



OPERATING EXPENDITURE

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

PAL BUS 9.02 – PUBLIC
2026–31 REGULATORY PROPOSAL

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1. Overview

Energy care

\$2.2M

In-person energy literacy programs and a web-based hub to provide customers with bill interpretation and enhanced understanding of energy consumption.



Community energy fund

\$5.3M

Enhancing inclusiveness and supporting customers towards an equitable energy transition.



Energy advisory services

\$2.3M

Expert guidance to assist communities in building their own energy programs.



Vulnerable customer assistance program

\$6.5M



First Peoples program

\$10.4M

Enhancing First Peoples energy access through programs that support resilience, help vulnerable customers, support renewable energy projects and provide tailored energy-related information.



Targeted at assisting customers and communities to transition away from gas-based appliances. Financial assistance for fuse replacement and upgrades to support electrification.

2. Background

2.1 Customer engagement

We strive to provide customers with an affordable, safe, and reliable energy service that continuously adapts to meet their evolving needs. To understand and keep pace with these changing needs, we have established various mechanisms to capture their insights, feedback, and opportunities for improvement.

Through direct engagement with customers and stakeholders and through our Customer Advisory Panel (CAP) we have been able to identify what is most important to our customers. We have gained insight into the energy transition, and their expectations of the network facilitating this. We have been able to gauge views on important customer-related topics such as energy equity, energy poverty, and customer values.

These insights and views have helped us shape new actions to improve our customer' experience and outcomes.

Through our engagement journey we have:

- completed the innovative Future Home Demand Project with Monash University exploring the interaction of energy use and everyday life trends
- undertaken joint distributor engagements with welfare agencies aimed at determining how Victorian electricity distributors can best support customers experiencing vulnerability
- completed a study on customers experiencing vulnerability identifying their priorities and concerns
- updated our customer values analysis framework to better understand their willingness to pay for network improvements they value
- sought to validate our draft proposal's value for our customers.

These insights have demonstrated the need for barriers to participation in the energy transition be dismantled and equal access be provided to all customers at an affordable price. Customers have shown they will pay for improvements that benefit others experiencing vulnerability or those 'worst served' under our current network arrangements.

We understand that it is critical we develop a customer assistance package that directly responds to the feedback we have received and delivers on the above expectations. This is particularly true for people at risk of experiencing energy poverty or experiencing vulnerable circumstances.

2.2 First Peoples engagement

Our network is located across 20 First Peoples language groups, with our 14 offices and depots located on the traditional lands of the:

- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung (Melbourne CBD)
- Bunurong and Boon Wurrung (Brooklyn)
- Wadawurrung (Ballarat and Geelong)
- Dja Dja Wurrung Clans (Bendigo and Maryborough)
- Yorta Yorta Nations (Cobram, Echuca and Shepparton)
- Eastern Maar (Colac)
- Latji Latji (Mildura)
- Wotjobaluk (Horsham)

- Taungurung (Kyneton)
- Eastern Maar and Gunditjmara (Warrnambool)

Powercor is home to approximately 28,185 First Peoples customers, 11 Registered Aboriginal Parties, and 18 Co-operatives and Gathering Places. Given our network footprint across First Peoples Countries, we have established dedicated roles within our business to drive First Peoples engagement including the establishment of a First Peoples Advisory Committee (FPAC) and the development of our business' first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The establishment of our RAP was an important milestone for empowering and increasing the self-determination of Victoria's First Peoples communities. This is achieved through mutually beneficial partnerships through training, employment, and business opportunities.

In March 2023, our First Peoples team facilitated a First Peoples regulatory reset workshop with 38 community members in partnership with Rumbalara. Due to the engagement occurring shortly after the 2022 Shepparton floods, we heard about the devastation, limited access to energy and the communities experience with Powercor at the time. First Peoples also expressed that reliability, affordability and equity was key to addressing the widening energy equity gap.



In June 2023 we established FPAC, comprising 5 community members (currently 4) from across our network. The Chair of the FPAC also participates on the CAP. FPAC has met 7 times and has provided feedback and input into the First Peoples program detailed below. FPAC have endorsed the recommendations included in the First Peoples program.

