



Commissioner of Charities Annual Report

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2016

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Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth**

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CONTENTS

Message from the Commissioner	04
Statistic Snapshot	07
Our Shared Vision and Strategies	08
The Charity Landscape in Singapore	10
Key Developments in 2016	23
Looking Ahead	35



MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

The vision of the Office of the Commissioner of Charities is to nurture a well-governed charity sector which instils strong public trust and confidence. This is only possible with strong support from the public, and those who are passionate about pursuing meaningful work in the charity sector.

I am privileged and honoured to be part of this journey.

As I prepare myself for the challenge, I will focus on three key priorities to enable a thriving charity sector:

1. Strengthening the sector's governance capabilities;
2. Promoting the importance of informed giving; and
3. Moving towards co-regulation

Good governance is the cornerstone of a charity's foundation. Hence, my Office works closely with the Charity Council on a series of initiatives to build and strengthen charities' governance capabilities. In April 2017, the second refined Code of Governance was issued after extensive consultations with various stakeholders since August 2015. The refined Code provides greater clarity and relevance which will help charities to improve their transparency and accountability to stakeholders. Following the launch, we conducted sharing sessions with charities to assist them with the implementation of the refined Code. There will be more of such platforms for engagement with charities.

With the rising global threat of terrorism, charities could also be susceptible to exploitation for terrorist financing. New ways of fund-raising, coupled by technological advancements, are changing the global landscape for the charity sector. To harness the benefits of technology, as well as mitigate the risks that come with the use of technology, the charity sector will need to evolve and adapt. To ensure that our regulatory policies remain relevant, my Office embarked on a review of the Charities Act and sought feedback from our stakeholders on the proposed amendments during the course of the review in 2016. We have conducted a public consultation in the third quarter of 2017 as part of the ongoing review.

My second area of focus is to raise public awareness of making informed giving decisions. It is heartening to know that there are many donors and volunteers who are passionate about doing good and give generously to support charitable causes. However, it is also important that donors take a prudent approach and find out more about the charities and individuals in need before lending support. That way, they can ensure that the funds raised will go to genuine causes.

Should online fund-raising platforms be used, it is also important for donors to be aware of the terms and conditions, as well as the fee structures of these platforms, to be clear on how their donations are being utilised. Donors should also take the time to examine the charity's annual report and financial information which are available on the Charity Portal. Financially healthy charities with a clear vision and mission would be better able to conduct their charitable programmes well.

Lastly, I will also like to emphasise that every individual plays a role in helping the charity sector. While my Office takes on the role as the regulator of the sector, we encourage active support from all stakeholders in our efforts towards promoting good governance and enhancing regulatory compliance.

Over the years, the charity sector has overcome obstacles and celebrated many milestones. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Mr Low Puk Yeong, for his exemplary work in laying a firm foundation for the charity sector over the past ten years. Together with my team, we will work hard to continue his good work, and strive for better governance, accountability and transparency in the sector.

The journey towards a well-governed and thriving charity sector with strong public support is never-ending but I can assure you that it will be a very meaningful one.

Dr Ang Hak Seng

Commissioner of Charities

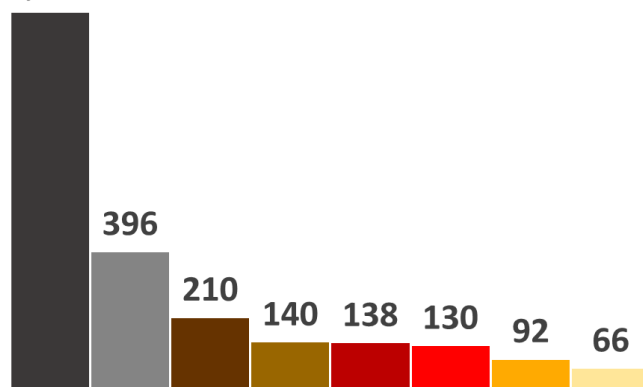
August 2017

STATISTICS SNAPSHOT



Registered Charities
in 2016

1,075



■ Religious
■ Others
■ Health
■ Community

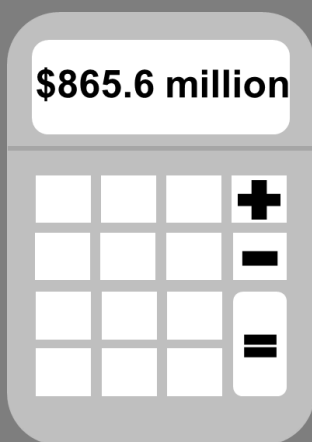
■ Social & Welfare
■ Arts & Heritage
■ Education
■ Sports



**ANNUAL
RECEIPTS**



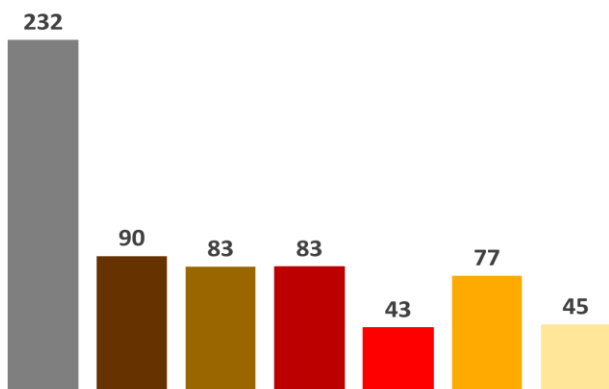
**TOTAL
DONATIONS**



**TAX-
DEDUCTIBLE
DONATIONS**



**FUND-RAISING
PERMITS FOR
FOREIGN
CHARITABLE
PURPOSES**



■ Social & Welfare
■ Others
■ Arts & Heritage
■ Health
■ Education
■ Community
■ Sports



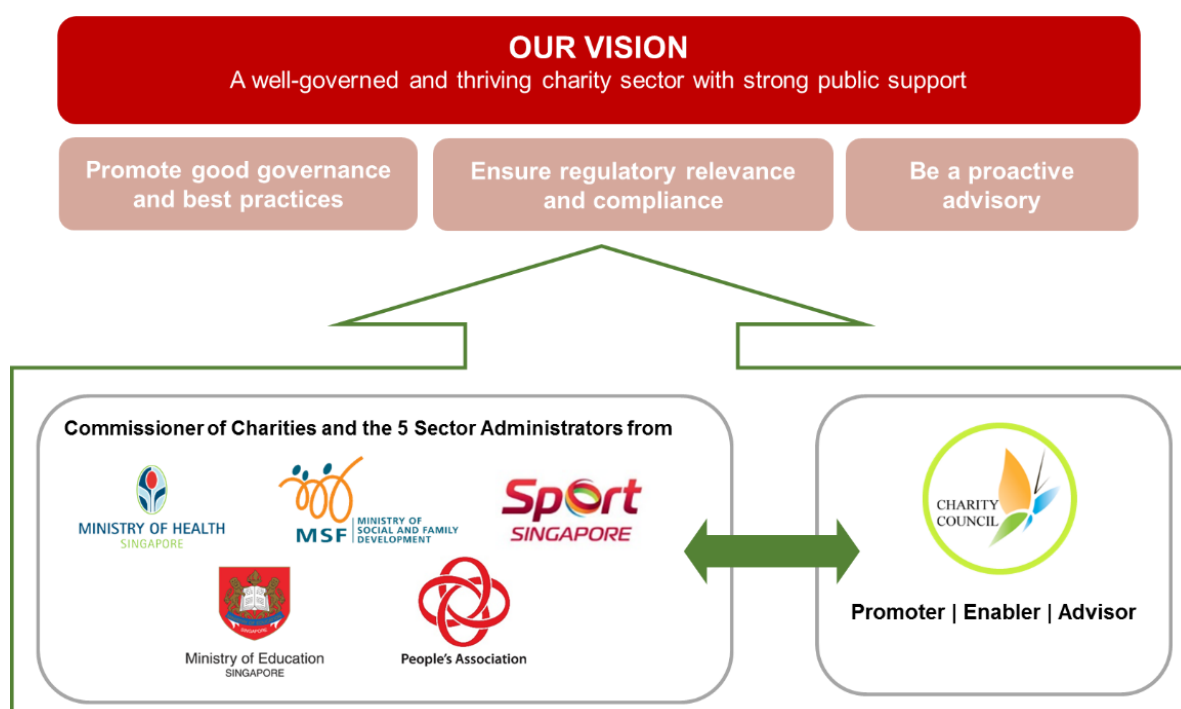
IPCs
in 2016

A SHARED VISION

A well-governed and thriving charity sector with strong public support

OUR VISION AND STRATEGIES

Our vision is to develop a well-governed and thriving charity sector with strong public support. Together with the Charity Council¹ and the Sector Administrators from the respective agencies, we work closely to implement initiatives based on the three key strategies outlined below. This ensures that our shared vision for the sector could eventually be achieved.



