

In the media

COST OF LIVING

A deep-dive analysis of how the media has covered
cost-of-living issues

Presented by **medianet.**
insights

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COST OF LIVING IN THE MEDIA

About this report.*

* the technical stuff

It feels like you can't open your news feed or a paper these days without coming across 'cost of living', as hip-pocket expenses such as **rent and housing, fuel and food** are compounded by external pressures from **inflation and interest rates** to natural disasters, international conflicts, and the continuing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like everyone else, businesses are also impacted by cost of living. So, we wanted to know:

- How have these cost-of-living pressures been reported in the media?
- How are businesses leveraging the conversation to drive media activity?
- How can businesses learn from discussions in traditional media versus social media?

To answer these questions, we analysed two months of media coverage from Australia's major online and print media outlets. Then we cross-referenced this data with the top 150 social media posts discussing cost-of-living issues from Australian accounts. The results show which **topics are trending when we talk about cost of living**, and how organisations have and can use these learnings to inform their media strategies.

In 2022, 'cost of living' became a byword for the everyman's experience, affecting everyone from government to those at the forefront of disadvantage, from big banks to mortgage-holders to the humble Bunnings sausage

01. The data*

* the big picture

** Social media was drawn from a period of mid-July to mid-September 2022, while all other data was drawn from 1 July to 31 August.

Total volume of items analysed

1,791

Leading theme in all coverage



Housing and rent

9%

of Australia's front pages featured cost of living stories over the two months compared to other issues

Members of the public

led **social media**** discussion of cost of living, producing **31%** of the top 150 engaged-with posts

Mortgage rates

were what journalists discussed most often in reporting on **housing and rent** in traditional media

Key learnings

The hip-pocket impacts on everyday **Australians** drove media coverage – Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers were leading spokespeople, as public appetite for cost-of-living relief was high.

In a time of **big international and national news** such as the Pacific Islands Forum, the FBI's raid of Donald Trump and ScoMo's multiple ministry scandal, cost of living still made 9% of stories on the **front page**.

And **members of the public** (not blue-tick journalists and politicians) drove **social media engagement** on cost of living. Everyday people typically posted about **government and politics**, criticising Labor and the Coalition alike for the crisis.



What does this tell us about media coverage on cost of living?

It tells us that people want their **lived experiences** of cost of living heard, and campaigns that leverage the felt impact of hip-pocket pressures work.

Whether that's a **social media influencer** promoting her work on Twitter by bemoaning the **housing crisis**, papers publishing **cost of living promotions and advice**, or **big supermarkets** putting a price cap on essentials in response to **rising grocery bills**.

It also tells us that politicians get the most traction in social and traditional media when they spruik their own responses to cost-of-living pressures, or criticise their opponents for failing to do so.

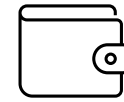
02.

Front page*

* the headline stories

9%

of front page articles focused on cost of living compared to other issues




Labour and wages

was the primary focus of front page coverage

The **Reserve Bank of Australia** was the most mentioned organisation on the front pages by a large margin. It was followed by the **Australian Bureau of Statistics** and the **Australian Council of Trade Unions**.

Leading Front Page Journalists





What does this tell us about what makes the front pages?

It tells us that journalists who make the front pages when reporting on cost of living are more likely to be men writing on **'big-picture' economic issues** such as wages and interest rates.

Their stories are more likely to appear in outlets like the *AFR* and *The Australian*. Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers was the leading spokesperson to appear on Australia's front pages, reflecting the appeal of policy and economics for the big headlines.

So, while media coverage *inside* the papers were more likely to focus on **hip-pocket expenses**, the front pages were a different story.

03.

Traditional media*

* the ins and outs of print and online

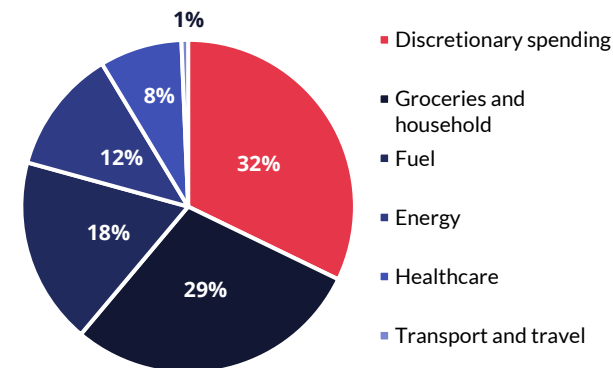
News Corp

published the most stories on cost of living, accounting for **62%** of all reporting

Pensioners

were most commonly cited to be impacted by cost of living

Commodities discussed




Top brands

1. Commonwealth Bank
2. Westpac
3. CoreLogic
4. Coles
5. Finder
6. ANZ



The impact of cost of living on **discretionary spending/consumer sentiment** and a **tightening household budget/groceries** were prominently discussed in reporting.