In addition, we have also engaged with 3 Registered Aboriginal Parties and 2 community organisations on their energy related priorities. We also attended the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy roundtable where we heard the need for capacity building including energy literacy and First Peoples wanting to build, own and maintain renewable energy projects.

Throughout the current regulatory period we have continuously engaged with First Peoples to better understand their lived experience with our network and to identify their energy related issues and priorities through community events and surveys. In September and October 2024, to better understand First Peoples energy related priorities, we attended the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association's Football and Netball Carnival.



At the carnival we engaged 110 First Peoples on the regulatory reset, with 75 respondents residing in the Powercor network. In this engagement, we tested the initiatives that we had heard from the Yorta Yorta engagement, what we had heard from Registered Aboriginal Parties and Community organisations and FPAC feedback on programs that are a priority for First Nation's communities. We heard that affordability was key, and concerns expressed at the widening energy equity gap due to cost-of-living increases. Community members stressed the inaccessibility of new energy appliances, the impacts that climate emergencies are having on communities and the need to help Elders access heating and cooling. We also conducted an online survey to gain further insights into the programs being proposed.

The First Peoples priorities identified are summarised below.

TABLE 1 FIRST PEOPLES CUSTOMER PRIORITIES

FIRST PEOPLES PRIORITY	SENTIMENTS AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT
<p>Access to energy is a human right</p>	<p>First Peoples have not been afforded the same generational wealth as the wider population. The health and equity gaps continue to widen.</p> <p><i>“Everyone is struggling, and we are all trying to support our families and mob.”</i></p> <p>Yorta Yorta community member, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report</p> <p>Elders within First Peoples communities are not using their heating or cooling, leading to knowledge holders becoming severely unwell.</p>
<p>Energy literacy</p>	<p>First Peoples noted the importance of easy to read, independent and unbiased energy literacy resources. First People want information on how to read electricity bills, energy efficiency, and information on renewable energy.</p> <p><i>“No one teaches you this stuff.”</i></p> <p>Yorta Yorta community member, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report</p>
<p>Renewables</p>	<p>First Peoples responsibilities to care and protect Country go hand-in-hand with the energy transition. First Peoples recommended that Powercor assist with connecting and providing information on what is/isn't possible for the renewable energy project. It was requested that Powercor provide an investment fund for renewable energy projects. First Peoples also shared the sentiment of wanting funding to undertake feasibility studies, build, own or co-invest in renewable energy projects. However, the lack of funding and support was noted as frustrating.</p> <p><i>“We expected solar panels to generate income for our community.”</i></p> <p>Yorta Yorta community member, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report</p>
<p>Resilience</p>	<p>First Peoples communities such as Mooroopna and Shepparton are in flood prone areas. The community wanted Powercor to establish mitigation plans to prevent outages occurring during floods and support their community centres accessing diesel generators when emergencies occur.</p>
<p>First Peoples liaison</p>	<p>First Peoples communities shared sentiment that Powercor should have First Peoples liaison officers to sit with communities for any programs we run and when emergencies occur.</p>
<p>Energy upgrades</p>	<p>First Peoples stated they incur additional costs operating older electrical appliances. First Peoples highlighted the financial barriers of replacing the appliances, sometimes needing to borrow funds from family or someone in the community.</p>

3. Our customer assistance package

Our customer assistance package combines several programs to improve service to customers experiencing vulnerability. We are not seeking to define or limit what is considered vulnerable as we recognise vulnerability can differ by individual. Therefore, we have designed our customer package to ensure customers experiencing vulnerability have access to the tools and information they need to minimise their exposure to energy poverty.

Our customer assistance package focuses on the strength and longer-term relationship with our customers. While customers can change retailers frequently, our network is the constant element of their energy supply.

Throughout our engagement, customers and customer-representative organisations were critical of reliance on retailers to deliver customer vulnerability services. Despite low awareness of networks, customers trusted networks to provide independent information about the energy transition, particularly compared with retailers¹.

