CHOICE

ANNUAL REVIEW 2024–25

Co-Chairs' report

Fiona Jolly, Co-Chair.

Nic Cola, Co-Chair.

Index

FY25 marked the beginning of our new three-year strategy, centred on a clear commitment: to drive change where consumers need it most, deliver more valuable membership, broaden our reach and strengthen our foundations for the long term. The strategy builds on CHOICE's enduring strengths – the loyalty of our members, the passion of our people, and the impact of our advocacy – while recognising that we must continue to evolve.

The Board played an active role in ensuring the organisation remained strong and well governed throughout this period. Early in 2024–25, CHOICE implemented an organisational redesign that reduced costs by $1.5m, delivering the first year of savings from this work. While difficult, these changes were essential to position CHOICE for greater resilience and sustainability.

From a governance perspective, the Board undertook an independent effectiveness review during the year. This confirmed that CHOICE is a well-governed organisation, while also providing recommendations to strengthen our focus on strategy and decision-making. We have already begun implementing these improvements and look forward to continuing this focus in the year ahead.

The Board reset its attention firmly on strategy and long-term sustainability. This included time spent with the Executive team exploring CHOICE's culture and values, and supporting the behaviours needed to embed them across the organisation. We also considered opportunities and risks around the future of our Marrickville site, oversaw progress on our technology transformation, Evolve27, and ensured that financial performance remained closely aligned to the strategic plan.

The Board's composition also evolved during the year. We welcomed Chris Whitehead as a new Director and were pleased to see the election of Fiona Jolly as Co-Chair alongside Nic Cola from March 2025. This followed Anita Tang's decision to step down as Co-Chair while continuing her service as a Director, ensuring terms of the Co-Chairs were staggered to provide continuity and stability over the coming years. We thank Anita for her outstanding leadership in the Co-Chair role and for her ongoing contribution to the Board.

We acknowledge the voluntary commitment of our fellow Board members, who bring their skills,

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 2024–25, visit **choice.com.au/annualreview** insight and expertise to CHOICE. Their contribution ensures the organisation continues to deliver value for members and remains a trusted voice for consumers.

Finally, we acknowledge that this has been a difficult year for staff, who have managed significant change with professionalism and dedication. On behalf of the Board, we thank the CHOICE team for their resilience and for continuing to deliver work of such importance to Australian consumers.

The Board remains confident that CHOICE is on strong footing. With a renewed strategic focus, strengthened financial sustainability, and a clear commitment to culture and values, the organisation is well placed to fight for fair, safe and just markets.

CEO's report

Ashley de Silva, CEO.

Every day at CHOICE, we see how trusted, independent advice and a strong consumer voice make a difference – whether it's helping someone choose the right product, exposing an unfair business practice, or pushing for reform. This year was no different. Our impact was visible across the country.

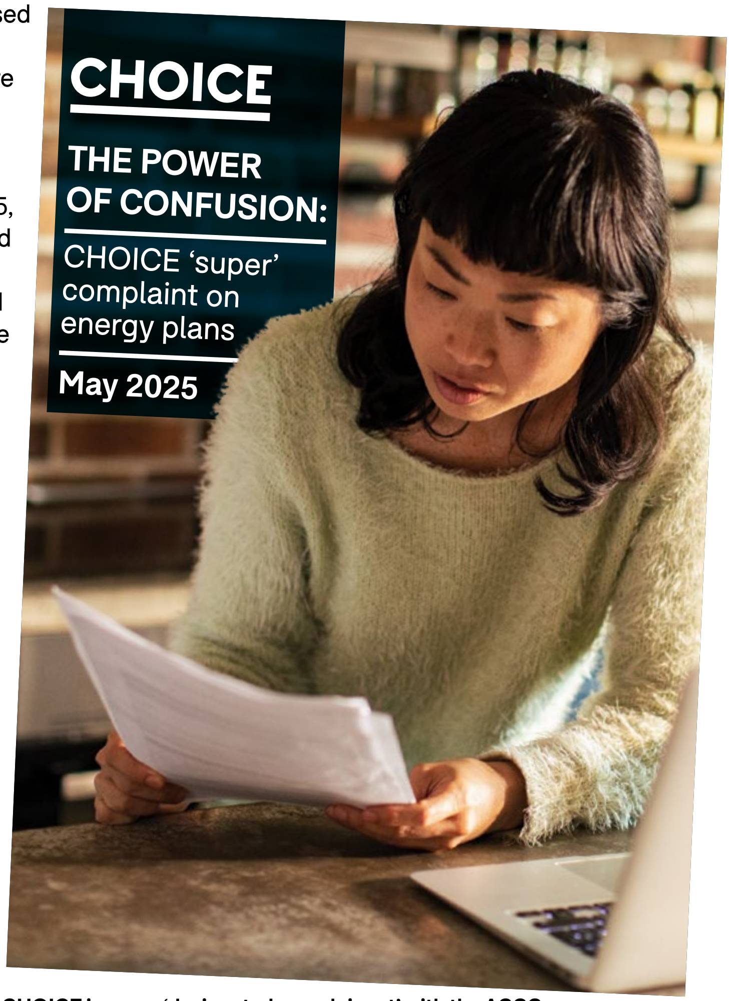
Our sunscreen testing revealed widespread failures, with many products not meeting the claims on their labels. This prompted review by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, underscoring the vital role CHOICE plays in identifying risks that others overlook and pushing regulators to act in the public interest.

Our work on supermarkets resonated deeply at a time when Australians were struggling to make ends meet. We highlighted examples of shrinkflation – where products get smaller while prices stay the same or increase – and called for stronger, clearer unit pricing. The government has since committed to tightening the rules to deliver a fairer deal at the checkout. In remote First Nations communities, our investigation highlighted the extreme cost of groceries and helped bring the issue to national attention. The result was a federal commitment to lock the cost of 30 essential products in 76 stores to city-level prices – a change that will ease financial pressure in communities that have too often been overlooked.