What does this tell us about print and online coverage?

Print and online coverage usually discussed the direct impact of cost-of-living pressures – on people’s ability to afford **houses, rent and mortgages**, the impact on pensioners, the **household budget** and consumer sentiment/discretionary spending.

Where politics was the focus of reporting, **appeals to the hip-pocket** were still the norm – whether it was Prime Minister Anthony Albanese explaining that Labor would raise the minimum wage and Centrelink payments, or the Greens and Independents criticising the government for corporate tax cuts in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

IN FOCUS

Spending

Consumer sentiment and discretionary spending take the lead.

32%

of traditional news stories focused on consumer sentiment and discretionary spending

Analysts and retailers

led discussion of cost-of-living impacts on consumer sentiment and discretionary spending

Alcohol and dining out

were what journalists discussed most often in reporting on specific commodities being sacrificed

Key learnings

Changes in spending patterns were prominent in traditional media, as both **personal spending cutbacks** and **innovative saving measures** were reported – such as house swaps instead of holidays.

Finance analysts giving insights were prominent in reporting, as were **retailers observing shifts in spending**.

The cost of **beer and wine** and even the impact on dating was reported, as one study found that rising everyday costs hadn't stopped people splurging on dates.

IN FOCUS

Cost of groceries

Feeling it in the hip pocket: Groceries and household budgets

29%

of traditional news stories focused on groceries and household budgets

Grocers and families

led discussion of cost-of-living impacts on groceries and household budgets

Coles and Woolworths

were the leading brands in coverage on the cost of groceries

Key learnings

Coverage of groceries and household budgets was varied, featuring tips from 'budgeting mums', the insights of growers, and retailers' views on how cost of living pressures had impacted shopping habits and bottom lines.

As well as supermarket chains, wholesalers such as the **National Farmers Federation** and **AUSVEG** also gained traction in reporting.

Even the reliable **Bunnings** sausage couldn't escape the cost-of-living crunch. News Corp and *The West Australian* reported that the **barbecued snag** would soon cost **\$1 more**, as the household hardware company felt the pinch of rising meat and grocery prices.

IN FOCUS

Cost of fuel

Forking out at the bowser:
The rising cost of fuel

18%

of traditional news stories focused on fuel as a cost-of-living pressure

Calls for the fuel excise

to continue was the leading theme in discussions of the cost of fuel

Australian Automobile Association

was the most prominent organisation in cost of fuel reporting, often via proactive spokesperson contribution

Key learnings

Oil prices are spiking globally as inflation, the pandemic and war in Ukraine create market volatility.

In Australian print and online media, global pressures were compounded by local concerns ahead of the end of the fuel excise in late-September. Australian Automobile Association managing director Michael Bradley and Federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers were the most prominent voices.

Interestingly, the cost of fuel also spurred media conversation around the cost of electric vehicles and EV policy, as higher fuel costs led to speculation on the appeal of an alternative.

IN FOCUS

Leveraging the issue

Who is leveraging cost of living to the greatest effect in the media?

50

stories in major print and online media focused on research into or advice to cope with the crisis

Coles and Woolworths

received positive coverage on insight into grocery shopping habits and their relief responses

Finder

published a nationwide survey in mid-August that gained notable traction in News Corp

Key learnings

Universities and economists leveraged interest in cost of living by **publishing advice and research**. Often this was commissioned by news outlets themselves.