[Powercor] have a vested interest rather than just a purely financial interest like the retailers do...The retailers are there to tell you whatever they want to tell you to make money. The distributor wants to keep you long term regardless of which retailer you're [with] so I think they've got more interest in teaching us all."

Medically vulnerable, regional / rural customer, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances

3.1 Energy care

Energy care is a community outreach program providing information/training sessions to community support workers and developing targeted communications and outreach programs for approximately 30,000 customers over the next 5 years, who may be at risk of vulnerability. The initiative supports customers accessing centralised, independent and accurate information.

Customers have told us they want education relating to supply charges, consumption behaviour and impacts of the energy transition²³. Customers are concerned about their ability to pay energy bills, many felt that education was a solution to this⁴. While some information is provided retailers, there is a prevalence of misinformation or promotional bias of literature about the energy transition⁵.

Energy care improves electricity education through in-person literacy programs involving interpretation of electricity bills, retail plans and understand energy consumption and energy-efficient practices. The in-person programs will be conducted annually.

In addition, Energy Care will provide training sessions with community support workers from partnership agencies. We will develop targeted communications for these sessions able to be used by participating agencies. The partnership approach is preferred given the expertise welfare agencies have working with their clients.

¹ Forethought, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances, February 2024, p. 9.

² Forethought, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances, February 2024, p. 9.

³ Forethought, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Community Summary Report, December 2022, p. 9.

⁴ Forethought, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Powercor Summary Report, December 2022, p. 13.

⁵ RPS, Customer Vulnerability Roundtable: outcomes report, October 2023, p. 6.

Training sessions will occur 3 times a year and welfare agencies will have access to a web-based hub. The web-based hub will provide welfare agencies with quick and easy access to all energy support programs, updates and connection to other hub members and network staff.

3.2 Community energy fund

The Community energy fund (Fund) supports a variety of initiatives aimed at improving inclusiveness and a more equitable energy transition. The Fund does this by improving access to renewable energy resources for all customers and communities across the network. This could include initiatives such as community batteries and solar hubs. The Fund will be allocated based on proposals presented to, and approved by, our CAP and FPAC for First People related applications. The Fund is conservatively estimated to support 6 projects annually. The first round of the funding applications is expected to open October 2026. Any funds not awarded will be returned to customers.

An equitable energy transition was identified as important early in our engagement journey, customers wanted to ensure equal access to future technologies including renewables. This theme continued to resonate with a growing number of customers citing financial and residential barriers to their participation in the energy transition, with these customers expressing a fear of being 'left behind'⁶. Customers sighted upfront costs as the biggest challenge to uptake, with customers suggesting subsidised costs to lower-income houses as an option to make the technology more broadly available⁷.

Community energy projects were seen as a key solution to create an equitable outcome for customers in vulnerable circumstances, unable to participate in the transition, with customers noting the significant cost barriers to implementing these projects⁸.

3.3 Vulnerable customer assistance program

The vulnerable customer assistance program (Program) is targeted at supporting customers and communities to transition away from gas. The program will do this through providing reduced fees for customers experiencing vulnerability requiring fuse or phase upgrades to support greater electrification at their premise.

Customers experiencing vulnerable circumstances supported the energy transition but were concerned who would pay for their transition from gas to electricity⁹. Electrification will challenge customers already experiencing vulnerability with limited financial resources¹⁰.

"What's it going to cost us when we don't have a choice?...If things change radically, we need to be prepared and financially prepared."

Disability, Regional / Rural customer, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances

⁶ Forethought, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances, February 2024, p. 23.

⁷ Forethought, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Powercor Summary Report, December 2022, p. 13.

⁸ Forethought, Deep and Narrow Engagement: Energy Transition Summit, January 2024, p. 19.

⁹ Forethought, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances, February 2024, p. 26.

¹⁰ RPS, Customer vulnerability roundtable outcomes report, October 2023, p. 7.

