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Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)

ACCAN Communications Consumer Congress

Wednesday, 13 September 2023

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JULIAN THOMAS: Morning, everyone. I'm Julian Thomas. I'm the Chair of the ACCAN Board. And I'd like to thank Allen very much for that wonderful Welcome to Country and also start myself by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, pay my respects also to their Elders, past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all First Nations people who are engaged and working with ACCAN or who are part of this meeting.

On behalf of the ACCAN Board, it's really a great pleasure to welcome you all to our 2023 Consumer Congress. I also want to acknowledge our distinguished speakers, who are going to be joining us online - the Minister for Communications, the Honourable Michelle Rowland MP, and the Shadow Minister for Communications, the Honourable David Coleman MP. They can't be here in person but will be contributing online. Now, it's absolutely great to be back at this venue. As Andrew said, it's some years now - this is our first meeting in person since 2019. The pandemic, that meant that we couldn't meet in person, that we have been conducting our recent meetings online, may seem, to some of us, like a fairly remote experience now. But there is no doubt that its impact on communications, in particular, and life generally has been absolutely enormous. The pandemic demonstrated the essential nature of communications for all Australians, not just the pandemic but in recent years the fires and floods as well. Without access to affordable, reliable communications services, many of us wouldn't have been able to work from home, to study or learn from home, to keep in touch with family and friends online, or to access critically important health services and information during that whole period. And, of course, many Australians could not do so. If the pandemic demonstrated one thing, it was the very high price that some Australians pay for being digitally excluded.

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We, as a board at ACCAN, are incredibly proud of the organisation's work towards ensuring communications services that ARE inclusive, accessible and available to everybody. ACCAN events such as this are all about connection. They give us a great opportunity to come together and discuss ideas in an open forum. So, that's the point of today. I'm looking forward to a series of great sessions. We're going to be guided through the day by Andrew Williams, our CEO, who's already talked a little bit about what's coming, and also Gareth Downing, ACCAN's Deputy CEO, and, of course, the whole, amazing ACCAN team. And I want to thank them as well for the extraordinary work they've done in making all of this possible. And thank you also, all of you, as well for your ongoing support and participation, and your contributions to our discussions today.