

THIS EDITION:

NO AUSTRALIAN LEFT OFFLINE

THE NEED FOR AFFORDABLE
BROADBAND FOR ALL
AUSTRALIANS

EMF - WHAT IS IT AND WHAT DOES
IT MEAN FOR CONSUMERS?

ACCESSIBLE TELECOMS -
PICKING THE PHONE FOR YOU



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ACCAN is the peak organisation representing all consumers on communications issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services. Our mission is to ensure that communications are trusted, inclusive and available for all Australians.

Contact us:

Phone: 02 9288 4000

You can contact ACCAN through the NRS

Web: accan.org.au

Twitter: @ACCAN_AU

YouTube: youtube.com/ACCANvideo

Facebook: facebook.com/accanau

Email: info@accan.org.au

Editor:

Melyssa Troy

Contributors:

Tara D'Souza

Gareth Downing

Melyssa Troy

Design:

Magnesium Media

www.luxurytravelmedia.com.au

Cover:

Design by Richard Van Der Male with images from Shutterstock



Our CEO: **Teresa Corbin**

Welcome to the autumn edition of the ACCAN magazine. This edition coincides with the launch of ACCAN's push for affordable broadband for all, known as "No Australian Left Offline." ACCAN is urging the nation's political parties to consider our proposal for affordable broadband for low-income households ahead of the 2019 Federal election. You can find out more about our policy proposal for "No Australian Left Offline" in this quarter's Feature Article.

As the way that Australians communicate continues to evolve, it's important that regulations are keeping up to date to protect consumers. In Policy News, our team explain the recommendations ACCAN put forward in our recent submission to the Consumer Safeguards Review – Part B, including our desire to see all providers of voice and broadband services bound to regulations around the reliability of telecommunications.

With an increasing public interest in 5G and the safety of small cells towers, we decided to sit down with AMTA CEO Chris Althaus to sort the fact from the fiction. Read all about it in this edition's Spotlight Article.

Finally, as ACCAN's 2019 grants program opens, we looked back at what 2017-2018 grant recipients Broadband for the Bush found from their recently published survey of regional, rural and remote Australians' telco habits. If you'd like to learn more about the grants program, head to the back cover.

For all the latest ACCAN updates, follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/accanau), Twitter (twitter.com/ACCAN_AU) or LinkedIn (linkedin.com/company/australian-communications-consumer-action-network-accan).

The ACCAN website has lots of useful information, tip sheets and guides for communications consumers.

As always, if you have any comments, suggestions or feedback, please email : ceo@accan.org.au or call me on **02 9288 4000**

Warm regards

Teresa Corbin

ACCAN CEO



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NO AUSTRALIAN LEFT OFFLINE: ACCAN Pushes for Affordable Broadband

In February, ACCAN launched “No Australian Left Offline” – a proposal for a new wholesale broadband concession that would provide over a million Australians with cheaper home broadband. ACCAN is urging the nation’s political parties to consider the proposal ahead of the 2019 Federal election.

ACCAN considers that a 50 mbps unlimited broadband service offered at a wholesale price of \$20 per month by NBN Co to households receiving government financial support to be the most effective way to achieve affordable broadband for all. This would mean eligible households would pay approximately \$30 per month for unlimited broadband – almost halving the current average cost.

“Low-income families are increasingly under financial stress, particularly when it comes to cost of communications,” said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. “Over 15% of Australia’s lowest-income earners haven’t been able to pay their utility bills on time – it’s clearly time for change.”

Telco Accountability is Key for Consumer Safeguards Review: ACCAN

Australians are being put at risk due to inadequate consumer protection frameworks around the reliability of telecommunications services, ACCAN has warned the Government’s latest Consumer Safeguard Review.

“Without a clear framework that sets out when services should be connected, faults repaired and consumers compensated, there is little transparency for the community and businesses about how essential communications services should be delivered. Consumers are confused and frustrated at their limited options when things go wrong and they are left without services and no redress for unacceptably long periods,” said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin.

ACCAN’s submission to the Consumer Safeguards Review calls for consumer protections to be extended to include fixed-line broadband services from all telecommunications retail service providers. Importantly, ACCAN has also proposed that connection and repair times for fixed-line services should be at least the same as the existing Customer Service Guarantee and should be defined in terms of days, rather than working days.