¹ The Charity Council was legally appointed on 1 March 2007 after the new Charities Act was brought into operation. The Council comprises 9 members from the people sector and 5 representatives from the Sector Administrators, and aims to fulfil the following roles:

- Promote and encourage the adoption of good governance and best practices, to help enhance public confidence and promote self-regulation in the charity sector
- Build capabilities of charities so that they are able to comply with regulatory requirements and enhance public accountability
- Advise the Commissioner of Charities on key regulatory issues which may have broad-ranging impact on the charity sector

THE CHARITY LANDSCAPE IN SINGAPORE

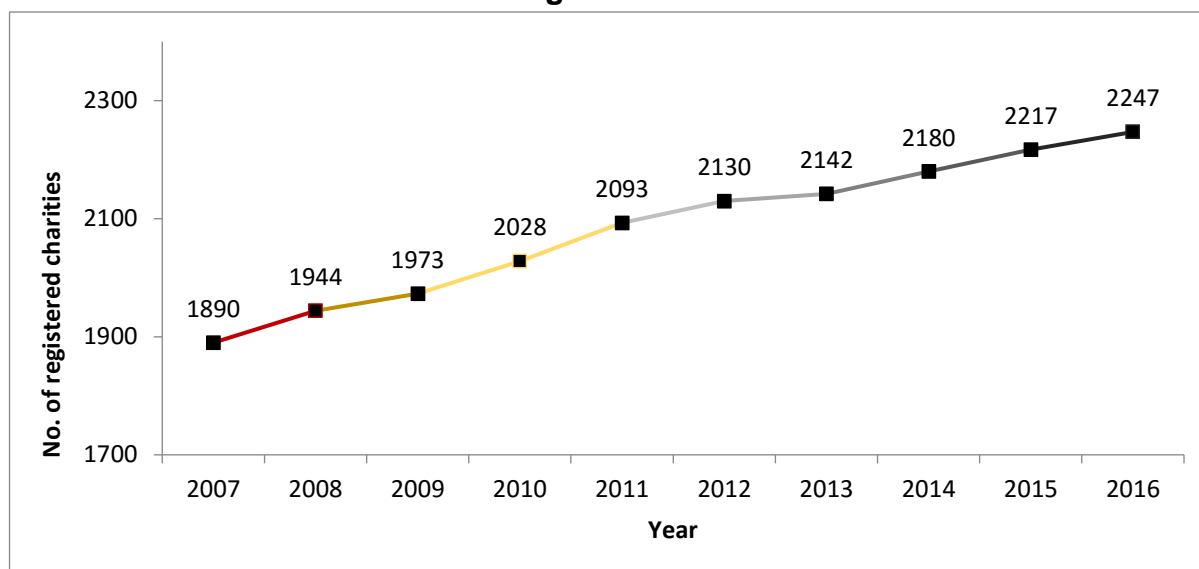
CHARITIES

In 2016, there were 2,247 registered charities in Singapore, as compared to 2,217² in 2015 (Chart 1). Organisations established for exclusively charitable purposes and carrying out activities to achieve these purposes are legally required to apply for charity registration with the Commissioner of Charities. All registered charities get to enjoy income and property tax exemption on premises used exclusively for charitable purposes. We recognise the following categories of charitable purposes:

- a) the relief of poverty;
- b) the advancement of education;
- c) the advancement of religion; and
- d) other purposes beneficial to the community. The following purposes are potentially charitable if they benefit the community:
 - i. the promotion of health;
 - ii. the advancement of citizenship or community development;
 - iii. the advancement of arts, heritage or science;
 - iv. the advancement of environmental protection or improvement;
 - v. the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantages;
 - vi. the advancement of animal welfare; and
 - vii. the advancement of sport, where the sport promotes health through physical skill and exertion.

² This figure excludes exempt charities.

Chart 1: Increase in Number of Registered Charities³ between 2007 to 2016



2 The majority of the charities registered were religious, social and welfare organisations, making up almost two-thirds (65%) of all charities ([Table 1](#)). This has been a consistent trend with that of previous years.

**Table 1: Distribution of Charities by Registration Status and Sector
(As at 31 December 2016)**

Sector	Total Registered		Newly registered charities
	Number	Percentage	
Sports	66	2.9%	1
Community	92	4.1%	3
Education	130	5.8%	2
Health	138	6.2%	1
Arts & Heritage	140	6.2%	7
Social & Welfare	396	17.6%	13
Religious	1,075	47.8%	7
Others⁴	210	9.4%	15
Total	2,247⁵	100%	49

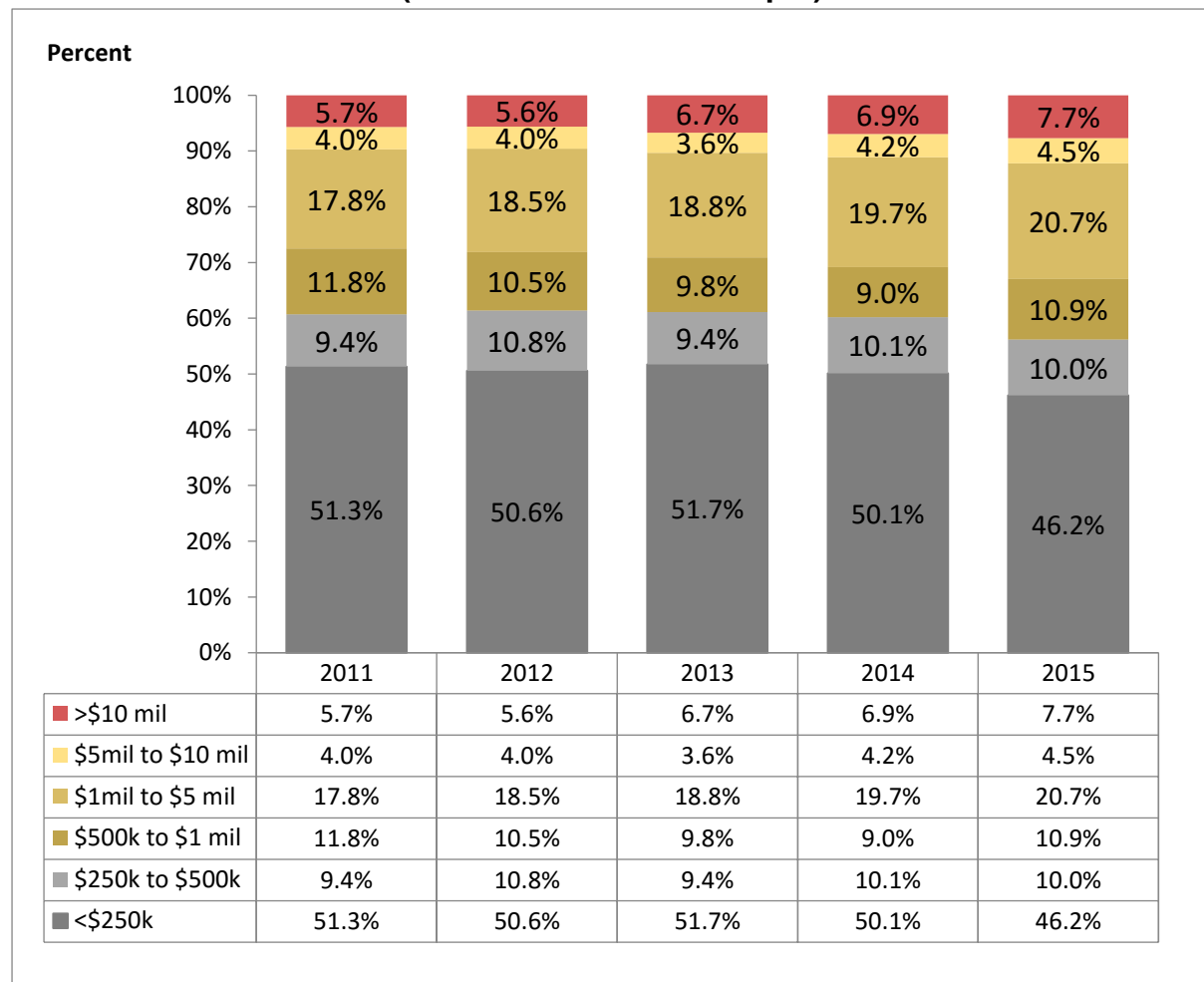
³ The figure includes the Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs).

