



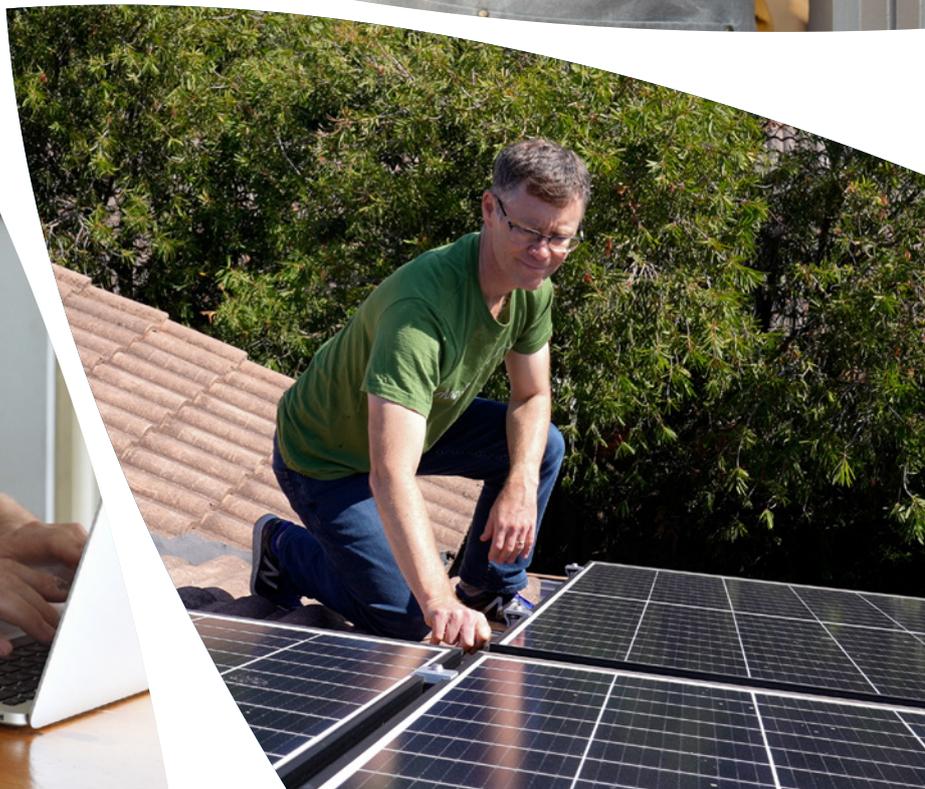
Grants



Backing bright ideas

Grants Program Annual Report Supplementary Information

2022-23





Introduction

The purpose of the Energy Consumers Australia Grants Program is to support advocates, organisations, and ideas that will advance the interests of household and small business consumers in the National Energy Market.

Our Grants Program is divided into the following categories:

- 1. Participation Grants** of up to \$15,000 to enable consumer engagement and advocacy in government, regulatory, or industry processes, or for small, targeted research projects.
- 2. Influence Grants** to support advocacy and research initiatives with a purpose of immediate influence on a specific and achievable goal on matters of material significance to residential and small business consumers.
- 3. Collaboration Grants** to support complex, multi-year advocacy projects, put forward by a group of organisations aiming to collaborate, with the aim to drive energy systems change.
- 4. Gill Owen Scholarship:** Dr Gill Owen was an inaugural ECA Board member and a tireless advocate for consumers. This scholarship is named in honour of her work and supports one individual each year to travel overseas to research innovative ideas and initiatives that are of relevance to the Australian energy market.

Gill Owen Scholarship





Grants

Backing bright ideas

This year, our Grants Program continued to focus on driving impact, both in terms of project selection and playing a supportive role as a funding partner.

Playing a proactive funding role

In 2022-23, we lifted our efforts to ensure applicants develop a clear Theory of Change as part of the application process to illustrate how they would set goals and deliver measurable long-term impact.

Our dedicated team worked closely with applicants to ensure projects were structured to demonstrate the relationship between the problem they are seeking to address, why their organisation is best placed to solve this problem, the activities they propose to undertake, and the impact they hope to achieve for consumers.

This proactive work has helped raise the quality of grant applications and their likelihood of approval by the Board, which has risen to 62 per cent from 52 per cent last financial year.

More high-quality projects funded

All this work means that in 2022-23, \$2.7 million in grant funding was approved for 24 projects – higher than the previous year’s \$2 million in grants approved across 23 projects.