Should a provider not connect or repair a service within the specified timeframe or fails to turn up to a scheduled appointment, ACCAN has proposed that there should be automatic compensation for consumers. If a provider is found to be consistently breaching the standard, penalties should apply.

ACCAN Calls on Government to Adopt Regional Review Recommendations

In December 2018, ACCAN declared that regional, rural and remote Australians will be better protected if recommendations put forward by the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review are adopted.

ACCAN has been a vocal supporter of the need to independently measure the speed performance of fixed-wireless and satellite NBN services to determine where the issues may lie. It is extremely pleasing to see that the report echoes these thoughts, as shown by the recommendation for a similar program for regional fixed-wireless and NBN Sky Muster customers. The report’s recommended audit of landline phone performances identifies loopholes in the current arrangement which do not serve the interests of consumers.

ACCAN strongly supports the Review’s proposed package to improve broadband and mobile service in regional Australia.

ACCAN Welcomes USO Preservation, Pushes for Broadband Inclusion Through Legislation

ACCAN welcomes the Morrison Government’s commitment to preserve the current Universal Service Obligation (USO) arrangements to guarantee fixed voice services to Australians, however stresses the urgency in extending guarantees to include broadband services through legislation.

The USO refers to the obligation to ensure that all Australians can access a Standard Telephone Service, regardless of where they live or work. Telstra is currently contracted to deliver this obligation and uses a range of technologies to do so, including its fixed copper network, and radio and wireless services.

ACCAN also strongly supports the Government’s commitment to creating a new Universal Service Guarantee that embraces broadband, as well as the traditional phone services. Consumers have repeatedly emphasised the importance of having a reliable broadband connection in today’s increasingly connected age.

ACCAN noted the importance of getting new arrangements in place to underpin the delivery of broadband. Currently, there is a policy expectation that NBN will deliver fast broadband to all premises, but this is not underpinned by any legislated obligation. Legislation introduced in March 2017 in the Federal Parliament will address this gap; frustratingly this legislation is yet to be passed.



EMF – What is it and What Does it Mean for Consumers?

WRITTEN BY MELYSSA TROY

As mobile phones and connected devices continue to grow in popularity across Australia, more and more infrastructure is needed to support these services. One of the most common technologies used to power our data demands is known as a small cell; these devices are used to boost 4G and mobile services in suburban areas.

While these low-powered base stations are less visually intrusive than their larger counterparts, some people are worried about the potential health impacts that they could bring to neighbourhoods. These concerned residents believe that the installation of small cells in their streets would expose them to dangerous levels of electromagnetic energy (EME). Chris Althaus, Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) CEO said these fears are unfounded.

“Small cells typically have a lower power output than macro cells, and so their EME emissions are also lower. This is partly because the closer the base station is to the consumer device, the less power it needs to transmit and communicate with the device,” he said.

Mr Althaus explained that small cells are regulated in Australia by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) who ensures that they meet set standards around EME levels and safe exposure.

“Small cells been extensively studied and ARPANSA alongside international health organisations and regulatory authorities, have found that exposure to low level EME fields do not pose any risk to human health.”

The increasing demand for reliable mobile coverage has meant that more and more suburbs have recently become host to small cells towers. For some residents, this has caused frustration as they feel that telcos are installing the technology without proper community consultation.

As they are attached to pre-existing infrastructure, such as light posts or electricity poles, small cell towers do not require the approval of local councils or planning processes.

“This means that the regulations that apply to them relate to what is defined by legislation as ‘Low Impact’ deployment,” said Mr Althaus.

Although they do not require planning approval, telcos do have certain obligations when it comes to consulting with impacted communities.

“The industry must comply with the mandatory Mobile Phone Base Station Deployment Code (regulated by [the] Australian Communications and Media Authority). This means that Mobile Carriers must notify residents within a local area about any plans to install a small cell and respond to submissions from councils and the public during a defined consultation period,” explained Mr Althaus.

“If consumers are concerned about small cell deployment in their area they can contact the relevant mobile carrier, their local council or visit the Radio Frequency National Site Archive website (www.rfnsa.com.au) to find out about small cell locations and contact points for each base station.”