We also embraced a new role as a "designated complainant" to the ACCC, made possible by legislation passed in July 2024. This status enabled us to raise systemic issues directly with the regulator, and we used it to expose how energy retailers were making it harder for consumers to find and keep the best deal. In August 2025, the ACCC confirmed it would investigate the issues we raised – an early sign of the impact this new power can have.

Alongside these high-profile campaigns, our testing program continued to provide trusted, independent advice to Australians on the products and services they use every day. This year, we tested more than 2400 products across 70 categories – from air fryers and robot vacuums to clothes dryers and insurance. We introduced new tools such as the A–Z Product Finder and expanded insurance reviews. This breadth of testing is at the heart of CHOICE's value to consumers and underpins the credibility of our campaigns.

We were proud to see our community grow this year. Membership grew to just over 203,000 by year end – a 3% lift year on year. At its peak before the Black Friday sales period, membership reached close to 206,000, the highest level in nearly 15 years. This growth is a credit to the strength of our testing, reviews and



CHOICE is now a 'designated complainant' with the ACCC.

tools, which continue to demonstrate the practical value of membership.

Beyond our paying members, the broader CHOICE community continued to play a crucial role in driving change. More than 62,000 supporters not only signed petitions but also shared personal stories that grounded our evidence and made our advocacy harder to ignore. These voices brought the human impact behind the numbers to life.

This year, people power helped us strengthen our case for fairer supermarket pricing, push for stronger product safety laws, and raise awareness of scams. Our campaign and supporter email list grew to more than 320,000 contacts, giving us the ability to reach around half a million Australians directly at any given time. This is people power in action – the foundation that makes CHOICE such an effective advocate for consumers.

CHOICE membership
June 2025
203,000+

Celebrating the wins: We employed a range of initiatives and engaged our membership in our campaign for stronger scam protection laws.

We are particularly grateful for the ways our community contributed to shaping our work. From reporting misleading supermarket specials to sharing experiences with energy bills or unsafe products, these voices strengthened our evidence base and ensured our advocacy reflected the realities of people's lives. The combination of expert testing, investigative journalism and lived experience is what makes CHOICE unique.

Internally, 2024–25 was a year of significant organisational change. To ensure CHOICE is financially sustainable into the future, we completed a major redesign to align costs with projected revenue. This was challenging but necessary work, and I am grateful to the entire team for their commitment and professionalism through the transition. Alongside this structural change, we made strong progress on Evolve27, our multi-year technology transformation. This program is modernising the systems that underpin our work – from finance and membership to publishing and customer service. As new platforms continue to come online over the next year, they will further reduce manual workarounds, simplify processes and improve member services.

Together with these structural and technological changes, we also strengthened the culture and values that guide how we work and serve consumers. This included a renewed focus on our values of Truth, Help and Impact, and the behaviours that underpin them. Another priority was completing our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and preparing to launch our Innovate RAP. Over the past year, this work has centred on building partnerships with First Nations organisations, formalising how we acknowledge and show respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and reviewing employment and procurement opportunities with First Nations-led organisations.

320,000+
consumer and campaign supporters signed up to receive CHOICE emails

None of this year's outcomes would have been possible without the CHOICE team, whose dedication and skill I deeply appreciate, or without our members and supporters, whose loyalty and trust give us the independence to hold powerful organisations to account. Together, we make CHOICE an independent and fearless advocate for consumers.

Campaigns and investigations

Holding businesses and government to account

At CHOICE, our investigations and campaigns are designed to do more than raise awareness. They shape laws, influence business practices and keep businesses and governments accountable. In 2024–25, we tackled issues that touch the everyday lives of Australians – from sunscreen to the price of food and groceries.

Sunscreens

This year, we decided to invest heavily in sunscreen testing. It's been years since we last tested the SPF claims of the most popular sunscreens on the market. Last time we tested six sunscreens, this time we tested a lot more – 20 to be precise.

The impact of this testing was wide and far reaching. Sixteen of the 20 sunscreens we tested failed to match their SPF claims, but some were worse than others. Ultra Violette's Lean Screen SPF50+ actually tested at an SPF of four. We were so concerned about that result we retested it again using an overseas lab. That test came back with an SPF of five.

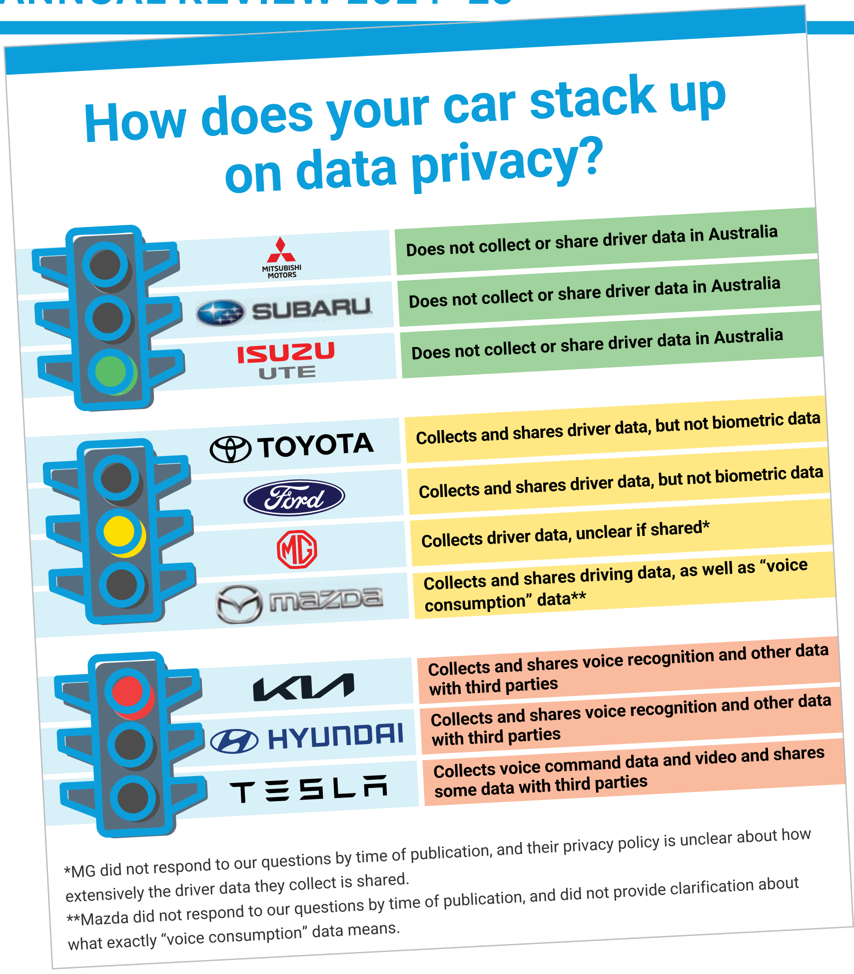
In the wake of these results, Ultra Violette did its own extensive testing, ultimately removing the product from sale. Other sunscreen products – including Naked Sundays Collagen Glow Mineral, which allegedly use the same base formula – have paused sales.

