>> Hello, everybody, we are about to commence the grants and research session. Take a seat and we will get started very shortly.

>> Good afternoon. My name is Laetitia Kwan and I am the grants and research assistant at ACCAN. Thank you for joining Australia at this session. We are looking forward to sharing with you what ACCAN's independent grants program is all about and by doing so, we hope to encourage you to consider applying in the future.

During this session, we are also going to hear from past and current grantees. A video will be played shortly that demonstrates what can be achieved under our program. ACCAN strives to create a sound body of evidence for consumer representation and advocacy with the objective of helping consumers better navigate the Australian communications market. Since 2010, we have supported over 80 projects and funded, on average, seven projects per year. Part of ACCAN's operation is to administer an independent grants program that funds consumer-focused research, and representation projects. While we often get applications from industry, small businesses and academics, ACCAN strongly encourages applications from the community sector. We also welcome partnerships that bring together a range of different organisations and perspectives.

ACCAN is committed to continuously working closely with applicants and grantees during the application stage as well as after projects begun. We ensure projects are aligned with ACCAN's work in advocacy and policy, as applications that tend to be the most successful are the ones which demonstrate strong consumer engagement.

In the next few minutes, we are going to show you a great example of an ACCAN-funded project which played a remarkable role in improving the accessibility outcomes of Telco apps and web sites. This project is called Telcos For All and it was undertaken by the Centre for Accessibility

Australia. Based in Perth, the organisation is a not for profit which focuses on promoting accessibility through advocacy, research and training services. It is a video we created, showing Telcos speaking about their journey during the project. (VIDEO PLAYS)

>> In 2021, ACCAN funded... (Inaudible)

>> People with disability contacted us to say there were accessible issues with the web sites and the telecommunications sector. The project focused on supporting the Telcos with their issues.

>> When the centre reached out, I was overwhelmed. I felt like this was a gift. (Inaudible).

>> The workshop was great and everyone came together to talk about a common subject and bringing that awareness and understanding. (Inaudible)

>> People with disability also are our customers. We should strive to ensure we make our online digital web site apps accessible to them as well.

>> For us it was motivation to keep going and this report shone a light on how much work we had done but how much work we still need to do.

>> Having accessible content makes a difference. If it is not accessible, I can't actively participate online and that effects my independence. When I get accessibility right, it makes my whole experience possible.

>> Digital accessibility is critical in terms of being able to create a level

playing field for everyone, so they can engage in our digital assets and get the same content that everyone else does. It is their human right to have that.

>> Sometimes accessibility is about a legal compliance. It is more about supporting people, supporting organisations and making a difference. Something that I think is fantastic, when organisations dedicate their work to getting access right, it is makes it better for people with disability.

>> We thank the participants in order of appearance.
(READS LIST OF NAMES)

>> Telcos for all, funded by ACCAN. Centre for Accessibility, Australia.
(VIDEO CONCLUDES)

>> Now we are going to hear from a few past and current grantees who will talk about their projects and share their experiences with the ACCAN grants program. These are people we are particularly proud of as they are making a significant impact on communications consumers and ACCAN is delighted to support their professional journeys. First we have Dr Justine Humphry.

JUSTINE HUMPHRY: Thank you, very much and probably you are bored of hearing from me today. There is so many fantastic researchers and community organisations here. I just wanted to share a little bit of information with you about the grant scheme and the opportunities that it represents and it is also a fantastic opportunity to be able to express my gratitude to ACCAN for all of their support for my first study and over the years. I actually applied for the grants scheme three times before I was

successful. I was successful on my third time and I almost gave up. Each time I applied my project application improved, my grant application improved enormously and, really, the reason for that is I got fantastic advice from my mentor, Gerard Goggin who is here in the room, who helped me enormously with the development of the idea and the project, but also from ACCAN, in particular, from Narelle Clark who gave me a lot of support and encouragement with the application process.