⁴ Charities under "Others" sector include charities set up for animal welfare, environment conservation and youth development

⁵ This figure is net of charities deregistered in the year.

3 A large proportion (46.2%) of the registered charities were relatively small, with annual receipts (which included donations, government grants, fees and charges for services rendered) of less than \$250,000 (Chart 2). While the distribution of charities based on income size remains fairly constant over the years, we note that the registered charities have been slowly growing larger in size in recent years.

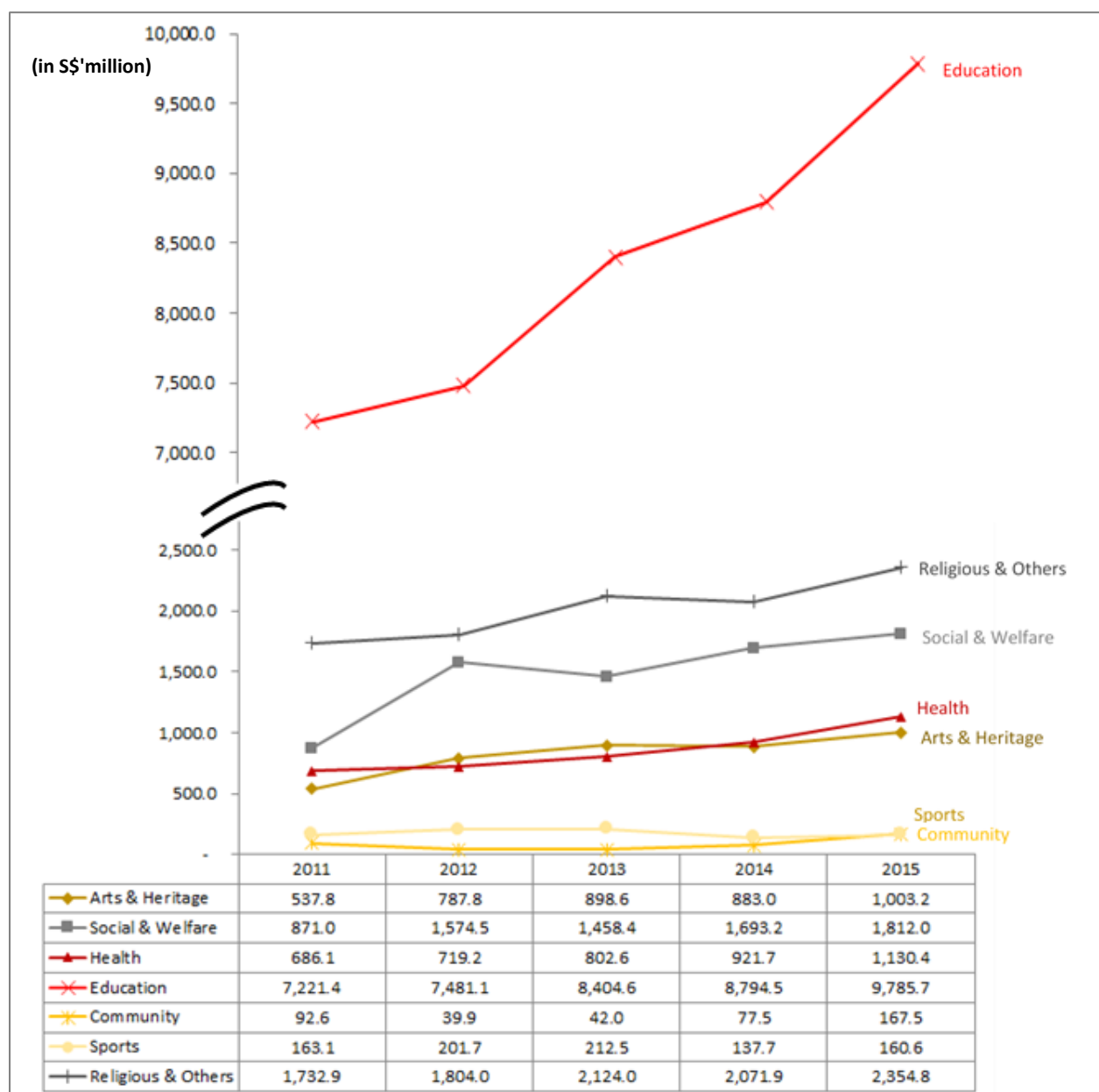
**Chart 2: Distribution of Charities by Income Size, 2011 - 2015
(Based on Annual Receipts)**



Annual Receipts

4 The total receipts of the charity sector, which include government grants, donations and fees and charges, rose to \$16.4 billion in 2015⁶, up from \$14.6 billion in 2014. The education cluster comprising \$9.8 billion in 2015, accounted for three-fifths (59.6%) of the year's total receipts (Chart 3).

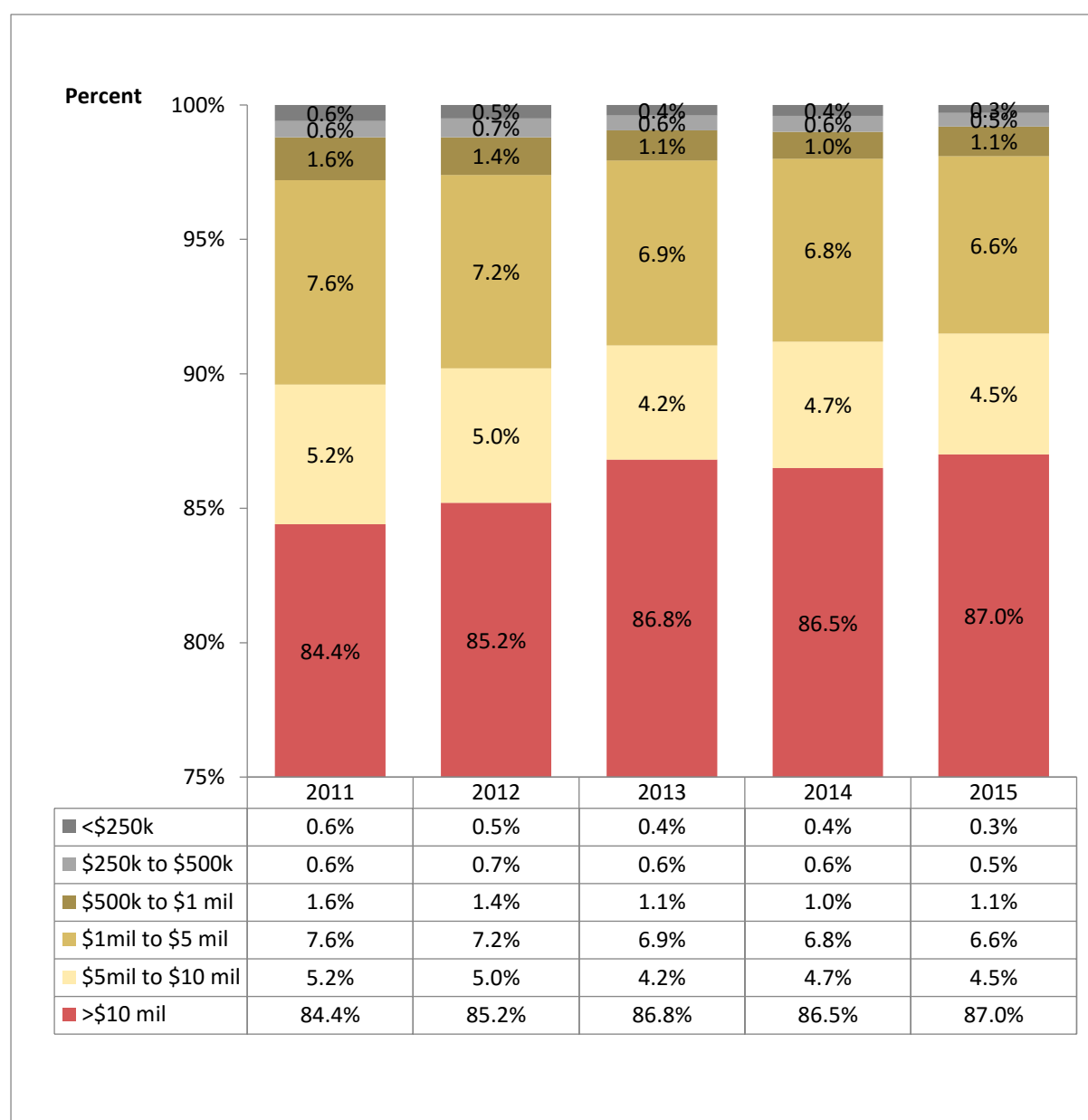
Chart 3: Sustained Growth in Annual Receipts across Sector, 2011 – 2015



