



Media Release

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Draft Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code released for public comment

ACCAN welcomes the release today of the public comment draft Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code, but says it doesn't go far enough in providing adequate consumer protections for today's telecommunications landscape.

The Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code has been released for public comment by peak industry body Communications Alliance. Submissions are due by August 10.

The Code sets out requirements for Retail Service Providers (RSPs) relating to sales, customer service, contracts, billing, credit and debt management, financial hardship, transfers between providers and the compliance framework. It is a key component in the consumer protection framework for the telecommunications industry.

ACCAN is a member of the Working Committee reviewing the Code, and has raised a number of issues in this process.

'ACCAN has consulted widely with its members to ensure the consumer voice is heard and that the Code is reviewed and amended with the consumer experience in mind' said ACCAN CEO, Ms Teresa Corbin. 'We have identified key areas of the Code that are failing to support the best outcomes for consumers and have been discussing these extensively with the Working Committee.'

In particular, ACCAN sees significant issues relating to customer service, sales, billing, accessibility, credit assessment and financial hardship. 'We are pleased that we have been able to make some ground on these issues that matter most to our members and consumers more generally. However we still see room for improvement by ensuring the Code supports consumer needs in a fast-evolving telecommunications market' said Ms Corbin.

Growing discontent with the industry has been reflected in a significant [rise in complaints](#) to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and has resulted in the development of new industry Standards by the ACMA. The Consumer Safeguards Review by the Department of Communications has also just commenced.

Industry has agreed to some changes to the Code that represent moderate successes for consumers. In particular, ACCAN is pleased that the draft Code includes: an obligation for RSPs to handle and resolve complaints about third party billing; a definition of data; guidance boxes relating to credit assessment, financial hardship policies and vulnerable consumers; a more flexible definition of financial hardship; and more clarity around the content of the Critical Information Summary.

'Unfortunately the changes do not go far enough to adequately protect consumers, particularly those who are vulnerable. Many of our suggestions have been left at the wayside because of industry concern about the cost especially for smaller providers' Ms Corbin said. 'We strongly believe that a good consumer protection regime is good for business and for customers. This is about creating sustainable services with less consumer complaints in the longrun.'

'The telecommunications landscape has changed dramatically over the past few years with consumers using and becoming increasingly reliant on telecommunications services in unprecedented ways. It has become a very complex market that consumers find difficult to navigate. The current rollout of the NBN is also a significant point of frustration for consumers', Ms Corbin said. 'Ensuring the TCP Code reflects current and future consumer demands in this new environment is vital.

Before the Code is registered, ACCAN would like further amendments made to support consumer outcomes by:

- Requiring a more robust credit assessment process
- A requirement to align sales practices with the interests of consumers
- Stronger, more extensive rules for third party billing
- Allowing consumers to receive a paper bill and pay using an alternative to direct debit without incurring a fee
- Requiring RSPs to provide information about accessibility features of devices for people with disability
- An updated definition of small business

'Consumers, regulators and the Government alike want to see significant change from the industry to curb poor consumer-facing practices such as mis-selling, inadequate credit assessments, and unsympathetic handling of consumers in financial crisis. This review offers an important opportunity for that to happen' Ms Corbin said.

If you would like to provide feedback to the draft TCP Code you can do so via the Communications Alliance [website](#). For more information contact Martin James on media@accan.org.au or 0409 966 931. You can also view our [blog](#) on this issue. For the latest updates, follow ACCAN on Twitter or like us on Facebook.