In addition to that, all of the discussions I had with partner organisations who ended up providing support for my project, once it was funded, and helping me to gain access to participants and that included organisations like the Salvation Army, Hanover Marist Youth Care, Homelessness Australia and Vincent Care Victoria, Western Housing for Youth, Youth off the Streets and the Department of Family and Community Services, which it was called at the time FACS and the Department of Human Service, DHS as it was called at the time.

Those discussions, those consultations that I had with those organisations and with those people really helped me to polish and refine the idea for my project. Ultimately, it was funded and I think the key there was to understand what was the policy relevance of the research and to try and explain and communicate that in grant application, in a way that aligned with the strategic priorities of ACCAN. It did take me a long time to do that, partly because I was just out of my PhD and this was the first grants scheme I had applied for. I wasn't familiar with what you needed to do to apply for a grant but it was an absolute pleasure working with ACCAN throughout the entire process and I highly recommend, for anyone who might be thinking of a community organisation, or an academic or another research institution who might be considering applying for the grants scheme to really have a go and it might take a little while for you to develop a project idea that is doable and that can achieve outcomes that will benefit your stakeholders and

your community organisations and the larger policy space but it is worthwhile putting the time and effort into doing it and having those conversations to make your application as good as possible.

It was from that consultation that I forged the partnerships that enabled me to access the participants in the study. As I mentioned, just to talk a little bit about what drove me to do the research, just taking one step back. The study that was originally proposed on homelessness and mobile phone and Internet access and use was inspired by my PhD research, which, at the time - this is way back in 2010 - was on mobile phone use among knowledge professionals in two different organisations in a local council and in a telecommunication company. I was particularly interested in the take-up of Smartphones, the iPhone had only just come out and had observed that a lot of professionals were using them in their - to kind of moderate and modify their work practices and the relationship between work and life and how they used their mobile phone and their mobile technologies in their work practices. One of the things that I observed at the time that I started to do my research was that, in fact, knowledge professionals who were one of the earlier adopters of mobile phones but there were other groups in society that you might not imagine would be mobile phone users, who were adopting mobile phones really early and that included low income people and people who were experiencing homelessness way back in 2010.

That was a really interesting phenomenon for me as a media researcher, because it really disrupted and challenged the traditional media diffusion model that technologies are adopted by, digitally savvy, privileged consumers and they diffuse or distribute to the rest of the population. It suggested that actually the uses of that particular technology were really important to the need for that particular technology were really important for other groups and society as well and they may be using them quite differently.

I was also inspired personally because I had had a brush with homelessness as a young person and had to leave home quite young when I was 17 as a result of a violent person in my household, so I felt a really strong affinity for this particular population and the need for connectivity.

In a way, I think I was really persistent to stick with it and, as I said, I received excellent support. The study was foundational for my research programs and goals. It was probably the first time that I engaged with the policy space and I had to systematically think through how to translate the research findings into useable policy recommendations. I received some really helpful guidance from Gerard and also from colleagues at the University of Sydney about how to do that, how to turn research findings that you have, insights that you have into a set of recommendations that can be actionable by the telecommunications industry, or social service providers and government organisations.

Some of the outcomes from the research included - I mentioned earlier the establishment of the ACCAN hardship portal on the web site, which is still operating, and this was an unexpected outcome and spinoff from the study. It wasn't actually something that I proposed but it was something that we identified as I started to do research and tried to develop an understanding of what were the sort of customer service responses to homelessness from the perspective of telecommunication companies that I realised there was a real gap there and ACCAN also realise that had this was something that was incredibly important and needed to be drawn together. I did receive some assistance from ACCAN to administer a survey across the Telcos to better understand and document their financial hardship policies at the time and then these were published on the web site, which became the first iteration of the hardship portal.

Another outcome of the project was that it contributed to the reduction of the cost of calling 1800 numbers from mobile phones which I mentioned. These fees are waived by most mobile phone providers and the mobile plans that they now offer. This was a combined effort. There was a big campaign at the time that ACCAN helped to coordinate and I think one of the things that is fantastic about ACCAN research is that it can contribute - the findings can contribute to these other campaigns as well, other strategies - related strategies that might be taking place in parallel or after you finished your research.

