

## PROGRESS REPORT

The Progress Report will be provided to the Board.

PROJECT OVERVIEW	
Grant recipient	ACTCOSS
Grant number	777
Project title	Energised consumers: Support for ACT low income domestic, non-government organisations and small business consumers to participate fully in consultations and decision making on energy issues
Date of progress report	30 November 2017
Reporting period	1 June-30 November 2017

## Key indicators of success

### Consumer voice

- Consistent, well-informed consumer groups with input over both short and longer term into energy policy at both ACT and national level.
- Development of pathways and approaches for **consumer engagement with the energy sector** by working with each group to identify concerns that reflect the unique issues faced by each group within ACT; and as a result increasing **ACT consumer participation in decision making** at all levels of the energy sector and providing means of **amplifying 'voice' of low income consumers, NGOs and small businesses** (long-term).
- Identification of **issues of importance** for low income, vulnerable and disadvantaged ACT consumers, NGOs and small businesses in relation to electricity and gas. We anticipate that price, choice, customer service quality, safety, reliability and security will be of importance to each group, however developing an evidence base from each of these groups will tell us if these or other issues are of greater concern for them. (both short and long term)
- Development of ACT based **consumer advocates' skills and knowledge** to facilitate consumers' involvement (short-term).

### Information to consumers

- Project will assist consumers to be **informed of existing cost and energy savings measures** including time-of-use tariffs and energy efficiency programs resulting in reduced prices and energy use (short-term).
- **Development of resources and tools** (including leveraging off tools developed in other jurisdictions) based on engaging with each of the groups above, specific to each group and relevant to the ACT as a unique jurisdiction (long-term).

### Policy input and ACT representation

- Development in conjunction with each group, **documented policy positions** reflective of identified needs and facilitation of opportunities to provide input into ACT specific energy issues, particularly via the Energy Consumer Reference Council (ECRC) and more broadly by the ACT Energy Policy Officer representing these views at a territory and national level (long-term).
- **Participation in national and regulatory consumer bodies** to represent the views of ACT consumers; to increase ACT wide learning from these processes, and to inform and leverage relevant expertise and resources, including in human service, environmental and other civil society organisations, to enhance involvement in ACT specific decision-making processes (long-term).

**PROJECT OUTCOMES – changes/impacts of your activities; what difference have your activities made?**

Proposed outcomes	Actual outcomes	Did you meet your key success indicators?
<p>1. A clear advocacy agenda is developed, that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. identifies the key energy issues that advocacy will be directed to</li> <li>b. outlines an advocacy strategy and</li> <li>c. specifies the preferred and achievable advocacy outcomes</li> </ul> <p>in respect of low income, small business and community sector consumers in the ACT</p>	<p>An advocacy agenda is being pursued which concentrates on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. actively advocating for consideration of the most vulnerable, particularly renters and public housing residents in policy relating to energy costs and energy efficiency measures, particularly drawing attention to impact of soaring prices on the most vulnerable</li> <li>. highlighting that policies to reduce emissions need to be in the interests of low income consumers and consumers who are vulnerable as climate change has most impact on these groups.</li> <li>. providing input to enquiries which focuses on the issues of the target group</li> <li>. undertaking representations to ACT Government on identified issues that affect the target group (eg input to ACTEWAGL and ACT Government on consumer info on Power of Choice implementation)</li> <li>. Contributing advice to ACT Govt on the Climate Change Mitigation Action Plan (member of Ministerial Advisory Group)</li> </ul> <p>Specific issues that have been identified for advocacy are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• energy hardship extends beyond concession holders to other low income households</li> <li>• the consideration of measures to ensure renters</li> </ul>	<p>These actions have contributed to the key success indicators relevant to <b>Policy input and ACT representation</b></p> <p><u>Barriers to meeting success indicators</u></p> <p>While anecdotally electricity affordability is hurting small business, it has been difficult to engage with this sector with our small business representative reporting that other issues figure more highly for small business. There has been limited interaction with the community sector to identify issues. They are more ready to engage re their clients issues. We were able to generate feedback to the ACT Government on the power of Choice FAQ from community organization customers.</p>