At the time of writing, the Therapeutic Goods Administration is investigating our findings and has stated it will take regulatory action if required.

Connected Cars

When we think about data and privacy issues, we tend to think about more traditional online activity, such as the websites we visit and the apps we use on our mobile devices.

But the reality is different. So many parts of our lives are being tracked and stored in ways that can feel sneaky and exploitative. Take cars, for example. When one CHOICE reader discovered the car he'd put a sizable deposit on came with tracking features he didn't want, Toyota refused to pay back his $2000 deposit.



That story kickstarted a deeper CHOICE investigation, which ultimately uncovered all the ways in which major car brands in Australia are tracking and monitoring drivers. Many car companies were not only storing voice recognition and other data but sharing this data with third parties.

It's far from ideal. Right now, car manufacturers are essentially able to write their own rules through privacy policies. We believe the Privacy Act doesn't do enough to protect drivers from overreach.

Supermarkets

We continued our government-funded quarterly supermarket comparison in 2024–25, giving Australians trusted information on how to save at the checkout. Alongside this information, we advocated for fairer and more transparent grocery prices by shining a light on shrinkflation, challenges with unit pricing and dodgy promotions that don't provide genuine discounts.

This campaign has since secured firm government commitments to reform, which should empower everyone to get a better deal on their groceries and make it much harder for the supermarkets to use sneaky tactics that cost us all money.

We're looking forward to year two of the grocery basket survey, finding new and innovative ways to present the data we uncover. In upcoming surveys, we won't just be evolving what's in the basket. We are committed to testing other elements of the supermarket experience, such as the freshness of fruits and vegetables.

First Nations

Our investigation into grocery prices in remote First Nations communities showed families often paying more than double city prices for everyday essentials. We worked alongside community advocates to bring this injustice to national attention.

In February 2025, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese cited our findings and announced a major reform: prices of 30 essential products in at least 76 remote stores will be locked to city levels. This commitment responded to the urgent need highlighted by our work and is a clear example of how consumer advocacy can drive government action on fairness and equity.

CHOICE now a 'designated complainant' with the ACCC

In July 2024, we were appointed as one of the first designated complainants under new legislation. This role grants us the formal right to raise systemic or significant issues with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), positioning CHOICE as a strong and indispensable voice for consumers.

In May 2025, we used our new power for the first time, raising the alarm on energy retailers and the sneaky ways they describe the value, nature and availability of their pricing plans. We alleged retailers may be misleading consumers and it seems the ACCC agrees this could be the case. In August 2025, the ACCC confirmed it would investigate the issues following our complaint.

CHOICE investigative reporter Jarni Blakkarly travelled to Wurrumiyanga to report on the cost of groceries in remote communities. (Photo: Jarni Blakkarly)

In the Tiwi Islands, Rosie and Denis often paid more than double that of their city counterparts for the same food items. (Photo: Jarni Blakkarly)

People power

Supporters taking action is a crucial part of CHOICE campaigns and the impact we can have when it comes to informing submissions to Parliament and affecting laws and policy.

In 2024–25, over 62,000 CHOICE supporters took action, including by signing our petitions and open letters, sending emails to decision makers, and sharing their experiences and real-life examples to help inform our stories and investigations.

Over
62,000
CHOICE supporters took action

- We delivered our petition for privacy reform, signed by over 32,000 people.
- Our petition for fair and transparent grocery pricing reached almost 35,000 signatures.
- Over 382 people sent us their energy bills to inform our energy investigation, and over 20,000 endorsed our first designated complaint to the ACCC.
- Our petition for stronger product safety laws reached over 31,000 signatures, and over 6000 people shared their experiences with product safety and unsafe products.
- Our petition for an unfair trading prohibition reached over 32,000 signatures.
- We received over 100 examples of dodgy unit pricing to inform our unit pricing investigation and advocacy.
- Over 20,000 people signed our petition to keep cash accessible and over 10,000 shared their thoughts and stories about card surcharges.
- Over 12,000 people endorsed our submission for fairer flight rights.
- Over 4000 people emailed their MPs to pass the Scams Prevention Framework Bill.
- Over 2000 people nominated a business, product or service for a Shonky Award.

Significant wins

In 2024–25, we achieved positive change for consumers on a number of campaigns we have been working on for years.

- The privacy regulator ruled that **Bunnings had breached the Privacy Act** by using facial recognition without proper consent. It was a landmark win for consumer rights. Our earlier investigations had exposed how major retailers were quietly collecting biometric data from shoppers, sparking national debate and calls for reform.
- After years of campaigning, **Parliament passed new laws to rein in harmful buy now, pay later (BNPL) products**. We've long argued that these loans should be regulated like other forms of credit, with safeguards to stop people being pushed into unmanageable debt.
- **Parliament passed new laws creating a scams prevention framework**, requiring businesses to step up and put in place stronger protections to prevent us from scammers. It's a major win for consumers and a result of advocacy by CHOICE and our allies.

Operations

Membership

This year was a stellar year for CHOICE membership. During our peak season, just before the Black Friday sales period, we hit a near-record 15 year-high of just under 206,000 paid members. By the end of the financial year, membership had dropped back marginally and within expectations to 203,000.