I just wanted to quickly mention - David Spriggs was here earlier, I wanted to mention the Ask Izzy service. This was an outcome of the research. Infoxchange connects people who are homes throughout Australia with access to food, shelter, health and other support services and they cited the research in their application to their successful Google impact challenge grant application.

I will wrap up now but I want to say who would I recommend apply for the ACCAN grants scheme? Firstly, this is an excellent program for early career researchers, either at the beginning or the mid-part of their career, especially those who are considering collaborating with community organisations and Social Services and potentially other senior academic researchers. I think it is also a really excellent program for researchers who might be more senior in their research career who want to make a specific policy intervention, a policy contribution and I would recommend working closely with another organisation or with ACCAN to understand what kind of policy impact your research can make in the conceptualisation of the research itself. Just wanted to emphasise that in working with community organisations, I think there is a real advantage. I am advocating for the inclusion of academics in community-led research because I think that that particular model, that particular synergy works incredibly well and community organisations are at the forefront of

understanding what the issues are for telecommunication consumers, particularly vulnerable or marginalised media consumers but they can also benefit from bringing in a research voice to be able to help systematically understand and evaluate those particular issues and then translate those into a policy research space - a policy space. Thank you. I would recommend that any community organisations that are considering applying, very happy to chat with you about your own goals and aims for your particular projects and I might hand over to the next person now.

>> Thank you Justine for sharing your wonderful project and journey with us. Let's move onto the professor now.

>> Amazing to hear about it, Justine. We are a new grants recipient. I work with a group of community organisations called Westerly who are service providers, council representatives, NGOs in Western Sydney that came together in 2020 when they realised that the very people they needed to reach, who needed their services the most, were the people that they couldn't access. So for a lot of these NGOs and organisations, there was a real wake-up call that the most important issue facing them was digital exclusion in their communities. We have had - it was a group that had been going for a couple of years and I was collaborating with them for a couple of years and we were having a lot of chats about what are the important issues and what needs to be done in order to get some advocacy done? The group keeps coming back to we need data, we may know what the issues are but we need numbers and we need to be able to have some legitimacy when we go and talk to politicians or to grant providers to say "These are the things we need" and so that's where, as an academic, I came in.

In one of our planning days, the issue that kept coming back up and I am grateful to the people that pushed this, the community organisations

kept raising the issue of first nations digital exclusion and they kept saying that we know a little bit about various communities that we are serving but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander digital exclusion in Western Sydney is an issue that we just do not have our heads around, we can't do service provision, we can't plan for it because we don't know what's happening. This project that ACCAN has very generously funded came out of that community initiative and our project partners, Jesuit Social Services, Digital Literacy Foundation, Salvation Army, Blacktown city council, Baptist Care and Think and Do Tank and these are the organisations in Western Sydney, and for this particular project, we went out of Western Sydney to partner with Black Aboriginal Corporation, an organisation empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGTQI+SB community members. We built in a lot of community consultation into the project.

One of the really interesting and wonderful things about the grant process with ACCAN was the support that Laetitia and Tanya offer throughout the process. Justine mentioned it kind of changed her thinking around how to do a project like this and it definitely changed my thinking as an academic, I am used to coming in and saying "I will give you some scholarship" and no-one will read and that is what I started with. By the end of it, it was - the things that we have promised are going to hopefully have so much more impact, so much more engagement with policy makers, so much more engagement with stakeholders and a real shift in our thinking and in our project design going forward. We have a Wurundjeri scholar leading the project and we have put together an Indigenous governance committee made up of a diverse group of elders, young people, Western Sydney first nations people who are directing our research, so we are kind of led by our community organisations as well as our first nations leadership and we are really lucky. I did not anticipate at the level of support that we are also getting from ACCAN. A lot of grant

bodies give you the money and kind of go "Good luck". Whereas, we have been really lucky ACCAN has reviewed our survey instruments, we have got feedback. They have come to our meetings. They have put us in touch with people and the name opens doors and so when we say to people "We are doing this ACCAN project" and they are like "OK, all right, let's play". It has been a really fantastic experience for us so far and for the community organisations that we work with and I will echo what Justine said, I think this kind of grants program can work really well when you have on the ground knowledge, community knowledge as well as academics that maybe can bring in a little bit of a different perspective as well. Thank you.