As Australia heads towards a 5G-driven future, it's likely that further electricity poles and light posts across the nation will host small cells in order to keep up with increased mobile demand. ACCAN will continue to engage with industry, including AMTA, to ensure that consumers are properly educated on the risks and benefits associated with small cells and other mobile technology.

No Australian Left Offline

A roadmap to affordable home broadband for all

WRITTEN BY GARETH DOWNING

Communications services have the potential to transform our day-to-day lives through greater access to health, education, government and financial services. Despite the great promise of communications, the high price of broadband locks families and individuals out of the opportunities of modern Australia. ACCAN is committed to promoting affordable broadband for all Australians so that there is **No Australian Left Offline**.

In February, ACCAN launched our No Australian Left Offline initiative in an effort to secure support from the major political parties ahead of the upcoming 2019 Federal Election. With broadband now a necessity not a luxury, it is time for our government to act and prioritise affordable broadband for all.

What is affordable broadband?

Affordable broadband is an internet service that enables all Australians to be online regardless of their personal circumstances or where they live without putting them into financial stress.

Why is affordable broadband important?

Without affordable home broadband, it is harder for school age children to do their homework and keep up at school both academically and socially; it is harder for young people to

prepare for the post-school world of further training, education or employment. For adults, it is virtually impossible to find opportunities and gain employment, in order to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. For frail and less mobile consumers, it is harder to reduce social isolation and access important support services.

For Australia, the absence of affordable broadband means our aspirations of better economic and social outcomes won't be attained, as the digital divide separating low income and high



Consumer Safeguards Review – Part B Reliability of Services

WRITTEN BY TARA D'SOUZA

In January, ACCAN made a submission to the Department of Communications and the Arts to recommend improvements to consumer protections around the reliability of telecommunications services.

This submission is part of a broader review of consumer protections in telecommunications. The aim is to determine whether existing arrangements will be fit for purpose in an environment where NBN is the underlying infrastructure provider, and consumer use of services has changed considerably since the existing framework was developed.

The review is divided into three parts:

Part A

Redress and Complaints Handling
Completed in 2018.

Part B

Reliability of Services
Submissions closed in January 2019.

Part C

Choice and Fairness
Expected in 2019.

Part B, Reliability of Services, examined the need for regulations to ensure customers can access reliable telecommunications services. Reliability relates to connection and repair timeframes, as well as how often network outages occur and how long they last. The current arrangements place obligations on fixed-line voice services (e.g. home phones) provided by Telstra.

Since the current arrangements were developed, the use of broadband has become widespread. This change warrants regulation similar to that provided

on fixed-line voice services (e.g. home phones). With the rollout of the NBN, Telstra should no longer be the only provider of regulated services - all providers of voice and broadband services should be subject to regulations to protect consumers.

We have made 14 recommendations to the Department of Communications and the Arts that we would like to see implemented in 2019 including:

- Telecommunications are essential services and regulations are required to obligate providers to connect or repair services within specified timeframes.
- There should be automatic compensation for consumers when a provider does not connect or repair a service within the specified timeframe or fails to turn up (or is more than 15 minutes late) to a scheduled appointment.
- Consumers with a medically diagnosed life-threatening condition should have access to faster connection and repair timeframes as well as backup services in order to maintain their connections to emergency services
- Penalties apply to providers for consistent breaches
- Providers report reliability performance (such as numbers of faults) to the ACMA for regular reporting.

ACCAN looks forward to the release of the Consumer Safeguards Review - Part B report in the coming months. We will be monitoring the recommendations that the government proposes to adopt to ensure that consumers are better protected when it comes to their right to a reliable service.





Accessible Telecoms – Picking the Phone for You

WRITTEN BY MELYSSA TROY

Earlier this year, ACCAN officially launched the Accessible Telecoms project, Australia's first independent information resource for telecommunications products suitable for people with disability.

It can be difficult to know where to start when it comes to understanding what accessibility features will be most important for you when picking a new device. Conveniently, the Accessible Telecoms website matches up access needs with the features available on different phone models.

Below are some of the top mobile phone accessibility features that should be kept in mind for users with hearing, cognitive, vision, speech, and physical needs. For a complete list of accessibility features and to find the right telecommunications product for you, head to: www.ideas.org.au or call **1800 029 904**.