This included three Collaboration Grants that we anticipate will provide important insights regarding dealing with complex, multidimensional energy market issues.

The projects we back continue to inform our own advocacy work, with data and insights forming the basis of briefings, submissions, and presentations to industry and government.



39
APPLICATIONS
REQUESTING
\$4.9m

In 2022-23, Energy Consumers Australia received 39 applications for new grants



24
GRANTS
APPROVED
TOTALLING
\$2.7m

24 grants were approved, totalling \$2.7M





Collaborating to future-proof Australian homes

The Renovation Pathways project, led by the Climateworks Centre at Monash University, is seeking to determine cost-effective ways to improve the energy performance standards of Australian homes.

Most properties making up Australia's housing stock were built before energy performance standards came into effect so for existing residential building stock to become zero carbon-aligned, renovations that include upgrades for improved energy performance, safer indoor temperatures, and lowered energy bills, will be essential.

The Renovation Pathways project, which is being conducted in collaboration with CSIRO and Strategy Policy Research seeks to fill information gaps and provide analysis and advice aimed at kickstarting a nationwide renovation boom targeted at energy performance upgrades.

Preliminary findings from the project released in April show that improving the performance of a home's 'thermal shell' – external walls, roofs, and floors – is a key part of the equation when it comes to energy and financial savings. It is also critical to reducing peak electricity demand in an electrified future.

There are also early indications that energy performance upgrades can pay for themselves through energy savings, with households potentially seeing energy consumption savings of 55 to 65 per cent on average from thermal shell improvements and efficient and electrified appliances.

Researchers are analysing real energy data from 1.2 million real homes to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of energy performance upgrades.

The project aims to deliver analysis that can provide insights for policy-makers and consumers living in a variety of home types and climate zones, including possible financial, energy, and emissions savings for each type of home across all climate zones.





Having an impact

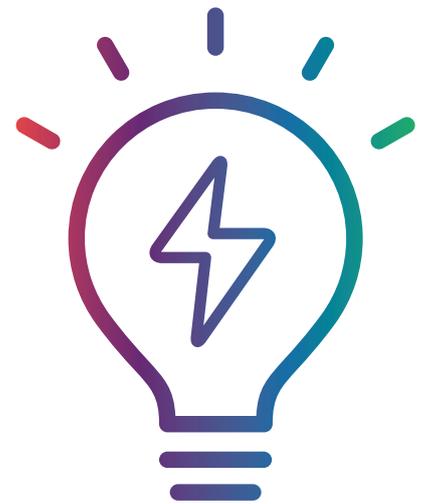
The impact of the work we support is evidenced in several recent policy decisions by government. ECA's first Collaboration Grant with Renew helped policymakers understand what actions households want government to take to help them improve the energy efficiency of their homes and has worked to counter industry resistance to reforms. The \$1 billion new Household Energy Upgrades Fund announced in the May Federal budget, which will support low-interest loans to upgrade the energy efficiency of low to middle-income Australian homes, is being informed by Climatework's research on the benefits – individual household as well as societal – of upgrading energy performance. Better Renting's citizen science projects, which recruit renters from across the country to track minute-by-minute temperature data in their homes, have continued to provide important advocacy for a cohort that risks getting left behind in the energy transition. This valuable work, supported by Energy Consumers Australia over multiple years, has helped to

encourage government action in the form of a commitment to improve the energy efficiency of social housing properties.

Inspiring our community

Our Foresighting Forum held in February allowed us to showcase the multi-year Digital Energy Futures project led by the Monash Emerging Technologies Research Lab at Monash University with support from Ausgrid, AusNet Services, and Energy Consumers Australia.

The two-day event, which is detailed further in the main section of this annual report, was attended by leaders, decision makers, and thinkers from across the energy industry, and served to generate considerable excitement about the Grants Program among potential applicants. The Foresighting Forum also led to the engagement of various organisations with the Grants Program. One grant application, approved by the Board in this financial year, was a direct response to a problem the organisation heard discussed at the Foresighting Forum.