	<p>have access to energy efficient housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the lack of access of residents in embedded networks such as caravan parks to concessions.</li> <li>• The impact of increases in electricity and gas prices of around 18-19 per cent on the most vulnerable.</li> </ul> <p>The advocacy agenda has been pursued by input to submissions and by face-to-face meetings with the ACT Government and ActewAGL Retail, participating in consultations with ActewAGL Distribution, responding to requests for input from ACT Government and by writing to the ACT Government on the embedded network customer concessions issue.</p>	
2. The nature and extent of identified key energy concerns and issues in the ACT is supported by an evidence base.	<p>Continued to compile ACT statistics relating to ACT energy consumers including number of users, numbers of concession holders, rates of disconnection, numbers receiving hardship assistance and numbers receiving ACAT Energy and Water hardship assistance – statistics which inform policy.</p> <p>Recruited a new member for the Consumer reference group who will represent the issues of renters, an issue which is consistently being raised from energy consumer representatives in other states. The Consumer Reference Group currently has three members; we are aiming for around 10</p>	These actions contribute to the key success indicators related to <b>Information to consumers</b> and <b>Policy input and ACT representation</b> and <b>Consumer voice</b>
3. The ACT Energy Consumers Policy Consortium, which includes ACTCOSS, is recognized as an authority on the impact of energy policy and regulation on low income, small	<p>The profile of the ACT Energy Policy Consortium and the Energised Consumers Project Officer has grown as is evidenced by the approaches made by the ACT Government and ActewAGL seeking input to their processes, and by the adoption of recommendations put forward.</p>	<p>These actions have contributed to the key success indicators relevant to <b>Policy input and ACT representation</b></p> <p>An example of the Consortium being seen as a credible authority is that recommendations</p>

<p>business and community sector consumers in the ACT</p>	<p>Also attending key roundtables and meeting has enabled contacts to be established with several organisations to enable building of working relationships over time and understanding key common areas of interest.</p> <p>The ACT Government and ActewAGL have approached ACTCOSS and other members of the Consortium on a number of occasions to contribute to policy decisions and to identify low income consumers to participate in surveys and consultations. This included being invited to join the Ministerial Advisory Group on Climate CHAnge mitigation Action plan 2, meetings to discuss broadening of the client group for the Household Priority Target for the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme , attending a meeting with the ACT Minister to discuss energy affordability issues and program approaches, attending and organizing a consumer reference group member to attend consultations with ActewAGL Distribution on the energy network proce determination for 2019-2024 and providing input to Frequently Asked Questions for the Power of Choice reforms.</p> <p>The profile of the Consortium has been raised by continuing to make submissions on behalf of the Consortium – as listed in activities and outputs - to a range of enquiries.</p>	<p>in our submission to the ACT Govt Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme discussion paper have been adopted with the extension of the eligibility criteria for the Priority Household Target group from January 1 2018. New eligible classes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three new concession types (Commonwealth seniors health care cards, low income health care cards and disability support pensions);</li> <li>• people accessing a retailer financial hardship program and people referred to retailers by specified community organisations and ACAT; and</li> <li>• people living in four types of priority dwelling (Housing ACT, not for profit community and aged care facilities and disability housing services). Managers of these dwellings can send a list of tenanted properties to the Tier 1 retailer confirming that they are tenanted priority dwellings, and no other identification will be needed.</li> </ul>
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<b>PROJECT OUTPUTS – what tangible results has your project produced?</b>		
<b>Proposed outputs</b>	<b>Actual activities and outputs</b>	<b>Explanation for any variation</b>
1. Development and documentation of the issues and energy policy positions for advocacy on behalf of priority household consumers, non-government organization and small businesses in the ACT	The submissions and correspondence in this reporting period are outlined in the lists below and copies have been provided as attachments	
2. Development of an evidence base to support advocacy on behalf of priority household consumers, non-government organization and small businesses in the ACT	Continued to assemble data at national and ACT level. Began compiling ACT statistics from AER site and publications relating to ACT energy consumers including number of users, numbers of concession holders, rates of disconnection, numbers receiving hardship assistance and also obtained numbers receiving ACAT Energy and Water hardship assistance from ACAT. We plan to publish this data to enable others to access it to increase their capacity to be part of advocacy effort. Reflected findings from research re energy price rises etc into submissions. Research into issues shows that over time there has been variability and no clear trend in data relating to numbers receiving hardship and size of debt.	
3. Development of strategies to improve consumer engagement by working with those groups in output (1) above predominantly in ACT Government-specific policy and regulatory processes, as well as relevant national policy and regulatory processes	The Consortium provides an accessible mechanism for industry and government to access consumer perspectives and tap into representatives from small business and community sector. As a result of consultation with the Consortium ActewAGL has now improved its hardship assistance with a dedicated phone line for those experiencing difficulty paying their accounts, and has introduced a one off \$100 Energy Support voucher. They are also funding Care Inc. to deliver an Energy Support Voucher Program which provides information on energy	