There was a concern amongst these customers that the transition was happening around them and concern over what would happen if they could not afford to make changes¹¹. Although government incentives, such as Victorian Energy Upgrades for homes¹², exist for upgrading energy-efficient appliances, they do not address network costs. Often customers transition away from gas cannot occur in the absence of installation of a larger fuse at their premise or a requirement to move from single to three phase supply. Powercor is uniquely positioned to assist in managing these network related electrification costs. We expect that the program will be able to assist at least 3,000 customers over the next 5 years, depending on the discount applied to the fixed charge.

Our CAP has highlighted the need for greater understanding of vulnerability in our network¹³. They consider efficient and effective delivery of vulnerable customer programs can only be achieved if there is robust vulnerability strategy in place that targets where programs can maximise their benefit. We therefore intend to work in conjunction with CAP on a network wide vulnerability strategy that will guide our implementation and operational strategies and ensure transparency and accountability on the operation of all vulnerability-based programs.

3.4 Energy advisory service

The energy advisory service is a data advisory program, administrated through our existing New Energy Services team and Electricity Network experts, that will offer bespoke data requests and advice on a range of community requests. Communities, First People organisations, welfare agencies and other institutions will have the ability to submit a bespoke request where fees are discounted or waived.

Today we receive many bespoke requests from councils, community groups and First People organisations. These requests often involve data and interpretation that requires resourcing from the network that we cannot offer without applying approved quoted service charges. These charges can be significant, and for many not-for-profit organisations, deter them exploring prefeasibility works that can be essential for accessing government supported grants and funding. Customers stressed the desire for greater data accessibility to support community level projects¹⁴. To establish these projects, customers must interpret the data, which is complex and for many users beyond their grasp¹⁵. We believe the network will be positioned to assist in this space and that is reflected both in customer sentiment and the number of bespoke requests we receive today.

Whilst it is difficult to estimate the number of customers who may benefit from this service, we have conservatively estimated around 17,000 over the next regulatory depending on the size and discounts offered. Any funding not utilised will again be returned to customers.

3.5 Endorsements

Following publication of our draft proposal, we incorporated feedback received from the test and validate engagement program, the CAP and FPAC. The proposed amendments to the original customer assistance package were then tested with the CAP, and changes to the First People elements tested with FPAC. FPAC endorsed the amendments proposed for the First People elements

¹¹ Forethought, Engagement Program with Customers Experiencing Vulnerable Circumstances, February 2024, p. 26.

¹² Department of Energy Environment and Climate Action 2024, Victorian Energy Upgrades for homes, Victorian state government website, accessed December 2024.

¹³ Customer Customer Advisory Panel: meeting 2, April 2023, p. 3.

¹⁴ Forethought, Test and Validate: roundtables, November 2024, p. 13.

¹⁵ RPS, Customer Vulnerability Roundtable: outcomes report, October 2023, p. 6.

and the CAP endorsed the remaining changes. Both CAP and FPAC articulated that appropriate governance and evaluation of the programs was a key requirement for successful program delivery.

3.6 Accountability

Customers, CAP and FPAC emphasised the need for an evaluation framework.

“If the programs go ahead, we want to see clear reporting back with quantitative outcomes about the results of these initiatives.”

Powercor customer, Test and validate: roundtables.

Therefore, it is our intention to work with customers, CAP and FPAC to develop an evaluation framework to account and assess each programs' performance, develop its governance and ensure the sharing of knowledge gained. The evaluation framework will guide the programs and ensure they remain agile and responsive to customer needs.

3.7 Benefit to customers

We conservatively estimate the entire reach of the Customer Assistance Package will include over 65,000 customers. Whilst we do not go into detail here the assumptions underlying this estimate, have been presented and reviewed by the CAP.

It should however be noted the number of customers assisted will vary depending on the depth of discounts or nature of innovations. We will therefore be keeping a close eye on the performance of each program and ensure the CAP and FPAC receive reporting at least annually.

3.8 Costing

The Customer Assistance Package was presented to all customers (not just those considered vulnerable) to test whether the outcomes aligned with expectations expressed in earlier engagement. The draft proposal included just over \$12M for the customer assistance package. We found post the draft proposal, the customer assistance package continued to be strongly supported, but it needed to be more significant to produce the desired meaningful impact¹⁶¹⁷.