Key themes 2022-23

This report is a supplement to our Annual Report and highlights the Grants Program outcomes in 2022-23. A full list of successful applicants – as well as grant outputs including reports, submissions, presentations, and other resources – is available on our website at energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/grants

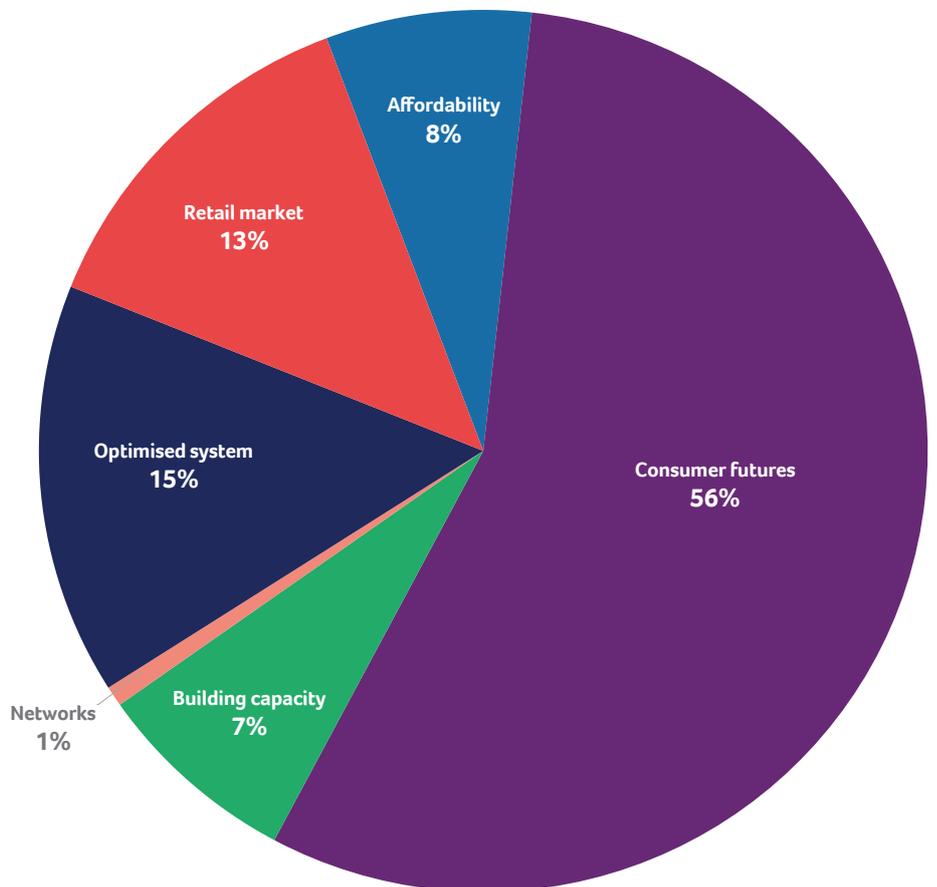
The following is a summary of the key themes of Grants Program funding this year and over the life of the scheme.

Affordability continued to be a priority throughout 2022-23 (see Figure 1), as did supporting work targeting disadvantaged and/or vulnerable

consumers, including low-income households, renters, and those facing cultural or language barriers to engaging with the energy market.

Grant funding totalling \$1.16 million – or 43 per cent of total grant approvals – was provided for projects with a specific focus on consumers facing vulnerability. We supported projects investigating how to build communities’ energy resilience in the face of increasingly common extreme weather events across Australia, as well as work to establish new connections between the energy market and the health system, to better identify and support people experiencing ongoing energy-and-health hardship.

Figure 1: Grant funding by theme





Grants to support vulnerable Australians

An estimated one-in-five Australians speak a language other than English at home. For this demographic – whether born here or overseas – language and cultural barriers can prevent them getting the information they need to make the most out of a complex and evolving energy market.

Through our Grants Program, we have sought to support and empower advocacy and research focusing on the distinctive needs and expectations of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities to ensure they are not disadvantaged in the energy transition.

The Voices for Power CALD Community Empowerment Training project, led by Sydney Community Forum, has so far trained over 100 community leaders to run information sessions in their own languages. More than 2500 people have attended these sessions where they have learned about navigating the energy market, improving the energy efficiency of their homes, and how to reduce their bills.

A second round of funding awarded in June 2023 will expand the number of community leaders who are ready and able to engage on energy transition issues and advocate for the needs of their communities, including with industry and key decision-makers.