⁶ Figures are computed based on the annual returns submitted for financial years ending in 2015. It is a regulatory requirement for charities to submit their annual returns within 6 months of the close of their financial year. The financial periods of charities may vary, depending on the operational needs of the organisations.

- 5 There were 179 large charities with annual receipts above \$10 million in 2015. This is 11.9% higher than the 160 large charities in 2014. These comprised mainly tertiary education institutions; health institutions and the larger religious and voluntary welfare organisations, and accounted for 87.0% of the total receipts in 2015. Conversely, small charities with annual receipts of less than \$250,000 accounted for less than 1% of total receipts despite their significant numbers in the sector ([Chart 4](#)).

Chart 4: Annual Receipts by Size of Charities, 2011 – 2015



- 6 Charities attracted approximately \$2.7 billion (or 16.7%) in donations (both tax-deductible and non tax-deductible) in 2015 ([Chart 5](#)). On the other hand, charities in the community, education, arts and heritage, sports and health sectors were more dependent on government grants ([Chart 6](#)).

Chart 5: Upward trend in Annual Receipts by Source⁷, 2011 – 2015

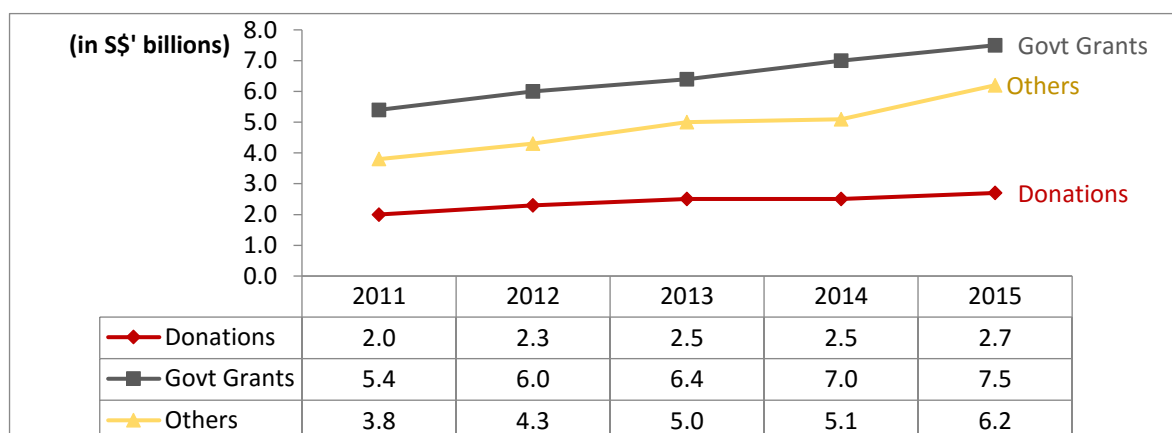
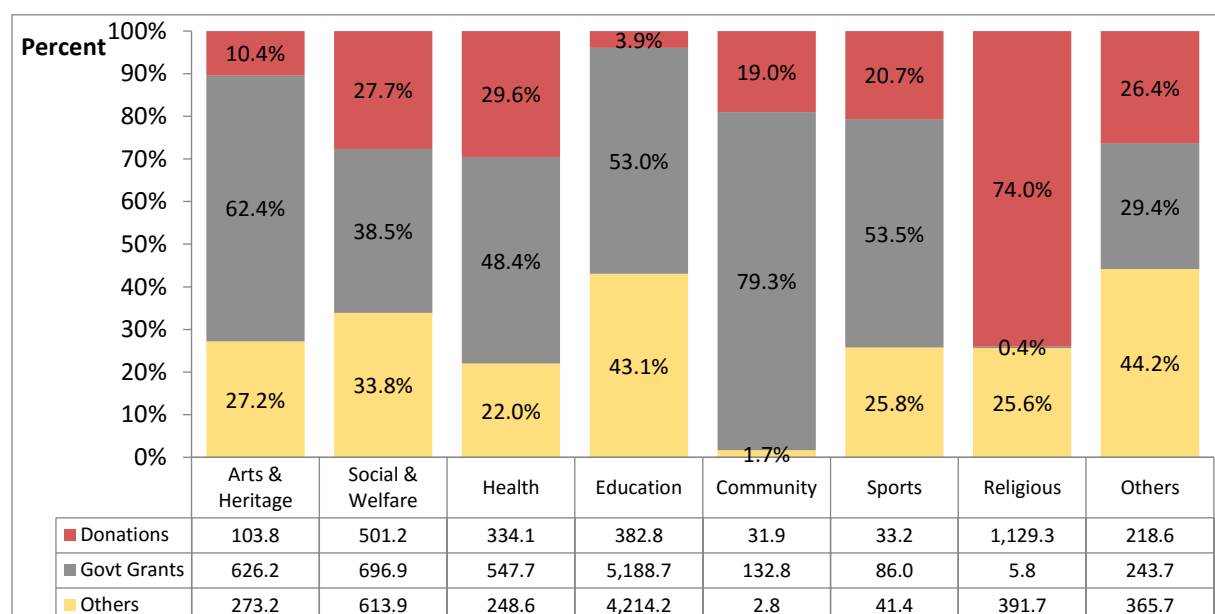


Chart 6: Annual Receipts by Source and Sector⁸, 2015



Note: Figures in the table are in S\$ million.