“The numbers are underwhelming compared to developer-based projects. \$14 million over five years seems small, given that other projects in the region have budgets of \$20 million.”

Powercor customer, Test and validate: roundtables, Forethought 2024

To increase the reach, for the final proposal the package has been increased to \$26.7M. This was endorsed by the CAP and the FPAC endorsed the First Peoples program.

A breakdown of the costs is presented in the table below.

¹⁶ Forethought, Test and Validate: roundtables, November 2024, p. 19.

¹⁷ Customer Advisory Panel minutes, meeting 14, October 2024, p. 3.

TABLE 2 CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE PACKAGE PROPOSAL (\$M 2026)

PROGRAMS	TOTAL
Energy care	\$2.2
Community energy fund	\$5.3
Vulnerable customer package	\$6.5
Community energy fund	\$2.3
First Peoples program	\$10.4
Total	\$27.7

4. First Peoples program

The First Peoples program aims to enhance First Peoples energy access through programs that support resilience, help vulnerable customers, support renewable energy projects and provide tailored energy-related information. This program is critical to delivering on our customer needs and addressing the widening energy equity gap.

When further testing and validating the program, the top three priorities included assisting First Peoples who are 60+ with heating and cooling, funding programs for low-income households to upgrade their old appliances to more energy efficient appliances and funding for community-owned renewable energy projects. In addition, we heard firsthand the impact of climate emergencies on communities and the strong need for tailored unbiased energy information.

The First Peoples program aims to empower First Peoples in making choices about their energy consumption behaviours, share information on how to lower electricity bills, energy efficiency tips and tricks and give information on current government rebates and funding programs.

The program will work towards delivering the following objectives:

- increase access to heating and cooling for First Peoples who are 60 and older
- increase energy literacy through tailored and self-determined community engagement sessions
- provide funding for energy-efficient appliance upgrades
- increase the number of First Peoples community owned renewable energy projects
- increase resilience within the community when climate emergencies occur.

The First Peoples program has been developed in conjunction with FPAC. The program will be adapted as needed when First Peoples communities' priorities change to ensure we are delivering on their energy-related needs and expectations. Any changes to the program or scope will go to FPAC for approval.

4.1 First Peoples community energy literacy program

Throughout engagement, we have been told First Peoples require ethical unbiased information on energy management. With 75 per cent of First Peoples customers seeking information on how to understand electricity bills, change energy plans, how to be more energy efficient and what to do when an emergency occurs. There was also interest in high-level information on renewable energy options.

Whilst there is information exists, it is often provided by retailers who are distrusted and considered biased. First Peoples communities want tailored information that is delivered by First Peoples for their community members. Community members and FPAC agreed Powercor has an important role to play in delivering energy literacy given we are trying to promote or sell anything like a retailer.

This initiative is aimed at enhancing engagement with First Peoples about energy management decisions. The sessions will be delivered in partnership with communities. For example, one session might be at an existing community event, whilst another might be sitting at a community organisation and booking in person yarns one-on-one with community members. During the engagement, Powercor received invitations to attend multiple community gathering places and yarning circles to run this program.

Supporting existing events is recommended over creating additional engagement and contributing to consultation fatigue. When Powercor attend existing community events to run the energy literacy

program, there is normally a donation required. The funding aims to pay for the energy literacy materials and donations that may need to be covered to attend these events.

This initiative will engage a minimum of 5 community events per year. To build relationships with community members and invite members over for a yarn, Powercor we normally offer free merchandise with Aboriginal art available. The merchandise assist initiating 5-minute yarns and is key to building relationships. It should be noted merchandise costs are not covered under the program.

4.2 First Peoples 60+ energy program

First Peoples have a life-expectancy 10 years lower than non-indigenous Australians¹⁸. In addition, First Peoples disproportionately experience several negative social indicators that affect health. These contribute to First Peoples in Victoria having a median age of 23 years – compared with 37 years for all Victorians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017)¹⁹.