Meanwhile, University of Wollongong researchers embarked on a study examining the energy experiences of international students, aiming to foster a better understanding of their energy behaviour and to create pathways to ensure they don't fall into energy poverty. More than 400,000 international students are currently studying in Australia, with research suggesting more than half have experienced poor living conditions in shared accommodation. The multi-method research project will incorporate an online survey targeting CALD students nationwide, with 45 households across three climate zones selected for further study. Energy audits will be completed at each home and temperature monitoring equipment will be installed. Participants will be invited to record their everyday energy practices via photography or video, using sketches, maps, or floor plans as part of a home ethnography exercise. A final report will seek to provide decision-makers with a better understanding of the unique challenges affecting this cohort and make targeted policy interventions to improve their situation as energy consumers.



Recognising the importance of research to build the knowledge and capacity required to influence policy development and industry practice, our Grants Program has continued to champion projects capable of demonstrating tangible impacts for consumers. In particular, we have prioritised projects that consider the big questions facing the energy system, such as the gas transition, the role of storage in the electrification of the energy system, mobility in the context of the move to electric vehicles, and how to ensure an inclusive energy transition.

This year, 44 per cent of grant funding went to projects with a national theme, consistent with our focus on issues that impact consumers across all jurisdictions (see Figure 2). However, we are mindful that individual states and territories face specific and unique energy-related issues and endeavour to support organisations with local research and advocacy projects. We are committed to increasing our outreach to state and territory-based stakeholders for future grants.

Figure 2: National and jurisdictional grant funding 2015 – 2023

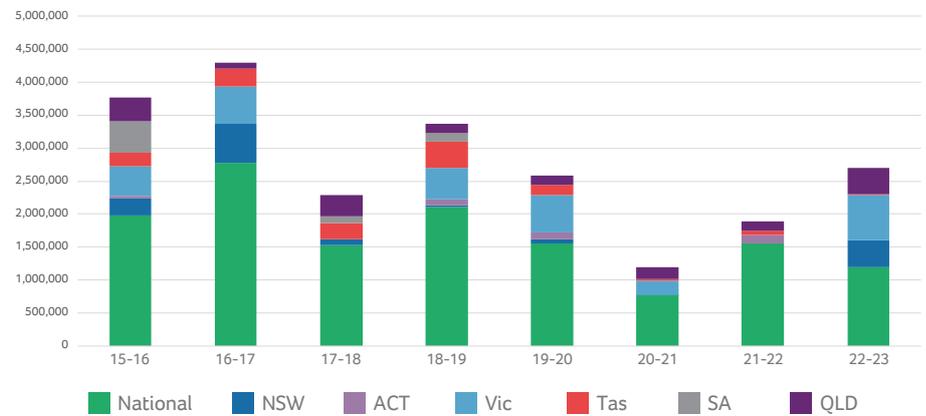
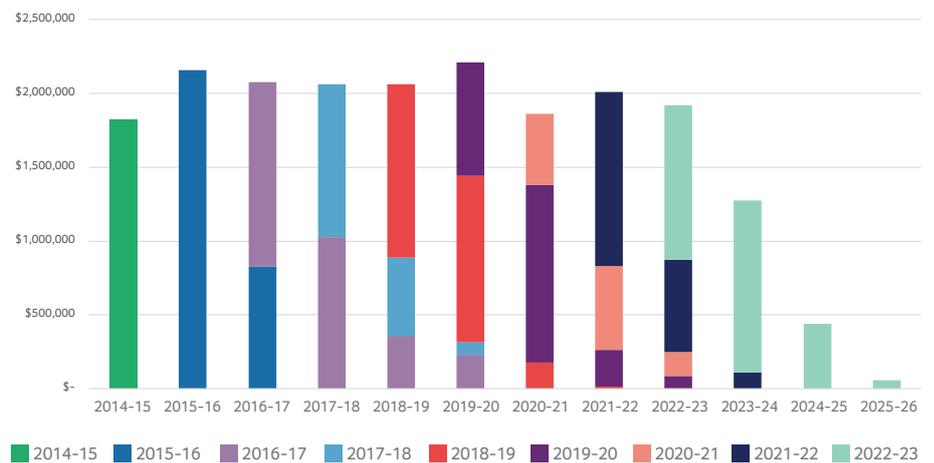


Figure 3: Annual Financial Commitments 2014 – 2026



Filling the evidence gap on farming and energy tariffs

Agriculture is one of the highest energy-intensive industries in Australia. Yet, relatively little is known about farmers' views and understanding of energy tariffs and energy savings.

The Queensland Farmers' Federation and the University of Queensland received grant funding to conduct research into the experiences of farmers when navigating, understanding, and switching electricity tariffs, and the impact of tariff reforms on agricultural operations.