	<p>and information workshops in addition to providing the voucher.</p> <p>The ACT Government community engagement strategy on the Climate Change Mitigation Action plan 2 has been influenced by Consortium input via the Ministerial Advisory Group</p>	
<p>4. Participate in various energy policy, programs and regulatory processes including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC)'s annual retail electricity price determination</li> <li>• The Australian Energy Regulator's ACT electricity and gas network determinations and associated regulatory processes such as approval of ACT tariffs and jurisdictional costs</li> <li>• The ACT Government's energy policy and program consultation and development processes, such as but not limited to the annual review of priority household target for the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme</li> <li>• Raising Awareness among ACTCOSS member organisations and individuals of the ACT Government energy concessions and energy programs that encourage the efficient use of</li> </ul>	<p>Attended ActewAGL Energy Consumer Reference Council meetings as outlined in engagements.</p> <p>Lodged a number of submissions on behalf of Energy Policy Consortium as listed in Attachments.</p> <p>Participated and contributed to various issues raised in ACOSS Climate &amp; Energy Policy Network Meeting teleconferences.</p> <p>Worked with ActewAGL Distribution re input to upcoming AER Electricity Price Determination and re questionnaire for consultations. On basis of input ActewAGL Distribution organized for consumers participating in the Energy Support Voucher Program to do the consultation survey to ensure vulnerable consumers voices were heard.</p> <p>Including updates on Power of Choice reforms and national energy policy decisions in the ACTCOSS e-newsletter that is distributed every week to 500 recipients</p> <p>Promoting education messages from ACT Government energy efficiency improvement and concessions programs as well as Industry hardship assistance programs via the ACTCOSS e-newsletter that is distributed every week to 500 recipients.</p> <p>Promoting publications from Energy Consumers Australia and regulator on opportunities for and research relevant to consumer issues in the ACTCOSS e-newsletter that is distributed every week to 500 recipients</p>	

energy and assist ACT consumers, particularly priority households, to access information about services and programs that assist with reducing energy cost		
5. Development of key networks, including advocacy and community networks, as well as energy industry, departmental and government contacts	See engagement table below	
<b>Focus of work in Jan-Jun 2018</b>	<p>Maintaining consumer engagement regarding implementation of the Power of Choice reforms</p> <p>Further development of the ACT Climate Change Action Plan 2</p> <p>Participate in consultations by AER on draft determinations for electricity network</p> <p>Input to and feedback on ACT position on COAG consideration of the National Energy Guarantee</p> <p>Monitoring price changes and impacts in ACT low income households</p> <p>Growing consumer self-advocacy capacity</p>	

## List of attachments

– list copies of reports, submissions, media releases etc. produced through the reporting period in relation to this project

Date	Attachment
29 June 2017	Lodged Submission to ACCC Inquiry into Retail Electricity Supply And Pricing
17 July 2017	Lodged Submission to Australian Energy Regulator re Access to Dispute Resolution Services for Exempt Customers Issues Paper.
26 July 2017	Made submission in response to ACT Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme Proposed Updates to Residential Energy Saving Activities Consultation Paper
1 August 2017	Spoke to Joel Dignam, Comfy Homes Alliance who represents the interests of renters on energy matters and provided him with a link to the paper Queensland Council of Social Services published in June – recruited him for Consumer Reference Group.
2 August 2017	Sent communique re three months work to Consortium and consultation group members.
16 August 2017	Consulted Consortium and provided input to ACT Govt proposed change to ACAT energy and water compensation amount
22 August 2017	Letter sent to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate regarding lack of access to concessions for caravan park residents
1 November 2017	Lodged Submission to AER's Customer Price Information Issues Paper September 2017
7 November 2017	Provided comments on Power of Choice Frequently Asked Questions to go on ACT Government website.
8 November	Provided briefing notes to Carmel Franklin, Care Inc. for a meeting with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate re a Solar for Low Income Program, an expansion of Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme to enable subsidized solar panels for priority households. Outlined issues with the problematic Repayment Plan contract that ActewAgl Retail has for purchasing Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme Appliances. Carmel Franklin used these notes to outline desirable elements for repayment plans for successful contractor.

<b>List of engagements during this reporting period</b> <b>– list any significant engagements, phone calls, meetings etc. that you have had in relation to this project</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
1 June 2017	Met (with Susan Helyar) with Ayesha Razzaq, General Manager, Retail ActewAGL to discuss hardship and Power of Choice issues
7 June 2017	Undertook AEMO training – The National Electricity Market Fundamentals (NEM) – this was a pilot course and we also had a feedback session as part of the training.
14 June 2017	Attended a meeting with Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate re Proposal to expand the EEIS Priority Household Group
20 June 2017	Participated in AER Customer Consultative Group teleconference
21 June 2017	Attended ActewAGL Energy Consumer Reference Council Meeting #18
22-23 June	Attended National Consumer Roundtable on Energy, Adelaide
26 June	At request of ActewAGL as a member of ECRC registered to trial the ActewAGL Customer portal which aims to improve information available to customers on usage.
27 June 2017	Met with Ian MacAuley ( a Care Inc Board Member and Adjunct Lecturer in Public Sector Finance at the University of Canberra and a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Development) who has published articles re the energy market) to discuss energy issues.
26-29 June 2017	Sought participants for ActewAGL Survey on 'Customer feedback and validation to improve how we engage. ' and provided 3 names to ActewAGL
4 July 2017	Convened Attended ACT Energy Consumers Policy Consortium Meeting
11 July 2017	Attended teleconference Briefing on AEMC's system security work program
18 July 2017	Attended AER Customer Consultative Group meeting
19 July 2017	Attended ActewAGL Consultations on Priorities for the ACT Electricity Network – The ACTEWAGL Distribution Electricity Network 2019-24 Five Year Plan. Organised for Shelley Clarke, member of the ACT Consumer Consultation Group for Energy Matters t also attend.