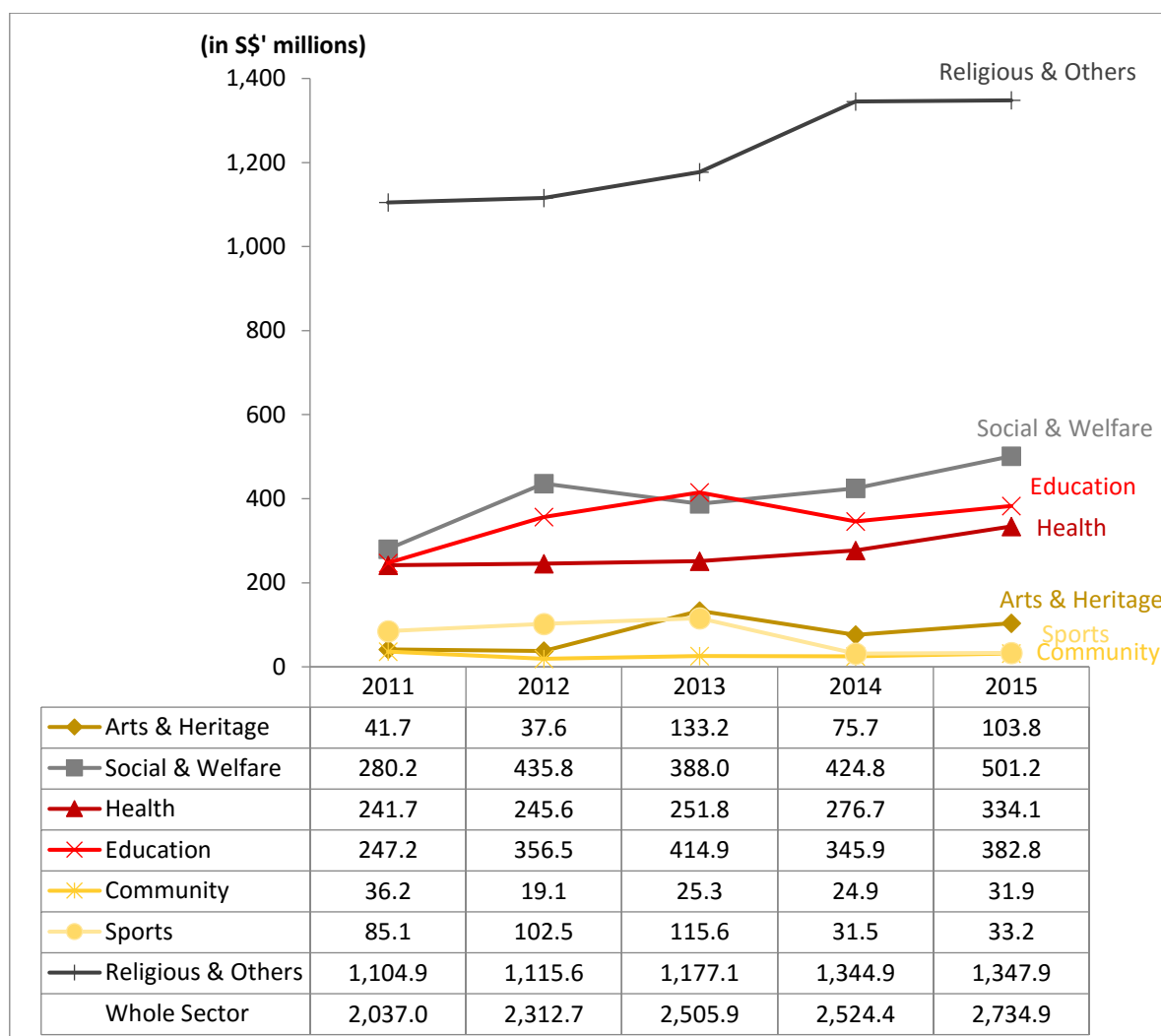
⁷ Other sources of receipts include income from the programmes and services rendered by charitable organisations.

⁸ Government grants to the “Religious” and “Others” sectors are mainly provided to non-religious related community and humanitarian programmes.

Total Donations⁹

- 7 Total donations increased in 2015, spurred by the one-time increase in tax-deduction from 250% to 300% for qualifying donations, in celebration of Singapore's Golden Jubilee (2015: \$2,735 million; 2014: \$2,524 million). The breakdown of total donations by sector is shown below ([Chart 7](#)).

Chart 7: Strong Public Support towards Total Donations across sector, between 2011 to 2015

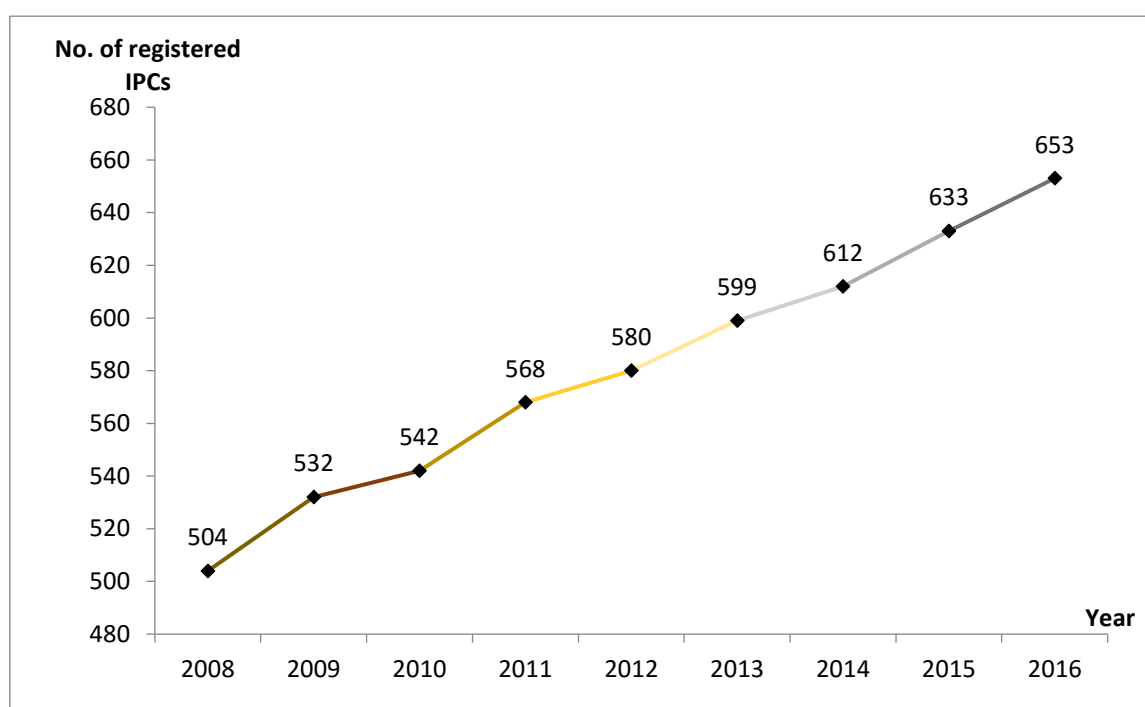


⁹ Figures on total donations are compiled based on the annual returns submitted by charities for financial years ending in 2015, and the data covers both tax-deductible and non tax-deductible donations. Hence, the data may depict a different trend from the tax-deductible donations (TDD) data due to different reporting periods and data coverage.

INSTITUTIONS OF A PUBLIC CHARACTER (IPCs)