Powercor has heard firsthand from First Peoples customers, FPAC and its own First Peoples team that a lack of access to energy, in particular heating and cooling, is contributing negatively to First Peoples health. One community member said:

“My great grandmother is 94/95 and... a few weeks ago it was hot and I went to visit her; it was hotter in the house than inside... she’s too scared to run her coolers because of the price of electricity. She is 94 and [overheating or the cold] could kill her. It gets hot out there. It was 32 outside and in Nan’s house it was 38 degrees.”

Yorta Yorta community member, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report

In response to this need, we tested and validated this program with community members. All respondents rated this program the highest priority for their communities.

The First Peoples 60+ energy program is a 5-year program and aimed at assisting more than 800 First Peoples in year one and 1,000 each year thereafter. There are 3,000 First Peoples 60+²⁰ across Powercor, however some Elders are living in housing facilities, or live with other Elders at the same premise.

As heating and cooling costs approximate \$800²¹ a year, the First Peoples 60+ energy program will increase access to heating and cooling through an annual \$500 rebate. It is envisaged that First Peoples 60+ will need to apply once after which they will be eligible to all 5 years of rebates, unless their living circumstances change.

This program will be delivered in partnership with Aboriginal Community Organisations, Aboriginal Housing Victoria and Aboriginal Community Elders Services to ensure that First Peoples community members are accessing the program. Under this program we will attend key community events, Elders events and, where welcomed, Elders yarning circles to promote the program and assist First Peoples in filling out applications for the program.

¹⁸ Department of Health and Human Services 2017, Korin Korin Balit-Djak Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017–27, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne.

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017, 2071.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016, ABS, Canberra.

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, Census information on the Indigenous populations: Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank, Campaspe-Shepparton-Moira, Castlemaine-Kerang, Geelong-Queenscliff, Macedon Ranges-Moorabool, Mildura, South-West Central Victoria, Southern Grampians-Glenelg, Swan Hill, Wallan-Seymour, Warrnambool, Wimmera, Wyndham-Altona

²¹ Victorian Government, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action 2024. Heating and cooling discounts

To be eligible for the grant, applicants must demonstrate they are:

- of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and you identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and are accepted as such by the community in which you have been living or are associated with and aged 60 or older
- a low-income household, hold a concession, low-income health care card or pensioner card.

4.3 First Peoples community energy fund

Victoria is attempting to implement a renewable energy revolution with projects being rapidly rolled out across First Peoples Countries. However, First Peoples communities are active sovereign users, who have worked with the sun's resources for thousands of generations.

First Peoples communities across Canada have been leaders in this space, with over 20 per cent of the energy market being owned by Canada's First Peoples. In contrast, Victoria is yet to see its first designed, owned and operated First Peoples project. First Peoples have been asserting their rights and interests in the renewable energy space for the several years and are increasingly frustrated with absence of any industry or government partnerships existing.

When engaging with Registered Aboriginal Parties and Aboriginal Organisations, community-owned energy was a top 2 energy related priorities. When engaging First Peoples customers more broadly, it was rated the 3rd top priority. In addition, when attending the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy engagement session, a number of community members voiced the need for energy literacy, capacity and funding to actualise their renewable energy projects.

The Federal Government's First Nations Renewable Energy Strategy (the strategy) commits towards achieving the goal of First Peoples involvement in renewable energy projects, and we believe given Powercor's footprint and touchpoints across many First Peoples communities, we can assist in delivering the actions under the strategy.

We are therefore proposing a First Peoples Community Energy Fund to assist communities in actualising their renewable energy projects. This program will be delivered in partnership with Aboriginal Community Organisations, Traditional Owner Corporations and Registered Aboriginal Parties. The program will look to fund projects that show long-term benefits for communities. The program will work towards delivering the following objectives:

- support First Peoples' access to renewable energy
- increase installation and usage of renewable energy generation and storage amongst First Peoples
- support feasibility studies and business case development for renewable energy projects that support First Peoples.

To be eligible for a grant under the program, First Peoples groups must:

- have a valid ABN and be registered with Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
- fully owned by First Peoples
- be able to demonstrate how their project would benefit their community.