26 July 2017	Provided Input to ACOSS letter to Minister Josh Frydenberg, MP, Minister for Environment and Energy
26 July and early August 2017	Met with Care Inc. Community Development and Education Officers to discuss energy information to provide to participants in the Energy Support Voucher Program and forwarded links for relevant sites, such as Energy Made Easy, and information.
26 July 2017	Participated in ACOSS Climate & Energy Policy Network Meeting teleconference
July, August 2017	Spoke to both the Manager and a representative of residents at Southside Village Motor Park regarding lack of access to concessions due to the park being an embedded network, researched approach of other States and sent letter to Chief Minister AC requesting that access be give to concessions for residents of Embedded Networks
8 August 2017	Provided input to ECA re actions for immediate relief and support regarding price rises and how retailers can strengthen hardship programs.
8 August 2017	Met with Care Community Development and Education staff and revised the consultation group proposal for them to use in recruiting members for the consultation group.
9 August 2017	Attended ActewAGL Energy Consumer Reference Council Meeting #19
6 August 2017	Sent communication to ACT Govt that the Consortium agreed with their proposed change to the ACAT energy and water compensation amount payable for complaints.
20 September 2017	Attended COSS briefing session at the ACCC prior to release of their report on energy prices
11 October 2017	Sent communication to consortium re letter from ACOSS to Minister Frydenberg and whether they were happy to be signatories and to send letter to ACT Government
16 October 2017	Attended briefing by AER on new Power of Choice metering changes
18 October 2017	ACOSS Climate and Energy Policy Network Teleconference
18 October 2017	Met with Craig Memery PIAC re areas may be able to work in collaboration with New South Wales.
18 October 2017	Attended Energy Consumers Australia Board Stakeholder Forum and launch of report on 'Household Energy Efficiency'
25 October 2017	Meeting with Minister Rattenbury, also attended by other community organisations, re Energy Affordability for vulnerable households

26 October 2017	ACOSS Climate and Energy Policy Network Teleconference
27 October 2017	Attended Climate Change mitigation Action Plan Ministerial Advisory Council
31 October 2017	AEMC Briefing on National Energy Guarantee
7 November 2017	Provided comments on Power of Choice Frequently Asked Questions to go on ACT Government website.
14 November 2017	Met with Minister Rattenbury and community stakeholders re Power of Choice changes
16 November 2017	Attended Climate Change mitigation Action Plan Ministerial Advisory Council
21 November 2017	AER CCG Meeting
23-24 November 2017	Attended National Consumer Roundtable on Energy, Brisbane
<b>Do you have any comments or feedback about, or relating to, this project?</b>	<p>Much of the project time is taken up working on Submissions to key enquiries and providing input to ACT Government energy initiatives. The future work plan will continue with this in the coming months. Input will continue on the Electricity Networks Price Determination 2019-24, with the focus moving from input to ActewAGL to providing input to the Australian Energy Regulator.</p> <p>The collation of data on local customer needs and experiences has been good foundation work.</p> <p>We have begun tapping into the financial counselling service community education programs to extend the reach of our consumer information messages and to engage with vulnerable customers.</p> <p>We know we need to increase our focus on consumer voice and development of consumer resources.</p> <p>There will be ongoing participation in ActewAGL's Energy Consumer Reference Council and forums re the ACTs Climate Strategy to Zero 2050.</p> <p>The project officer was on leave for an extended period and some areas continue to need progressing such as exploring community education models in Queensland and South Australia with view to whether they could be adapted to ACT, and preparing a key Statistics Paper – (ABS releases in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of year include Household Expenditure Survey). The funding for only two days places significant constraints on how much can be achieved. There will also be further efforts to engage members of the Consumer Reference Group, noting that this is a slow process.</p> <p>However in the first year of the project significant progress has been made in developing links into ACT agencies and becoming an integral part of the consultation processes for energy initiatives.</p>