Year on year, this was an increase of 3% in subscribers. Overall, a record number of new or returning subscribers – 70,000 – combined with consistently strong retention rates, exceeding our expectations and creating solid momentum into 2025–26.

Our opportunity to interact and engage with Australian consumers also grew across all our free-to-access media channels.

- Our CHOICE website had 24.6m user sessions from 15.5m users.
- Our overall database of Australian consumers continued to grow to a community of over 450,000 members and supporters, allowing us to reach more Australians with consumer advice and advocacy opportunities.
- Our mainstream media coverage continued to break records. In particular, coverage of our sunscreen test in June was our biggest ever PR story.
- Our social media channels continued to grow, with a total increase of 24,000 followers across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn, representing a net growth of 6.7% overall.

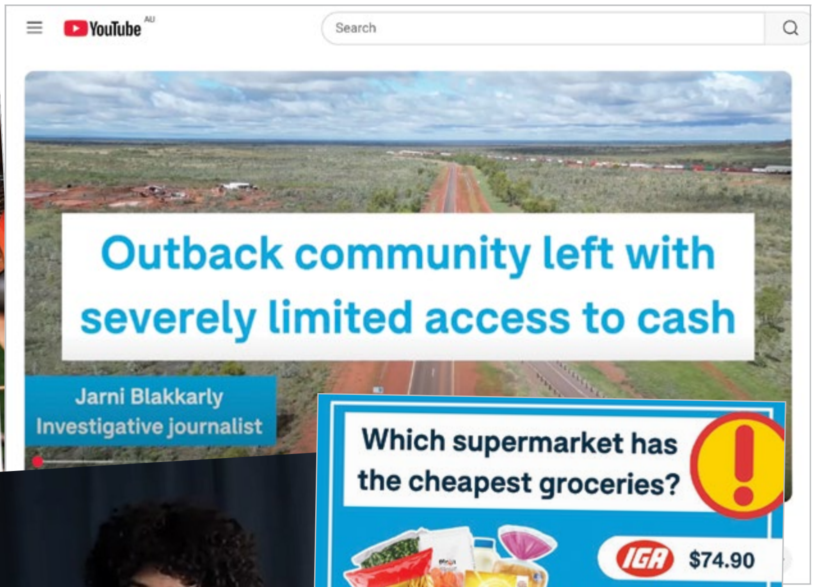
We also continued our push to always add value for our members. New tools like our general insurance reviews – including home and contents, travel, and car insurance – and our new A-Z product finder allow our members to make better buying decisions.

In a world where information that is free from commercial or political influence is becoming an increasingly rare commodity, CHOICE is more relevant and valuable than ever to our customers – whether accessing our free or paid content. We continue to conduct expert testing in our own laboratories without influence, fear or favour, as well as calling out shonky behaviour by profit-driven corporations.

Your membership dollars go directly back into this fight, and we thank you for your contribution to a fairer, safer and better Australian society.

24.6 million user sessions on choice.com.au

A community of over **450,000** members and supporters



Our social media channels amplify our work. We're active on Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, and our own forum, CHOICE.Community.

CHOICE expert Rebecca Ciaramidaro does the painstaking job of 'dirtying' standardised sets of crockery with different types of food to test dishwashers.

Reviews and testing

Each year at CHOICE, we aim to expand our product testing categories wherever possible. We continue to receive many requests to test brand new product categories on the market, as well as to update some older categories.

In 2024–25, changes in our organisational structure initiated a re-evaluation of how and where we spend the CHOICE funding allocated to testing. The aim, as always, is to make sure we are making the best use of funds to deliver value for our members.

SUNSCREENS TEST

This year, we chose to forgo some of our fast-moving consumer goods content, such as dishwashing liquids, to concentrate resources on our sunscreen test. While a costly test to carry out, the findings proved worthwhile.

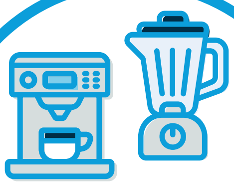
The last time we tested sunscreens was in 2017. We discovered some problems in the market back then, as well. We are continuing to push for a proper compliance regime to ensure claims made by brands and manufacturers don't drift away from evidence-based findings again.

NATA ACCREDITATION

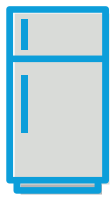
The CHOICE test labs were subject to a successful National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) surveillance audit in May 2025 for 1702 (Whitegoods and TVs). We are due for a surveillance visit for accreditation of 3601 (Children's products) in March 2026 and a full reaccreditation for accreditation 1702 (Whitegoods and Calibration) in October 2026.

CHANGES IN THE CHOICE LABS

In addition to the initiatives being implemented as part of the Evolve27 organisation-wide technology strategy, the testing labs migrated to a new document control software system, which aims to better serve us in the years to come.



70
product categories tested in 2024–25

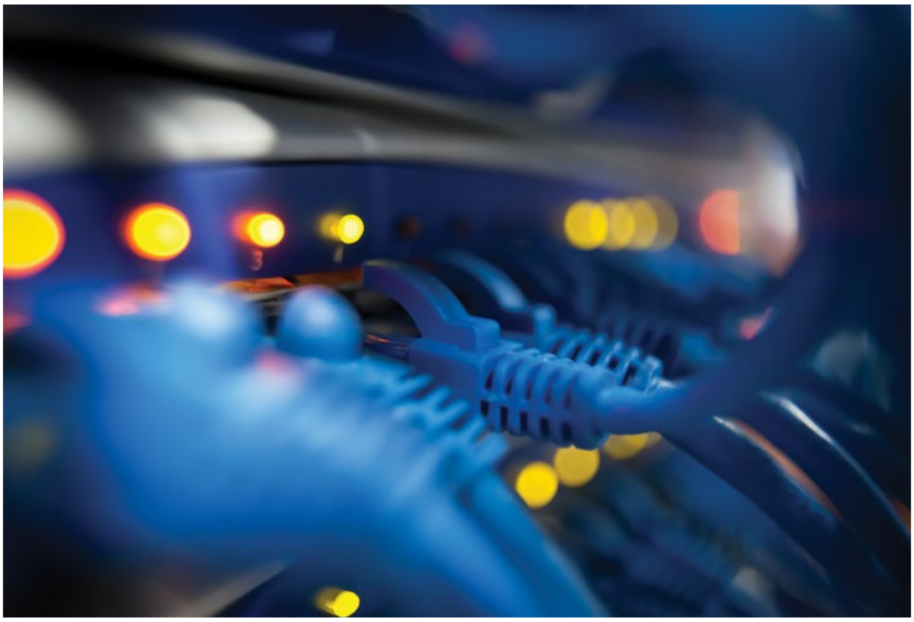


2424
products tested

The Reviews and Testing and Consumer Insights departments at CHOICE collaborated on research, canvassing our membership to better understand how they would like us to develop our testing methods into the future.