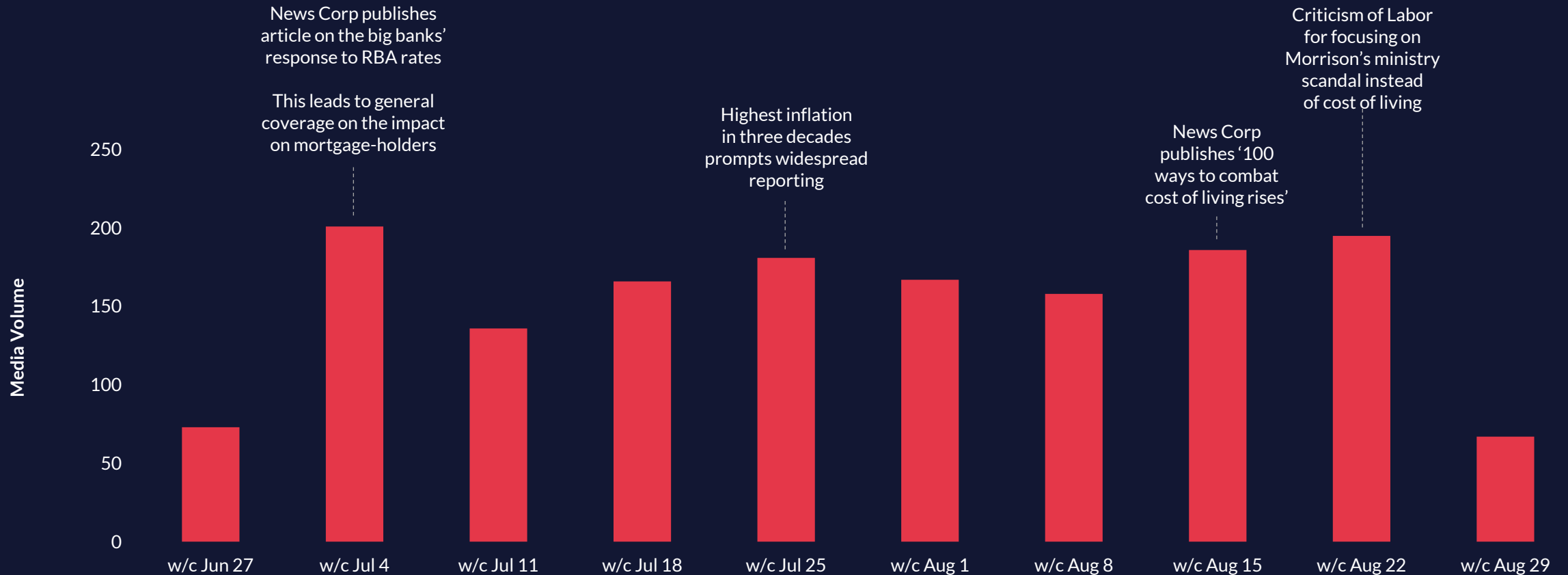
News Corp promoted and then ran a story detailing '100 ways to save money', which appeared prominently across major mastheads. Comparison website **Finder** was also prominent after its nationwide survey found many hoped for a **pay rise** amidst **declining rates of saving**.

Coles and **Woolworths** also gained traction, **speaking on the crisis's impact on spending habits** and in doing so often promoting their response by price-capping basics.

Media timeline

events that caught media attention

The week commencing 4 July saw the largest spike in print and online coverage, as the RBA handed down the cash rate and banks responded by setting mortgage rates.



04.

Social media*

* conversation on the ground

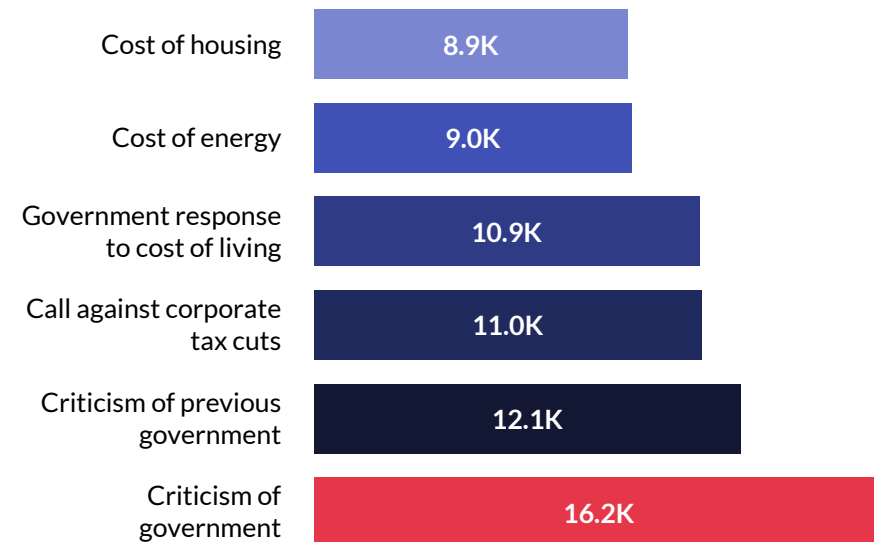
** Social media was drawn from a period of mid-July to mid-September 2022, while all other data was drawn from 1 July to 31 August.

28.9k

social media posts discussed cost-of-living issues over two months**

Greens Leader Adam Bandt and ACTU Secretary Sally McManus were two of the leading voices by engagement, as Bandt criticised **federal corporate tax cuts** and McManus compared the rising cost of living with **stagnating wages**.

Leading topics in the top 150 posts by audience engagement





What does this tell us about the social media conversation?

Members of the public were the most common accounts to post about cost of living in the top 150 posts by engagement over two months. When politicians and social commentators have blue ticks and tens of thousands more followers, this tells you a lot about what's getting likes and retweets – its everyday people feeling the impact.