The project involved collecting data on farms' electricity tariffs, connection points, patterns of use, and solar generation and interviews were conducted with 35 predominantly Queensland-based farmers involved in cotton, sugarcane, cereal crops, horticulture, livestock, and dairy operations. Quantitative and qualitative data was gathered and analysed separately.

A final report published in August 2022 highlighted the unique and complex circumstances facing many farmers, who, on average, operated five separate electricity accounts, with more than half subscribing to all three tariff suites (residential, small business, and large business). Further, their energy needs can fluctuate significantly throughout the year depending on rainfall and season.

The report also found farmers viewed tariffs as complex, difficult to understand, and were unconvinced the perceived small cost savings were worth considering tariff options. Not surprisingly, many farmers had not assessed their tariff options for over four years.

Since then, new resources and tools have been developed to raise awareness of both the issues and opportunities for farming operations and to educate farmers on how they can better select and manage electricity tariffs so that they can reduce their electricity costs.

The report has helped fill the evidence gap around farmers' energy needs and expectations, which will help to inform discussions with government. It has already supported the advocacy efforts of the Queensland Farmers Federation, which is pushing to increase the 100 MWh/year threshold for the large customer classification, which was found to be problematic and uneconomic for many farmers.





How to stop solar going to waste

A research project by the University of Queensland and Circular PV Alliance has highlighted new market opportunities for discarded solar panels in Australia.

Currently, decommissioned panels are sent to landfill. However, with the continued uptake of renewable energy forecast to generate 450,000 tonnes of solar PV panel “waste” by 2040, the issue needs to be addressed for a range of environmental, social, and economic reasons.

Supported by grant funding from Energy Consumers Australia, research partners assessed the market for used and surplus PV panels in a bid to understand potential customers for used PV panels and identify market or policy barriers to reusing, repurposing, and recycling these panels.

Their report, released at the Smart Energy Council Expo in May 2023, highlighted several potential and perceived barriers to PV panel reuse, including policy settings that provide financial credits only for new PV panels and that fail to incentivise quality in terms of mechanical strength and energy output performance. For consumers, perceived safety concerns and preferences for new technology have prevented the fledgling second-hand market from gaining traction.

According to the report, reclaimed PV panels offer low-cost, clean energy options for households and community energy projects. Even when not reusable, PV panels include valuable materials that can be recovered, such as silver, aluminum, silicon, glass, and copper.

The researchers have recommended the adoption of a consistent, national approach to product stewardship to give rise to the circular economy for PV panels and initiate the establishment of successful markets for used PV panels as well as mechanisms to incentivise participation and disincentivise non-participation in product stewardship.

Our Grants Program has continued to support multi-year engagements in recognition that many of our partners require flexible funding deals and certainty in order to commit to their work.

We continue to work with small business advocacy groups to ensure that their unique interests and circumstances are reflected in the Grants Program. Having recently bolstered our resources to help build engagement with the small business community, increasing the number of applicants from this sector will be a priority in the coming financial year (see Figure 4).

The past year also saw us strike a balance between advocacy and research projects (see Figure 5) as we bolstered the proportion of approved research grants to 46 per cent, up from 36 per cent in 2021-22. This was a promising development, showing that applicants have embraced and adapted to the new requirement for developing a Theory of Change to demonstrate the impact of the project for consumers.

A full list of our grants is available on our website.