This year, we asked our members about air fryers and robot vacuums, both of which are still incredibly popular with Australian consumers. In response to the research results, we have made changes to testing across both these categories as we move into the 2026 financial year.

It's important that CHOICE testing remains relevant and responsive to consumer needs. As an example of this, we implemented a process within our clothes dryer methodology this year, in response to an explicit consumer need to test whether clothes dryers twist and tangle clothing during operation. We now test dryers for twisted clothing using bedsheet sets. The results are recorded and, where this happens, products are penalised.



Evolve27: Transforming our technological foundations

Over the past sixteen months, CHOICE has been undertaking one of the most ambitious technology transformations in our history. Our existing systems had grown in complexity as the organisation evolved, leaving us reliant on manual workarounds and processes that no longer served us well. To address this, we launched Evolve27 – a comprehensive strategy to modernise and simplify the core technologies that power CHOICE.

Evolve27 is focused on replacing the critical platforms that underpin how we operate and serve our members, including:

- email campaign management
- payment systems
- subscription management
- customer relationship management (CRM)
- finance systems
- our website.

This is a significant investment in both time and resources, designed to fix inefficiencies today, and set us up for sustainable success in the years ahead.

From the outset, we knew the importance of selecting the right partners, and we've worked closely with trusted vendors who bring the expertise required to deliver such a broad program of change.

Thanks to the dedication of the CHOICE team and our partners, we have already reached major milestones with more to follow. For our staff, the difference is already being felt. Where once teams relied on time-consuming manual workarounds to move information between systems, they will now be supported by modern tools that streamline these processes. That means fewer repetitive tasks, less double-handling, and more time spent on work that delivers value for our members. The changes have also allowed us to reduce our cost base, ensuring we're making the most of every dollar.

MEMBER BENEFITS

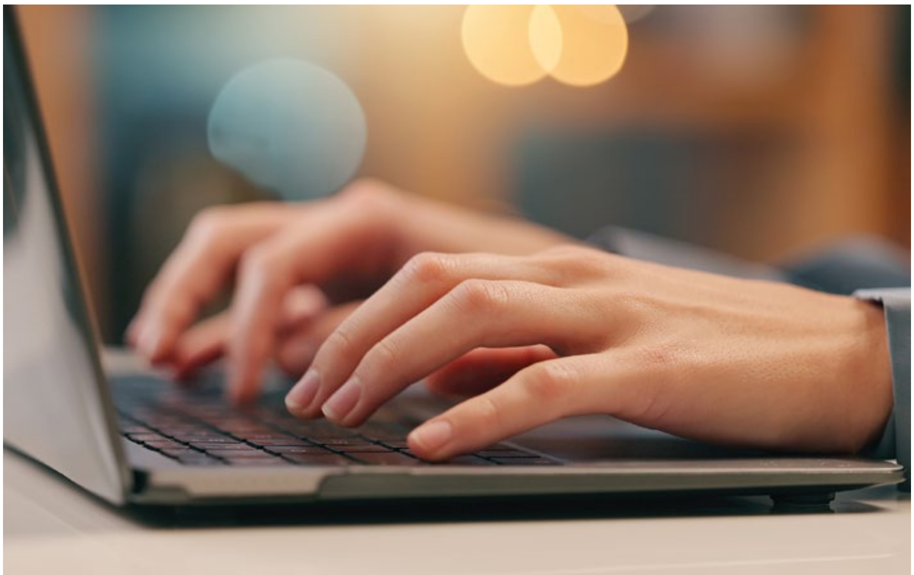
For our members, the benefits are equally significant. The new systems mean more reliable payment experiences, smoother subscription management, and faster delivery of the content and services they rely on CHOICE for. The upcoming website launch will allow us to bring information online more quickly, respond to emerging consumer issues faster, and offer a more personalised experience tailored to each member's needs and interests.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Evolve27 lays the foundation for further innovation into the future. Modern, flexible systems deliver the ability to develop new products and services, test new ideas and adapt to the evolving needs of Australian consumers. Importantly, these platforms have been designed to be modular, so if one component needs to be replaced, we can do so without disrupting the whole ecosystem.

Evolve27 is more than a one-off project, it is the start of a new way of working. Completing this deep renewal will ensure that our systems will no longer fall behind but continue to evolve steadily, keeping pace with the changing needs of our members and the fast-moving digital landscape.

Ultimately, this is an investment in the future of CHOICE, ensuring that our staff members have the tools they need to work effectively, our members enjoy a seamless experience and our organisation remains agile and innovative. The work achieved so far is a testament to the commitment and skill of the CHOICE team, and we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead as Evolve27 reaches its final milestones.



Partnerships

CHOICE Recommended

Our CHOICE endorsement program is a licensing scheme that offers the opportunity for manufacturers to leverage high scores received in our rigorous, independent and expert reviews and tests. Products that perform well can arrange to use the CHOICE Recommended and CHOICE Best Brand labelling for marketing and advertising, packaging and at point of sale.

The endorsement program contributed 6.1% of our total annual revenue this year. It also significantly enhances our brand visibility beyond our membership.

While this remains our second-largest source of income, it was another year of decline, prompting a review of the program to ensure it continues to deliver value and support our broader goals. We have now implemented changes designed to strengthen the program's performance, with benefits expected to flow through in the year ahead.