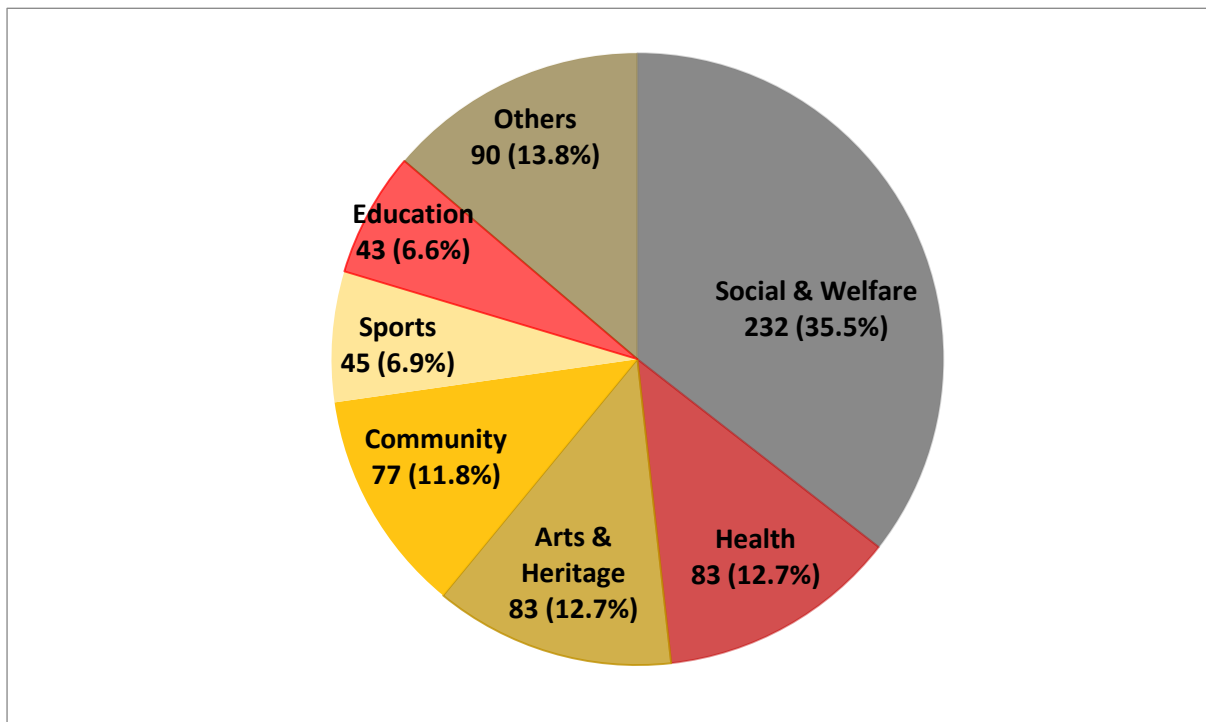
- 8 Some registered charities are conferred the status of an Institution of a Public Character (IPC). This allows them to issue tax-deductible receipts to donors who want to claim tax relief based on the amount of qualifying donations made¹⁰. To qualify as an IPC, the charity must be dedicated to serving the needs of the community in Singapore as a whole and not be confined to sectional interests or groups of persons based on race, belief or religion. As at 31 December 2016, there were 653 approved IPCs ([Chart 8](#)). Charities from the social and welfare sector formed the largest group of IPCs ([Chart 9](#)).

**Chart 8: Increase in Number of Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs),
between 2008 to 2016**



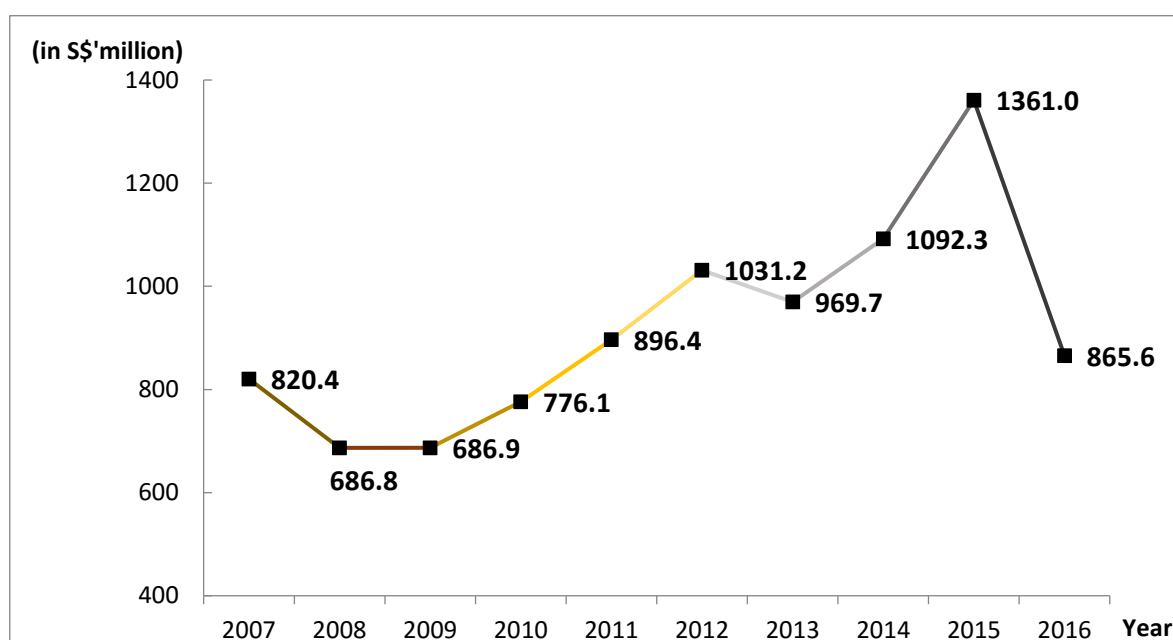
¹⁰ Under the Income Tax Act, outright cash donations, donations of shares by individual donors, donations of computers (including hardware, software, accessories and peripherals) by corporate, artefacts donations, donations under the Public Art Tax Incentive Scheme, and land and building donations will qualify for tax deduction.

Chart 9: Number of Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs) by Sector, 2016



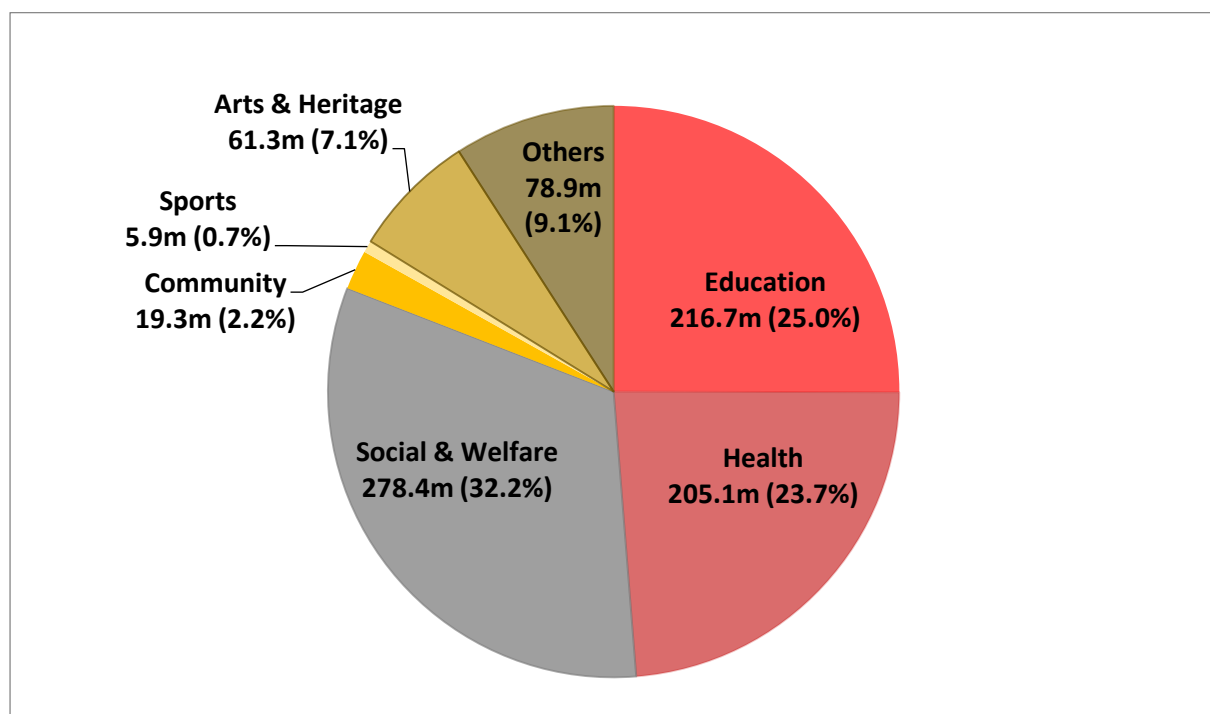
- 9 In 2016, there was a decline in the total amount of tax-deductible donations (TDD) received by the IPCs from \$1,361.0 million in 2015 to \$865.6 million in 2016. The 36% decrease in tax-deductible donations marks the lowest amount of tax-deductible donations in the last five years ([Chart 10](#)). This was partly attributed to the tax deduction reverting back to 250% after the Golden Jubilee year tax deductions of 300% in 2015. In addition, the economic uncertainty may have had an adverse effect on charitable giving. However, we are confident that the public will continue to support local charitable causes.

