Opera House and Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet –

APEC Taskforce. As CEO of the FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup in 2022 Melissa delivered the most attended Women's World Cup in

history of the competition and the first carbon-neutral event. Currently, Melissa is the CEO of the Australian Veterinary Association and serves as an Independent Director of ASX-listed cyber-risk firm WhiteHawk (WHK) and the NSW Institute of Sport. Melissa strongly aligns with CHOICE values that promote fairness and empower consumers. Since joining the CHOICE Board in November 2023, Melissa has been a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee and Membership Growth & Engagement Committee.



## Jamie Pride

Jamie is a Partner at Humanly Agile, an organisational design and change management consultancy focused on helping clients unlock innovative ways of working and maximising the potential of their people.

In addition to his consulting work, Jamie serves as the Chief Entrepreneur in Residence at Western Sydney University, where he supports the next generation of innovators and business leaders. With over 27 years of experience in senior leadership roles across global consulting, advisory and technology

organisations, Jamie has built a career on driving transformation and growth. His corporate background includes serving as the Australian CEO of realestate.com.au, where he spearheaded significant digital advancements, and as a Partner at Deloitte, where he advised on complex business transformations for some of the world's leading companies. Jamie joined the Board in November 2021. He serves on the Finance, Risk, and Audit Committee and the Technology Committee, where he has played a critical role in overseeing the transformation of CHOICE's technology platforms.



## Amanda Robbins

Amanda has extensive expertise in economic and social policy, having worked at the most senior levels of the Australian government and across the community and nonprofit sectors for over 20 years, domestically and internationally.

Amanda founded Equity Economics in 2013 and has since delivered original economic policy analysis and advice for governments, think tanks, corporates and the community sector. Amanda is committed to supporting and strengthening the role of the non-government sector in Australia. Amanda combines skills in economic analysis with an ability to formulate policy and

communicate complex reform. Amanda's experience internationally includes roles as senior adviser in the Treasury of Papua New Guinea from 2006 to 2008; deputy director of Australia's flagship economic governance program in Indonesia; and most recently working as a consultant for the World Bank in Washington DC. Amanda holds a Global Executive MBA and Bachelor of Economics (Social Sciences) from the University of Sydney, a Diploma of Law from the NSW College of Law and a Master of Laws (Legal Practice) from the ANU. Amanda was appointed to the CHOICE Board in November 2022 and is a member of the Impact Committee and Membership Growth & Engagement Committee.