4.4 First Peoples energy climate resilience

First Peoples living in the regional Powercor network have been routinely impacted by climate emergencies. This has resulted in call for the need of gathering places and community centres that have access to generators. During our engagement, 55 per cent of First Peoples reported

experiencing a prolonged power outage due to extreme weather in the last 3 years. 24 per cent had experienced outages lasting longer than 24 hours.

One community member on Yorta Yorta Country, raised concerns their location in a flood prone area negatively impacted their housing prices.

“our house was like an island... We also couldn’t check on Elders...”

Yorta Yorta community member, Broad and Wide Stakeholder Engagement: Yorta Yorta Country, Consultation Summary Report

Another community member said they had nowhere to turn to for electricity, or to heat bottles for their baby, for several days. The community believed it would be beneficial if their community centre (Rumbalara) had been able to have supply restored as a priority until supply could be restored to the flood lands.

This program is designed to support establishing places for First Peoples communities to gather when emergencies occur. The program has been front-weighted to ensure we are increasing resilience amongst First Peoples communities as a priority. A 0.4 FTE resource has been included to design, deliver and work with communities on this program.

To be eligible for the grant, First Peoples groups must:

- have a valid ABN and be registered with Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
- be located in or near a high-risk fire or flood area
- demonstrate how the proposed initiative would benefit the community's resilience during an emergency.

4.5 First Peoples energy appliance upgrade

First Peoples have highlighted the desirability of upgrading electrical appliances in low-income households to improve energy management affordability. Some of the sentiment shared from community members was that many households possessed inefficient washers, fridges, freezers or air conditioners which increasing electricity bills significantly. These households were however trapped in a high energy cost cycle, unable to afford more energy efficient appliances.

Throughout the engagement process, we were repeatedly told the Victorian Energy Upgrades was not fit-for-purpose as it was insufficient, poorly understood and too difficult to access.

Victorian First Peoples face severe inequity. The average Powercor First Peoples income is \$478²² per week. This contrasts with \$803 for non-First Peoples (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021)²³. Therefore, buying new electrical appliances or accessing solar/batteries is simply harder for First Peoples to acquire than the average Powercor household.

The First Peoples energy appliance upgrade is a 5-year program that aims to assist those most in need. This program will be delivered in partnership with First Peoples organisations who provide critical housing to communities and Aboriginal Housing Victoria.

To be eligible for the appliance upgrade, households must demonstrate:

²² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, Census information on the Indigenous populations: Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank, Campaspe-Shepparton-Moira, Castlemaine-Kerang, Geelong-Queenscliff, Macedon Ranges-Moorabool, Mildura, South-West Central Victoria, Southern Grampians-Glenelg, Swan Hill, Wallan-Seymour, Warrnambool, Wimmera, Wyndham-Altona

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, Snapshot of Victoria, ABS, Canberra.

- they're of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and you identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and are accepted as such by the community in which you have been living or are associated with
- that they are a low-income household, hold a concession, low-income health care card or pensioner card
- households would only be eligible to receive two energy appliance upgrades across the 5 years.

Ensuring we are improving First Peoples access to energy, information and closing the widening energy equity gap is critical to the success of this program. Below details the positive impacts, endorsements and accountability of the program to First Peoples customers.

4.6 First Peoples Impact

The First Peoples program aims to:

- reach a minimum of 5 First Peoples community events a year through the energy literacy component
- improve access to heating and cooling for a minimum of 1,000 First Peoples 60+
- support First Peoples owned renewable energy projects in Victoria
- increase resilience in First Peoples communities when emergencies occur
- increase access to more energy efficient appliances for low-income households.

4.7 Benefits

The First Peoples program will deliver the below benefits:

- deliver on the First Peoples communities, needs and expectations
- empower First Peoples to actively consider how they can better manage their energy needs
- engage communities on energy and reduce fear of electricity bills
- contribute to the National Closing the Gap objectives by ensuring First Peoples 60+ have access to energy and have somewhere to go to during a climate emergency
- Contribute to reducing the 'Energy Equity' Gap that First Peoples currently face
- Assist in delivering capacity under the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy through providing energy literacy
- Assist in supporting First Peoples owned renewable energy projects under the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy through providing critical funding.