Chart 10: Decline in Tax-Deductible Donations, in 2016



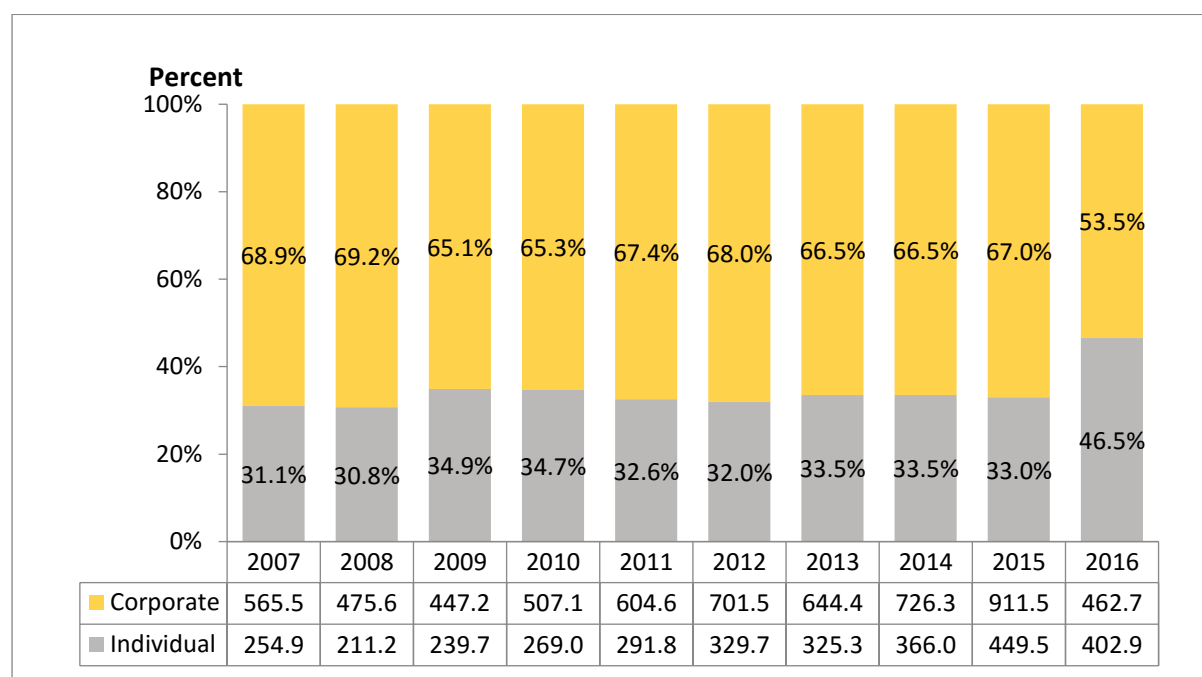
10 As with prior years, IPCs in the social and welfare, education and health sectors attracted the bulk of TDD (81%) ([Chart 11](#)).

Chart 11: Tax-Deductible Donations by sector, 2016



11 In 2016, corporate donors continue to contribute a bigger proportion of TDD compared to individual donors. While the proportion of donations from individuals had grown from 33.0% in 2015 to 46.5% in 2016, the absolute amount of donations from individuals had declined by about 10.4% ([Chart 12](#)).

Chart 12: Tax-Deductible Donations by Source, 2007 – 2016



Note: Figures in the table are in S\$ millions.

FUND-RAISING APPEALS FOR FOREIGN CHARITABLE CAUSES

12 A total of 42 permits were issued in 2016 for organisations to conduct fund-raising appeals for foreign charitable causes. Of the 42 permits, six of the permits granted were for relief efforts including aid provided to victims of natural disasters, such as Kumamoto earthquake, Ecuador earthquake, Bangladesh and Philippines floods. Permits were also granted for the UN World Food Programme and humanitarian projects including rebuilding projects and school projects in Asian countries. Based on the submitted Statements of Accounts, the actual amount raised from the permits granted was \$5.8 million, of which \$0.9 million went towards disaster relief efforts and \$4.9 million was collected for various humanitarian projects.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2016

PROMOTE GOOD GOVERNANCE & BEST PRACTICES

We strive to develop the governance capabilities of board members so that they can exercise sound and responsible stewardship of public resources in fulfilling the objectives of the charities.

CHARITIES TRANSPARENCY AND GOVERNANCE AWARDS 2016



On 28 September 2016, 35 charities were recognised for their exemplary disclosure and transparency practices with the inaugural Charity Transparency Awards. The Charity Transparency and Governance Awards Night 2016 was graced by the Minister for Culture, Community and Youth – Ms Grace Fu.

Among the 35 charities, the Nature Society (Singapore), Association of Women for Action and Research, and SPD were conferred the Charity Governance Awards in recognition for achieving the highest standards of governance in the small, medium and large charity categories respectively.



Two other charities were also recognised with a Special Commendation Award for their exemplary demonstration of good governance in specific areas. The Esplanade Co Ltd was recognised for its Clarity of Strategy, while the National Kidney Foundation was recognised for Risk Management.

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Since March 2015, the Charity Council co-organised a series of Town Hall meetings with the Centre for Social Development Asia (CSDA), a research centre under the purview of Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore, for the charity sector. These Town Halls served as platforms to raise the sector's awareness of the need to enhance core competencies and practices in specific areas such as financial management, accountability and disclosure. The sessions allowed Board members and staff of charities to discuss and explore practical solutions to address common issues and challenges faced by the sector.



In February 2016, 130 participants and 50 invited guests attended the 3rd instalment of the Town Hall meetings themed “Best Practices in Accountability and Disclosures for Charities – What to include in Annual Report”. We also had the privilege of having an overseas speaker, Mr Venkkat Ramanan, who gave an insightful presentation on Integrated Reporting. The session illustrated how charities could effectively use their annual reports to communicate with their stakeholders.

Subsequently, the 4th instalment of the Town Hall meetings was held in November 2016 covering the topic of “Fund-raising Landscape in Singapore”. This meeting saw an increase in attendance with an overall turnout of 168 participants and 43 guests. The program included a key note address by Mr Tony Manwaring, from Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, who shared about Charity Fund-raising Best Practices and Challenges in the United Kingdom. In addition, the participants were given insights from a local research on the fund-raising landscape in Singapore and benefited from a robust panel discussion.

CHARITY GOVERNANCE CONFERENCE



In addition to Town Halls, the Office of the COC also works closely with the Charity Council to support the annual Charity Governance Conference. In 2016, the Conference looked into the future and sustainability of charities with the theme “Governance for Charities in the 21st Century”. The Conference

brought together both charities and corporates aspiring to uplift their governance practices.

Held at Mandarin Orchard Singapore’s Grand Ballroom on 28 September 2016, the Conference saw an overwhelming attendance of 345 participants, of which 290 were from charity organisations.

“Lessons on Governance applicable to Charities” and “Investment of Surplus Funds” were the two main conference topics. The Conference was followed by three concurrent governance workshops on topics on “Effective Communication and Crisis Management”, “Staying on Track with Robust Governance/Governance and Sustainability for Non-Profit Organisations” and “Enterprise Resilience in the Age of Disruptive Technologies”.



Charities also had the opportunity to network with representatives from corporate organisations and explore opportunities on how these organisations could support their charitable causes.

REFINEMENT OF THE CODE OF GOVERNANCE

In August 2015, the Charity Council embarked on a second refinement of the Code. Since then, four dialogue sessions involving over 183 charities and IPCs across the various sectors have been held, followed by a four-week long public consultation. The refined Code was issued in April 2017, and aims to strengthen the governance practices of charities in Singapore, and enable them to be more transparent and accountable.