In our 2025 brand survey, 38% of respondents who were aware of the program said they had purchased a product because of the CHOICE Recommended or Best Brand award.

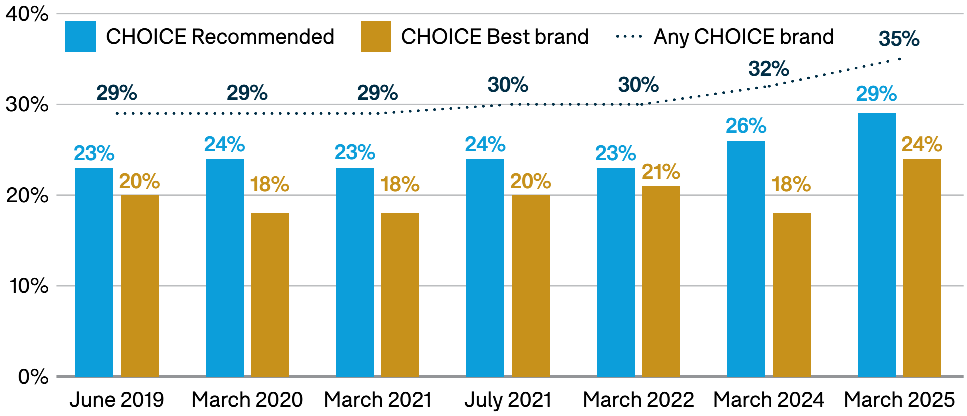
The perception of the CHOICE endorsement program from a trust, quality and confidence perspective continues to outshine similar programs.

CHOICE Partnerships

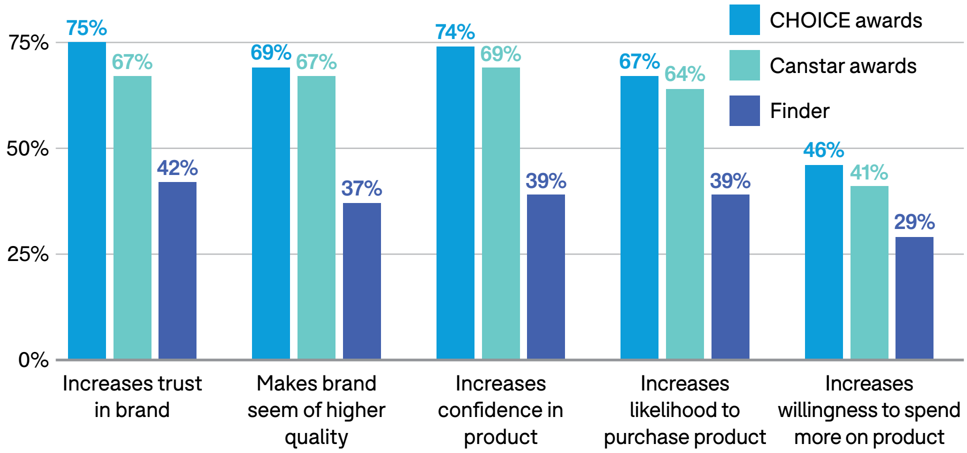
There are three types of partnerships under the CHOICE Partnership program:

- Affiliate partnerships, which allow CHOICE to track and receive commission for sales we generate of products we have recommended
- Service partnerships with businesses who share our values and can provide services we don't – Solar Quotes, WhistleOut, Bill Hero
- Strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations to grow both brands together.

Consumer awareness of CHOICE Recommended and Best Brand



CHOICE endorsement compared to our competitors



AFFILIATE PARTNERSHIPS

CHOICE implemented our affiliate program in 2019 to help members find better pricing for products and services and be able to purchase them directly from retailers via our website.

We conduct an appliance retailer satisfaction survey every few years to identify who to partner with. Our affiliate income is a very small part of our revenue but helps our members with the purchase process.

Our strategy to improve and expand affiliate partnerships in the next year includes:

- providing purchase links to a larger range of our tested products so that more members can complete their purchase journey based on broader criteria, such as specific features or lower prices outside the top scoring models
- automating and improving efficiency in the new content management system and providing visitors with multiple retailer options and live prices, in line with our UK counterpart, *Which?*
- adding multiple retailers, which will be more convenient for our members and allow us to capture more revenue from affiliates while remaining impartial.

SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS

In more recent years, we have developed partnership programs with organisations that provide services CHOICE does not, including SolarQuotes, a solar installation service; Bill Hero, an energy switching subscription service and WhistleOut, an NBN switching service. These services enable CHOICE members to confidently complete the customer journey that begins with us.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

In 2024–25, we started looking into ways to work with like-minded organisations where our interests and audiences might overlap. These partnerships represent the opportunity to create win-win relationships with organisations that share our values and will help to grow our membership, provide revenue that can be reinvested back into the organisation and achieve even better outcomes for Australian consumers.

Artwork by Rheanna Lotter/Ngandabaa.

Environmental, social and governance

Reconciliation Action Plan

Over the past year we have continued our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) journey, officially launched in October 2022. After completing the initial Reflect stage of the RAP, we were recently granted approval to commence the Innovate stage. 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.

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 the Boyer Lecture by Noel Pearson was screened followed by a discussion lead by our RAP team.

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 a spotlight on the handling of superannuation for the First Nations community and access to cash in remote communities. We continue to seek opportunities to highlight and campaign on issues disproportionately affecting First Nations communities.

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BANKING

Cashed out

Residents of Tennant Creek and surrounding remote towns have been left with severely limited access to cash after a sudden bank closure. **Jarni Blakkarly** reports

It's a Thursday morning outside the office of CatholicCare Northern Territory in Tennant Creek, an unassuming building just off the main highway that splits the town in two.

For many of the financial assistance charity's clients, it's payday. That means there is a steady stream of people coming in to ask for help to access their online banking or reset their pin numbers so they can go to one of the only remaining ATMs in town and withdraw cash.

When asked what they are coming in to get help with, everyone gives the same one-word answer, "Westpac".