If you are shopping for a new phone, remember to look for these features, as they may assist you:

Hearing

- Allows for sign language communication - The device screen supports at least 20 frames per second (minimum for quality sign language communication).
- Hearing Aid or "HAC" Setting - The device has a user setting designed to reduce issues related to interference buzzing for hearing aid users in telecoil mode. Does not guarantee total clarity.
- Visual Alerts - Incoming Calls - When a call comes in, it displays a visual alert, such as the caller's name or photo if it is stored in your contact list

Cognitive

- Voice notes - Allows you to record, save and play back a short voice reminder.
- Simple reminders - All text alerts and other reminders that are displayed on the screen use simple, easy to understand language.

- Photo Associated Telephone Book - You can add photos of people next to their numbers in your contact list (a personal 'telephone book' you create in the phone).

Vision

- Adjustable Font Size - You can make the text on the display larger or smaller to make it easier to read.
- Screen reader - A mode in which onscreen information is made available via text to speech and the device is operable without vision.
- Personal Assistant / Voice Control - The device provides a personal assistant that can help the user carry out functions on the device (e.g. writing and sending texts, placing phone calls, scheduling events, posting social media updates, searching and surfing the internet, accessing different applications etc.).

Speech

- SMS Personalisation and Reuse - Allows you to create standard text messages that you can quickly send to anyone without having to retype them each time. For example, "I'm in a meeting, I'll call you back".
- Messaging Options - Predictive Text - Helps you write text messages more quickly by predicting words from the first few letters you type.
- Allows for sign language communication - The device screen support at least 20 frames per second (minimum for quality sign language communication).

Physical

- Headset - plug connected - You can plug in a headset containing headphones and a microphone. This allows you to answer calls, listen, and talk without holding the phone. This can mean better call quality for some people and is useful if you have trouble holding a phone.
- Easy to Press Keys - Keys on the keypad are easy to press
- Automatic answer - You can set it to answer all calls automatically without you having to do anything.

Analysing the Broadband for the Bush (B4BA) Survey

WRITTEN BY MELYSSA TROY

A dedicated network of organisations known as the B4BA work together to uncover the everyday reality of communications services for rural and remote Australians. The 2017-2018 grant recipients investigated the availability, quality, reliability and affordability of telecommunications services experienced by rural and remote Australians.

B4BA's survey was analysed by Marianne St Clair and David Murtagh from Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute who identified the telco issues faced by rural and regional Australians, and what can be done to improve.

While mobile phones are the most used device by rural and regional Australians, the B4BA survey also identified a strong need for landlines; this dual-device approach aims to provide a guaranteed method of communication should one type of device fail, and is consistent with findings from other ACCAN-funded research. The need for a back-up form of communication is demonstrated by regional and remote consumers who felt their services were less reliable than those in urban areas. St Clair and Murtagh highlight the need to review and enforce the Universal Service Obligation to ensure regional and remote Australians have adequate access to basic communications services.

“It is important the Universal Service Obligation is reviewed and enforced to ensure RRR people have adequate access to basic communications services.” – St Clair and Murtagh

The reliability of services was seen as a major concern within the survey, with only 65% of regional and remote survey respondents indicating that their service was reliable. When faults did occur, having them fixed was also an issue, with some individuals waiting for up to six weeks for rectification. Case study participants reported experiencing poor customer service from Retail Service Providers and two participants resorted to contacting the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

Interestingly, when it comes to the most positively-regarded communications technology, NBN SkyMuster came out on top. SkyMuster was seen as a “fairly reliable” and stable option that generally worked well in all weather conditions. However, there were also a number of comments regarding frequent drop outs, slow download and contention on SkyMuster services.



In summarising what could be improved to move toward better communications services for rural and remote Australians, the project team identified their preferred central themes of a future remote telecommunications policy and strategy. This policy and strategy would address key problem areas such as increasing mobile phone coverage to include access to Wi-Fi calling and messaging, the reliability of services, and fault rectification efforts.

B4BA's research is an important tool to help understand which telecommunications issues are most important in our regions. ACCAN is pleased to have supported their efforts through our 2017 – 2018 grants program.

Expressions of interest for the 2019 Grants Round open March 4, 2019. For more information, visit www.accan.org.au/grants.



ACCAN Grants Scheme

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**FOR WORK on telecommunications
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OPEN 4TH MARCH***

**Contact the ACCAN Grants Team
to discuss your project ideas**

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