ENSURE REGULATORY RELEVANCE AND COMPLIANCE

We review our regulatory framework regularly to ensure it is relevant and meets the evolving needs of the charity sector. Rules and regulations are also tiered according to the size of the charities, with larger charities subjected to more stringent rules as compared to the smaller players.

REVIEW OF THE CHARITIES ACT

To ensure the relevance of our regulatory policies, the Office of the COC embarked on a review of the Charities Act since late 2015. As part of the review, feedback was gathered from various stakeholders including the Charity Council, the Sector Administrators and representatives from charities.

The on-going review seeks to enhance the regulatory framework to increase accountability of the charities and fund-raisers in Singapore. It will also afford stronger regulatory powers to the COC in the discharge of his duties to maintain public trust and confidence in charities. The Office of the COC commenced public consultation on the proposed amendments in the third quarter of 2017.

SHARING SESSION ON CHARITY AUDIT

In March 2016, the Office of the COC, together with the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA) and the Charity Council co-organised a sharing session with audit practitioners to discuss about common observations noted in charity audits.

The session served to help auditors gain a better understanding of the regulatory requirements under the Charities Act and Regulations so that they could carry out more robust audits. Deputy Commissioner, Ms Sim Hui Ting touched on the common pitfalls faced by charities and also highlighted the red flags that practitioners should look out for during the audit of charities' accounts.

GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

To supervise, monitor and regulate the charity sector, the Office of the COC and the Sector Administrators carry out various forms of reviews. One of such reviews is governance reviews, which is akin to health checks and conducted on selected charities and IPCs each year. These reviews serve to help them identify and rectify gaps and weaknesses in the governance processes and internal controls within their organisations. Since 2015, the scope of governance reviews was expanded to include an assessment on the “Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism” (AML/CFT) measures implemented by the charities. This helps to ensure that charities have appropriate due diligence measures in place to know their beneficiaries, partners, and affiliates, as well as established procedures to ensure that the charitable funds are applied towards the intended purposes.

In 2016, governance reviews were conducted for 27 charities and IPCs. We worked together with these charities to improve their governance by providing recommendations which were typically customised based on their needs. Some common recommendations include clearer distinction between Board member roles and operational duties, tighter controls over procurement and payments, better management of conflict of interests, as well as safeguarding of donations and charitable assets.

The Office of the COC monitors the follow-up actions undertaken by the charities. Such reviews are well-received as the selected charities and IPCs benefitted from the advice of professional consultants in relation to strengthening their internal processes and enhancing their governance standards.

BE A PROACTIVE CHARITY ADVISORY

We strive to be a transparent and responsive regulator which actively advises the public and charities on issues affecting the charity sector, and also improve the accessibility of information to facilitate the work of charities, and informed giving by the public.

STARTER KIT FOR REGISTERED CHARITIES



In 2016, the Office of the COC put together a Starter Kit for registered charities. This serves as a quick reference guide to aid newly registered charities in understanding the duties and responsibilities of governing board members and key regulatory requirements such as submission timelines, amongst others. It also covers information about fund-raising matters, such as duty to donors, use of donations and the requisite disclosures. The starter kit is available on the Charity Portal.

COUNTER-TERRORISM SEMINAR



With the rising global threat of terrorism, it is important that charities are prepared to respond when such threats occur. Hence, the Office of the COC also started engaging charities through the SGSecure national movement to sensitise and to mobilise the community to better protect themselves against terrorism.

Religious organisations form a significant part of the charity sector. During the Counter-Terrorism Seminar jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Home Team agencies, the Office of the COC covered the measures to combat the misuse of charities for terrorist financing.



EDUCATING CHARITIES ON TERRORIST FINANCING

From time to time, the Office of the COC disseminates information on matters relating to Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism to charities. This is to ensure that charities stay informed of the threat environment and are able to protect themselves against the threats.

In early 2016, we shared the “Best Practices Paper on Combating the Abuse of Non-Profit Organisations” (“the Paper”) published by the Financial Action Task Force (“FATF”). Charities were encouraged to take reference from the Paper regarding good practices which they can adopt to safeguard themselves against the risk of abuse by terrorists or terrorist organisations, such as ensuring that transactions are conducted via regulated financial channels and carrying out proper due diligence procedures on key donors and beneficiaries.

In September 2016, we also disseminated the “Terrorist Financial Risk Indicators” Report compiled by the FATF. By providing the charities with a supplementary list of relevant key indicators, the report serves to aid charities in detecting terrorist financing activities so that they can implement measures to safeguard themselves.

LOOKING AHEAD

FUTURE PLANS

A thriving charity sector cultivates a nationwide culture of giving. It bridges communities and enables us to work towards a more inclusive society. With our vision to develop a well-governed and thriving charity sector in mind, the Office of the COC will build on initiatives that will contribute to the sustainability and strong support for the sector.

Promoting Informed Giving

In the coming year, the Office of the COC will focus on initiatives to promote informed giving. Over the years, there has been an increasing number of fund-raising appeals, in particular those conducted on internet platforms. While it is heartening to know that there are individuals and organisations who are passionate about supporting charitable causes and individuals in need, it is also of utmost importance that donations are used for genuine charitable causes. We strongly encourage donors to be discerning in their giving, and to that end, we will be rolling out various informed giving initiatives to educate the public on the necessary checks to aid them in giving wisely.

Strengthening Governance Capabilities

The Office of the COC will also continue to focus on strengthening governance capabilities in the sector. Many of our capability building initiatives leverage on successful collaborations with various agencies and partners. Following the launch of the refined Code of Governance for Charities and IPCs in April 2017, the Office of the COC worked closely with the Charity Council and our various partners to conduct sharing sessions on the Code and develop resources such as toolkits to support charities in their implementation of the Code guidelines. To-date, along with the National Council of Churches of Singapore, Singapore Buddhist Federation and Taoist Federation Singapore, sharing sessions have been conducted for the churches and Chinese temples in July 2017. Sharing sessions for the other sectors and religious groups will also be rolled out progressively.

Furthermore, the VWOs-Charities Capability Fund (VCF) has been extended for another five years from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2022. The scope of the VCF has also been widened to make its grants for charities and IPCs more comprehensive in coverage and better aligned with the refined Code of Governance to enable charities to build their governance and management capabilities.

Enhancing Risk Management Practices

Charities today manage a varied spectrum of uncertainties and risks. It is therefore important that charities build capability to identify, understand and manage risks to drive long term sustainability and effectiveness. Recognising that risk management practices are still in their infancy in the charity sector, the Office of the COC worked with the Charity Council, KPMG Singapore and National University of Singapore Business School to organise a seminar in June 2017 to raise charities' understanding about this topic. The Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Toolkit for charities and IPCs was also launched at this event to provide charities with a set of guidelines and practical considerations when starting off their ERM journey.

Various learning events to facilitate the implementation of Risk Management will also be rolled out in 2017. In August 2017, the Risk Management for Charities Workshop was organised by the Chartered Secretaries Institute of Singapore (CSIS) and RSM Risk Advisory Pte Ltd, and funded by VCF. A series of Community of Practices (COPs) will also introduced from the third quarter of 2017. The COPs provide a platform for charities to share and learn from one another on the topic of risk management as well as to co-create solutions to common challenges.

Stepping Up Regulatory Compliance Awareness

Since mid-2017, the Office of the COC has been stepping up its engagement efforts with charities to raise awareness on regulatory compliance requirements. Through frequent conversations with various apex bodies and charities, we seek to better understand the challenges charities face in meeting regulatory requirements, and the assistance required on compliance matters. These efforts will help to enhance our initiatives to encourage and enable self-regulation with the sector.

Enhancing Service Delivery

We will also be working on enhancing the Charity Portal to increase the user-friendliness of the platform. These efforts aim to provide a more seamless user-experience for charities and members of the public.

CONCLUDING NOTE

We believe that a thriving charity sector is vital at all times, particularly during economic uncertainty, as it enables mutual help and builds a cohesive and caring society. With this in mind, our three key priorities of strengthening the sector's governance capabilities, promoting the importance of informed giving and moving towards co-regulation will be the main drivers of our initiatives for the coming year.