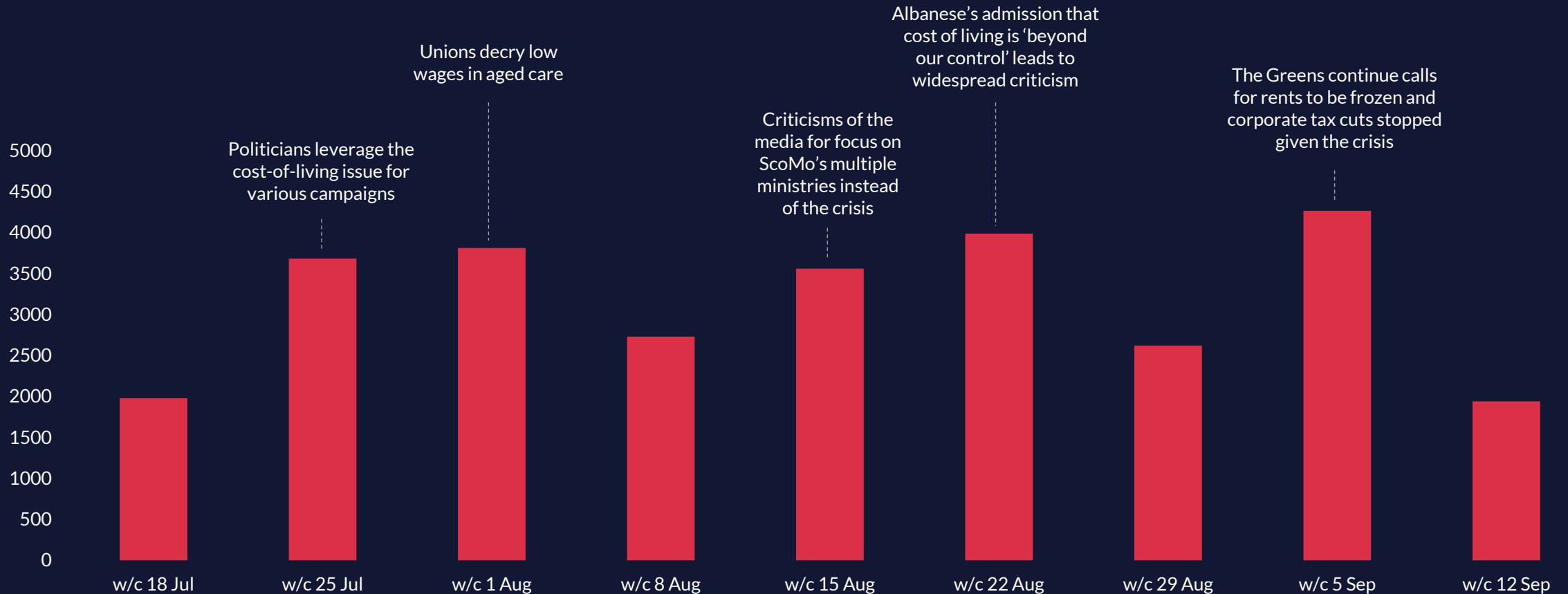
The most common themes in social media conversation that we analysed were criticisms of past and current government for leaving ordinary people behind and complaints about the **cost of housing and rent**. Notably, calls for the government to do more were voiced by both members of the public and 'blue tick' accounts.

Overall, **social media chatter mirrored the themes in traditional media**. Although, government criticism was more apparent in social conversations.

Social timeline

Social posts over two months

Politics dominated conversation, as the Greens, Coalition and members of the public alike called for further action to address the crisis.



05. Key takeaways*

* to conclude with

- Media interest in the cost-of-living crisis was wide-ranging and diverse. Journalists focused on everything from the **government's relief measures** and their alleged missteps to the **experience of everyday Australians**: how they suffered, but also how they thrived and innovated under financial pressure.
- Our analysis shows that while the **front pages focused on macroeconomics**, coverage behind the front pages actually focused on the **hip-pocket** and **practical advice** to cope.
- The data showed cost-of-living pressures created winners and losers. While some coverage outlined the **impact on vulnerable people**, other reporting lifted up the voices of **everyday household budgeting experts** or showcased the ability of brands and outlets to leverage the conversation.
- Finding an angle related to cost of living for your organisation may help generate prominent media coverage, particularly in **advice and research**.
- With the lead up to the October mini-budget and no clear end to the crisis, cost of living should see even more intense media attention. This creates potential opportunity for brands, organisations and advocacy groups to **communicate messages in a sensitive and timely manner**.

Let's go deeper

Our analysis doesn't just stop here.

To discover more insights specific to your business, organisation, campaign or industry, or to find out more about this report and our findings, please contact our **Head of Insights & Strategy, Sally Chadwick.**

Get in touch



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