LAETITIA KWAN: Thank you. A fantastic project you have on board. Lastly, we have Dr Evana Wright who will be accompanied by Dr Genevieve Wilkinson.

GENEVIEVE WILKINSON: Hi, everyone. Evana and I, we're lucky enough to work with our UTS colleague, Professor David Lindsay, on a grant from 2020-2022, and many of you will have heard Evana speak this morning about our project. It was a 2-year grant that examined the regulation of home Internet of Things devices, focusing particularly on the issues it's raised for consumer law, privacy and cybersecurity. We used six case studies of common IoT devices found in the home, such as Google Nest and Roomba, which framed our research, resulting in a 200-page report, 42 recommendations for change to the law, which was published in 2022, as well as three related publications in consumer law journals and two consumer fact sheets. The research was strongly influenced by meetings with key stakeholders, and particularly by two roundtable discussions which involved around 20 participants, who commented on research briefs and then draft reports about the legal issues that we identified and key

recommendations. And the roundtables were really an absolutely critical tool for pursuing decision-makers and asking them to engage with the problematic legal issues that we identified in our research, and the commentary from the roundtable also informed the direction of our research. So, one of the strengths of the project was using the grant as a reason to bring these people together to discuss issues for legal reform regarding the Internet of Things. We included multiple government departments but also a range of other stakeholders. And the comment that the ACCAN name opened doors, I think, really resonated, as did Justine, comments about how fantastic we found working with ACCAN and what a positive experience that was. It really enhanced our research. So, I'll now hand over to Evana.

EVANA WRIGHT: Thanks, Genevieve, and nice to see everyone again this afternoon. So, it was wonderful for us to have this engagement as a central part of our research project, taking it away just from the academy and engaging with government, but also with other civil society stakeholders, industry, and to have that continued engagement from ACCAN participants, including Tanya and Wayne, who are in the room, to really provide us with some guidance and to speak to those other stakeholders about issues that Internet of Things devices raise. So, it was wonderful to bring those consumer advocate voices to the forum. And as Genevieve mentioned, that informed our research outcomes, our direction, and we continue to engage in collaboration with those stakeholders, including the government agencies, in how we can bring some of our proposals and our recommendations to life, which is very exciting to sort of see the grant continue on.

So, in terms of encouraging people to engage with other stakeholders in their applications, we drew on our existing networks to form our roundtables, particularly the network of one of our chief

investigators, David Lindsay. And our roundtable participants were also very generous. They then, in turn, suggested other people to join the project, and so I can highly recommend working with that broader group and then moving further and further out to get other people engaged in your work. We were also very lucky that one of the previous ACCAN grant recipients, a team from Deakin University including Monique Mann and Ian Warren, were just sort of in the process of wrapping up their research. And so that whole research team then became involved in our research. So, ACCAN really provides that great community that you can work with. So, yes, I don't know - we probably don't have time for our reflections on what we'd do different in the future, but perhaps avoid a global pandemic while completing research! Thank you!

TANYA KARLIYCHUK: That was definitely an interesting time for everybody trying to do community projects and research, so really appreciate everybody's efforts during that time, and the willingness to talk.

I know I'm keeping you from free wine now, so the main message is that Laetitia and I are around today, tomorrow, but also online via email, so please contact us if you do have the inkling of a project idea. If you have questions around who you might be wanting to partner with or engage with, all of those are things that ACCAN can help with. Next year, our round opens in February for projects that begin in July. You can apply for up to $100,000 for a maximum of two years duration. Our data shows that the projects that do the best do have meaningful consumer engagement. Our applications are all assessed independently, which does mean that ACCAN, Laetitia and I, can help you. We can even go as far as looking over drafts of your application. We can talk to you about your project ideas, we can facilitate introductions, all of those things, so please be in touch. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)