4.8 Endorsements

The First Peoples package has been endorsed by the CAP and FPAC. The package has been tested with all customers, with the majority supporting the First Peoples package and backing the importance of delivering on these programs.

4.9 Reporting and accountability

We will deliver, report and monitor on the program to FPAC and the Executive. If there is a proposed change to the program based on learnings or feedback, it will go to FPAC for approval. This will ensure that the program is delivering on the funding promises and be responsive to the First Peoples community's changing needs and energy related priorities.

Feedback will be captured from the program and reported every 6-months to FPAC and the Executive.

4.10 How we are meeting First Peoples customer needs

Our First Peoples program directly addresses First Peoples priorities identified through our stakeholder engagement, as shown below.

TABLE 4.1 STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK TABLE - INSERT CAPTION ABOVE TABLE

FIRST PEOPLES PRIORITY	HOW IT IS BEING DELIVERED ON
Access to energy is a human Right	Access to heating and cooling for First Peoples who are 60+ is proposed under this program.
Energy literacy	A small amount of funding for materials and engaging First Peoples on energy literacy is proposed under this program.
Renewables	Funding is being provided under the First Peoples Community Energy Program to deliver on First Peoples rights and interests.
Resilience	Funding is proposed under the First Peoples program to increase support for community centres and gathering places that communities go-to when a climate emergency occurs.
First Peoples liaison	The FTE included in energy literacy will be able to assist First Peoples with their energy related queries
Energy upgrades	Funding is proposed under the First Peoples program to support low-income households to buy more energy efficient appliances.

4.11 First Peoples support for all programs

Critical to the delivery of all these initiatives is ensuring there is a team who can support and run these programs in a culturally safe manner. We have proposed a minimum of 3.5 FTEs to ensure the success of the First Peoples programs collectively, and ensuring we are engaging First Peoples communities how and when they would like to hear about these programs. The 3.5 FTE will support, run and promote the programs and increase community uptake of these initiatives. The roles will be promoted as identified First Peoples roles. However, if we are unsuccessful in recruiting the right First Peoples candidates, we will open these roles up for people who have worked with First Peoples.

To ensure we can deliver these programs, we have included the costs of a customer grants portal. It is imperative that access to programs is easy and does not create frustration or confusion for First Peoples applicants.

In addition, FPAC will oversee and approve funding allocations under the proposed programs. The programs will be re-evaluated annually to ensure we are continuously meeting First Peoples customer needs.

4.12 First Peoples Program costing

Based on the feedback of Powercor customers, post the release of the draft proposal, the value of the First Peoples program was increased to support the desired impact. The FPAC and CAP endorsed the additional funding.

We have divided the funding of the First Peoples program based on how many First Peoples reside within each network. Table 2 outlines the cost of the First Peoples program across the 5-year program.

TABLE 2 FIRST PEOPLES PROGRAM PROPOSAL (\$M 2026)

INITIATIVE	RESOURCING	TOTAL
First Peoples community energy literacy program	Funding for materials and costs associated in attending events	\$0.3
	0.6 FTE in 2026 and 1 FTE every year after to support the engagement within the community and organise events	\$1.0
First Peoples 60+ energy program	Program funding	\$2.6
	1 FTE for the administration of the program and engagement with First Peoples 60+ to increase uptake	\$1.1
First Peoples community energy fund	Program Funding	\$2.3
	0.7 FTE to support administration of program and increase awareness of program	\$0.8
First Peoples climate resilience	First Peoples Climate Resilience	\$0.4
	0.4 FTE for administration, evaluation and engagement with community centres	\$0.1
First Peoples energy appliance upgrades	Program funding	\$0.7
	0.8 FTE for administration, engagement and promotion of the program	\$0.9
First Peoples Advisory Committee	-	\$0.1
Grants portal	-	\$0.2
Total	\$10.4	



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