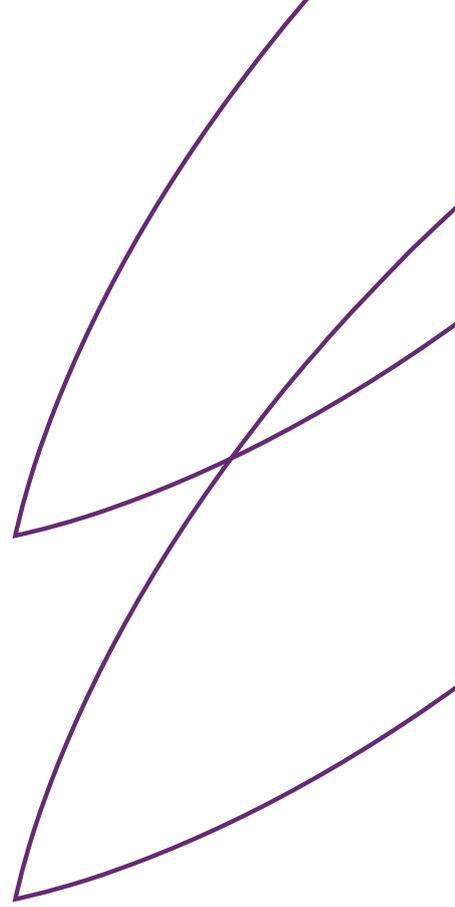


Figure 4: Trends – households and small businesses 2014 – 2023

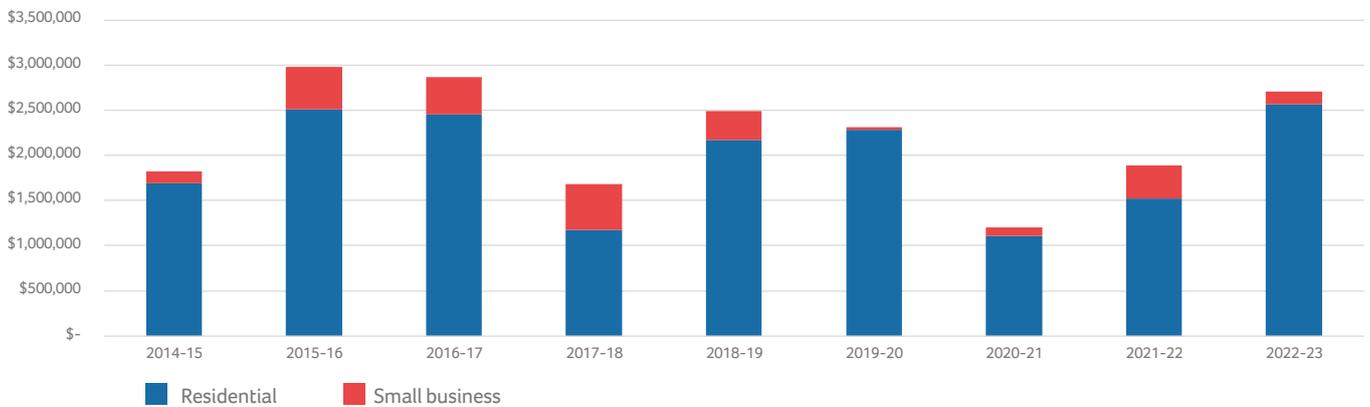
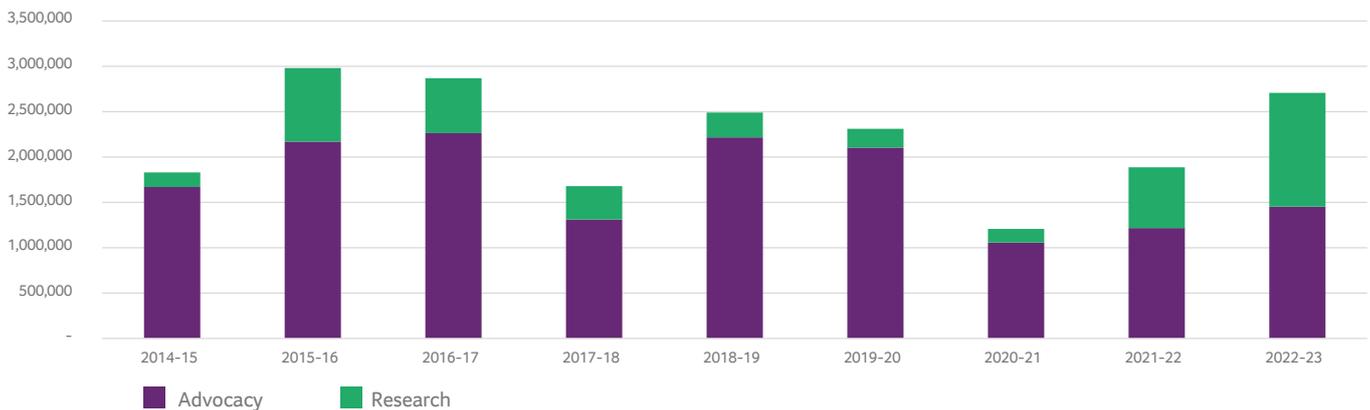
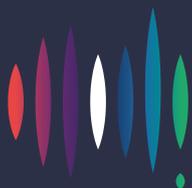


Figure 5: Trends – advocacy and research grants 2014 – 2023





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