It has been over two years since Australia's second-largest bank closed its branch and pulled out of the town of Tennant Creek with less than 24 hours' notice. Support workers like regional manager Marcella Rankine were left scrambling.

"There was no notice. We just got a Westpac worker come in and say we were closing and that was it and it was closed the very next day," Rankine says.

The town is the main regional hub for the wider Barkly region – an area bigger than New Zealand

"The community was lost and confused about where to get their Westpac money from, so we stepped in and provided the service, but the impact was huge. We had to stop delivering other services."

Westpac found to have breached the Code

Tennant Creek is a hot and remote town, 500km north of Alice Springs on the long stretch of the Stuart Highway to Darwin. It was once bustling due to the extensive mining operations, and at one point was one of the biggest gold-producing regions in Australia. Now, more than half the shopfronts on the main street are boarded up.

On the outskirts of town, the Battery Hill Gold Mining and Heritage Centre displays relics of the town's former glory days, such as old mining tools, alongside black and white photos of men working among the rocks and dirt. There is almost no mention of the fact that, for thousands of years, this has been Warumunga country.

The town is home to 3000 people, more than half of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and it is the main regional hub for the wider 320,000km² Barkly region, an area bigger than New Zealand.

People come into town here from all across the region to access services. The Westpac closure has had a major ripple effect. There's now just one bank branch left in Tennant Creek – ANZ – and it opens for just four hours a day, Monday to Friday.

When the Westpac branch pulled out of town, CatholicCare lodged a complaint with the Banking Code Compliance Committee, a committee of just three people supposed to ensure banks comply with the voluntary industry Code of Practice.

It found that Westpac breached the Code with its abrupt branch closure, but the sanction issued by the committee was mild at best: Westpac was merely named in a scathing press release. The bank has faced no other consequences for leaving marginalised customers in the lurch.

"Westpac could have done at least six months' preparation to let the community know this is happening," Rankine says.

"They could have built the capacity of the community before their closure with the internet banking and the telephone stuff, but it wasn't that way, it was all lumped on us to do."

Over two years on from the closure, CatholicCare still spends much of its limited resources assisting Westpac customers. In the month of November 2024 alone, they recorded 161 Westpac clients coming in for support.

IMAGES: JARNI BLAKKARLY

Westpac responds

Westpac says that "safety and security concerns" in Tennant Creek meant it needed to close the branch outside standard process in order to "protect our people".

"These circumstances were specific to the Tennant Creek branch and included damage to our branch and ATM. Customers were notified via SMS and informed of alternative banking options. We recognise more could've been done to fully support our customers, and we have reviewed and strengthened our branch closure protocols as a result," a spokesperson says.

Westpac did not respond to our questions about whether the bank, which posted a $7 billion profit in 2024, would consider providing financial support to charity organisations doing the work of assisting Westpac's customers. The spokesperson says Westpac continues to provide services to Tennant Creek through engagement team visits, including one as recently as February 2025.

Two years on, CatholicCare still spends much of its limited resources assisting Westpac customers

A community reliant on cash

Westpac's closure in Tennant Creek was a case study in how a regional bank branch shouldn't treat its customers. But it was also just another example of a nationwide problem that's only getting worse.

As more and more regional and remote bank branches close, residents in these towns and the surrounding communities are having trouble accessing cash. For many, it's still their primary form of payment. First Nations advocates say their communities are particularly reliant on cash, which remains the preferred way of doing business.

CatholicCare's Marcella Rankine says the impact of the branch closure has been huge.

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Our investigation into bank closures in remote communities.

Diversity and inclusion

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 continued to update 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, in June 2025 CHOICE lodged its annual public report with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

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.

Key findings from the 2024–25 report include:

- CHOICE's workforce distribution is at 52:48 female/male:
    - In the upper quartile of the workforce, this ratio is 41:59 female/male; and
    - In the lower quartile of the workforce, this ratio is 63:37 female/male
- CHOICE's average total remuneration gender pay gap is 12.2% and the median gender pay gap is 2.4%.
- CHOICE's average gender pay gap has slightly increased due to variances at different parts of the pay distribution, and is likely related to more male employees in executive-level roles.
- On the positive side, our median gender pay gap has decreased by 3.9%, indicating the middle point of earnings for male and female employees is getting closer – that is, the typical male and typical female employee are earning more similar amounts.

Social Impact Committee

During a year of ongoing economic uncertainty for many Australians, our 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 with the First Nations community via AbSec. CHOICE also continued to donate appliances from our testing program to the Women's and Girls' Emergency Centre (WAGEC), with over $30,000 in products provided to help women and children in need. Sixty CHOICE staff members also gave regularly through

$30,000
in products provided to help women and children in need

L–R: CHOICE staff members Deepa Prakash, Simon Miller, Melanie Stopic, Soraya O'Malley and Cindy Misseyer join the Walk for WAGEC. (Photo: Deepa Prakash)

CHOICE staff members Christina Hofmann, Soraya O'Malley and Megan Chambers tend to the Bushcare site near the CHOICE office. (Photo: Melanie Stopic)

workplace donations, contributing over $6000 between our partners WAGEC, Fred Hollows Foundation and AbSec.

We put on our trainers to join the Walk for WAGEC and Fred's Big Run events, raising over $9800 and $2500 respectively, and our end-of-year lunch raised over $2100 for Loaves and Fishes Restaurant at the Exodus Foundation, WAGEC and AbSec.

$9800
raised in Walk for WAGEC

$2500
raised for the Fred Hollows Foundation

Environmental impact

As part of our commitment to sustainability and responsible stewardship, we continue to aim to minimise our environmental footprint while delivering on our mission.

Over the past year, our team has taken meaningful steps to embed environmentally conscious practices into our operations and activities.

Our environmental practices reflect not only our organisational values but also our recognition of the role we play in supporting the long-term health of our communities and the planet.

Financial results

The 2024–25 financial year was one of transition for CHOICE. It was the first full year to reflect the outcomes of our organisational redesign, which reshaped our cost base to better match future revenue. These changes have already delivered a leaner, more sustainable organisation while maintaining investment in our people and services. Against this backdrop, CHOICE returned to revenue growth, with total revenue increasing by 1.4% to $24.2m.

