



*Media Release*

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## Study proposes a new model for Deafblind access to telco services

A new study launched today examines the barriers faced by many Deafblind consumers when accessing customer service call centres. The [Assisted Access](#) study by [Able Australia](#), was funded through the [ACCAN Grants Scheme](#) and aimed to develop a model for Deafblind consumers to access their telco's customer service with ease and security.

Consumers who are Deafblind have both a significant hearing and vision loss. Current information and privacy practices usually require the customer to interact using their own voice – not a facilitator's – and therefore prevent these consumers from easy phone access to their telcos. Text based alternatives are often also inadequate when using specialised screen set ups and braille based systems.

The study examined the current options available in Australia and reviewed systems in place overseas to access customer service and concluded that a solution could be the use of a personal identification number (PIN). The unique PIN would resolve the privacy and security issues and provide an alternative to voice identification. When presented along with other account information, a PIN should constitute sufficient identity verification for Deafblind consumers who need to communicate with call centre staff through an Auslan interpreter.

"The options available to Deafblind consumers at the moment are not adequate to allow them to easily access the customer service of their telecommunications provider," said Able Australia researcher, Ben McAtamney.

"Smartphones and tablets give Deafblind consumers unprecedented independence and access to information and communication with the outside world. It's important that issues with accessing telecommunications provider customer service are resolved so these consumers can interact through a third party effectively."

The report suggests that the PIN could work in two ways – either as a randomly generated PIN sent to the customer prior to each interaction, or as a number assigned to the customer and kept on file as part of their account information. Using a PIN would add security and help to protect the customer's privacy.

"ACCAN supports the conclusion of the study and hopes to see telcos allow Deafblind consumers easier access to customer service through the implementation of a PIN system," said ACCAN Disability Policy Advisor, Wayne Hawkins. "Telcos need to offer a range of customer service options so that Australians living with a disability can have independent access to easily manage their phone and internet accounts."

The report also sought industry feedback on the proposed PIN system. Not-for-profit telecommunications provider, [Jeenee Mobile](#), was receptive to the solution and is launching its PIN system today. Under the Jeenee Mobile system

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*The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.*

customers will be able to select a PIN of their choice which will be attached to their account enabling Deafblind consumers to contact Jeenee Mobile through a third party using the PIN.

Jeenee Mobile's General Manager, Jeremy Way said: "We were pleased to work with Able Australia to help develop a PIN system for Deafblind consumers to access our customer services. Jeenee Mobile works to support every Australian in making mobile services as accessible and inclusive as possible. We believe that every customer, irrespective of individual capacity or capability, should have equal access to our services, which we provide to a broad cross section of Australians that live with (and without) many different types of disability. We welcome this report and commend Able Australia and ACCAN for highlighting this important issue, the implementation of which provides Jeenee Mobile with an opportunity to further support the Deafblind community and make their interactions with us easier."

Download a full copy of the [Assisted Access](#) report on the ACCAN website.

For more information, please contact Luke Sutton on 0409 966 931 or [luke.sutton@accan.org.au](mailto:luke.sutton@accan.org.au).

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