Our total revenue increased by 1.4% to $24.2m

Membership remained the strongest driver of revenue, highlighting the loyalty of our subscribers and the value people continue to see in CHOICE. Membership revenue grew year on year, supported by both new and returning members. In contrast, CHOICE Recommended revenue declined to $1.3m, down from $1.7m the previous year. This reflected fewer test categories producing a clear winner suitable for endorsement. Given that results in the prior year were also below expectations, we undertook a review of the program. The review confirmed our commitment to licensing only where testing outcomes justify it, but also led to changes designed to strengthen the program's performance, with benefits expected to flow through in the coming year.

At an operating level (excluding the costs of the restructure and Evolve27), expenditure decreased by $1.5m, or 6.8%, to $21.0m. These savings reflect the full effect of the organisational redesign and a more disciplined approach to costs. Importantly, they were achieved while providing a 3.5% increase in salaries and the mandated 0.5% increase in superannuation.

Alongside this improved operating performance, we continued our planned investment in Evolve27 – the multi-year technology transformation that is central to streamlining operations, lowering long-term costs and improving services for members. External costs of $2.06m were incurred this year and treated as exceptional items. Taking these factors together, CHOICE recorded a deficit of $1.57m.

At 30 June 2025, CHOICE held cash and investments of $8.3m. Although lower than the prior year, this balance remains comfortably above the reserves target set by the Board. With a reduced cost base, strong membership revenue, and sufficient reserves, CHOICE is well positioned to complete the Evolve27 program while returning to sustainable surpluses in the years ahead.

	YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2025	YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2024
Revenue	**$22,769,204**	**$22,661,354**
Other income	$1,415,344	$1,179,009
Less: Direct costs	($1,513,343)	($1,544,158)
Less: Operating costs	($22,186,631)	($23,126,613)
Net result before exceptional items	**$484,574**	**($830,408)**
Evolve27 costs (incl Organisational costs in 2024)	($2,063,671)	($1,848,378)
Net Result after exceptional items	**($1,579,097)**	**($2,678,786)**
Current assets	$9,614,029	$12,260,397
Non-current assets	$7,212,130	$7,385,397
Current liabilities	($8,926,151)	($9,684,336)
Non-current liabilities	($368,906)	($851,259)
Net equity	**$7,531,102**	**$9,110,199**

Meet the Board

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. He has over 25 years of CEO experience 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. Nic's 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. He 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 assumed the Co-Chair role. He is also Chair of the Commercial Committee and a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee.

Fiona Jolly – Co-Chair

Fiona is a non-executive Director and former CEO and lawyer 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's executive career spans significant work on regulation reform with both the government and private sector. Fiona is Vice Chair of Goodwin Aged Care Services, Deputy Chair of the ACT Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority, Rural Financial Counselling Service (NSW), a Director of the Australian Institute of Building Surveyors and Freshmark Fresh Produce and is an elected Councillor for HCF. She has previously served as president of the YWCA of Australia and the chair of Australian Business Volunteers. Fiona was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and was appointed Co-Chair in March 2025. She is Chair of the Technology Committee and a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.

Samantha Challinor

Sam brings over 20 years of experience in senior accounting and leadership roles, excelling in financial, risk, information technology, and project management oversight and governance. Her extensive commercial experience spans the technology industry, for-purpose organisations, and public health government sectors. Notable positions include Interim CEO at Arthritis NSW, Director of 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). As an experienced Board Director and Committee Chair, she has proven expertise in governance, financial and risk management. Sam also serves as a director of the National Affordable Housing Consortium Group, RSL LifeCare and Sydney North Health Network. Additionally, she chairs the Finance, Audit & Risk Committees for these organisations. She holds a Bachelor of Business (Accountancy) from QUT and is a Fellow of CPA Australia and 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. Kat was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2020 and retired in January 2025.

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 Energex 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 and ASIC's Consultative Panel. She holds a BA, LLB and MBA and 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 retired in November 2024 after serving three terms.

Melissa King

Melissa is a practised CEO, senior executive and advisor, with experience spanning corporate, government, the arts, sport and not for profit sectors with organisations including Surf Life Saving Australia, Sydney Opera House, 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, she 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. She was appointed to the CHOICE Board in November 2023 and is a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee, the Commercial Committee and joined the Technology Committee in May 2025.

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 is a member of the Finance, Risk & Audit Committee and served on the Technology Committee in FY25.

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. She is committed to supporting and strengthening the role of the non-government sector in Australia and 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 became Chair of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee in May 2025, and is a member of the Campaigns Committee. Amanda was a member of the Commercial Committee until November 2024.

Anita Tang

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 statutory bodies and in NSW Parliamentary Committees. Anita has completed nonprofit leadership programs at Harvard and at Stanford and served on the Boards of numerous non-profits 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, was appointed Chair in 2020, and in 2021, became part of an inaugural new leadership model of Co-Chairing. Anita stepped down as Co-Chair in March 2025. She is Chair of the Campaigns Committee and a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee.

Chris Whitehead

Chris has a career background in financial services and information technology. He is a Director of IMB Bank, where he also chairs the Board Risk Committee. He also undertakes occasional consulting relating to strategy and governance. In addition to banking, his financial services experience includes executive and board roles in payments, general insurance, health insurance, financial advice and funds management. He has a deep appreciation of the importance of financial services in people's lives and the serious impact of poor or unsuitable products, services and advice. Chris has held senior roles at BankWest, Bank of Scotland and Credit Union Australia. In 2016 he was appointed as Managing Director and CEO of FINSIA, the leading professional body in financial services. Over the period of the Hayne Royal Commission FINSIA advocated for the professionalisation of banking, with individual accountability for competency and conduct in addition to that of licensees. FINSIA introduced Australia's first professional banking qualifications in 2018 and developed a range of ethics education and other professional development programs. Chris was elected to the CHOICE Board in November 2024. He is a member of the Governance, Culture & Ethics Committee and the Commercial Committee.