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## Media Release

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### ACCAN voices concerns about proposed changes to the NRS

The Government's [commitment to providing the National Relay Service](#) (NRS) into the future is welcomed, however, ACCAN is concerned about the lack of provision to increase funding even though new relay options were introduced over the last three years.

"The NRS has been a critical communications channel for Australians who are Deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired for more than two decades and it continues to be an essential service for many consumers," said ACCAN Disability Policy Advisor, Wayne Hawkins.

"The introduction of video relay, SMS relay, two-way internet relay, the NRS app and captioned telephony has made Australia's National Relay Service a worlds-best service for people who are Deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired and it should be applauded.

"There are real concerns that without appropriate funding NRS services may be wound back from present levels leaving some consumers without services."

ACCAN would like to see the NRS funded on a user-need model rather than be capped at the 2012 level of \$20 million per year (excluding GST).

Additionally, ACCAN has concerns about the Government's proposal to require NRS users to register to use the service – particularly if the registration process is online. This does not accommodate NRS users who do not have internet access, such as older Australians, who use teletypewriters (TTY) to use the NRS.

"The NRS is more than a safety net, it provides equivalent access to communications services for those who cannot use standard telephone services. It should be available for anyone who needs it without a requirement to be registered," said Mr Hawkins.

Consumers have also raised concerns that the NRS outreach services have been curtailed, creating a digital literacy vacuum for potential and new users of the NRS.

"While there may be a number of mainstream technologies, such as Skype and FaceTime, that users could transition to, decreasing reliance on NRS services, without appropriate awareness, education and ongoing support it is unlikely that these options will be taken up," added Mr Hawkins. "There are also situations where these mainstream options are not available, such as contacting Government services like Centrelink."

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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.*

Consumer groups raised many suggestions for NRS improvements in the 2016 review. We are worried that these suggestions may not be taken up in this tender process.

ACCAN recommends the Government undertake immediate consultation with NRS stakeholder organisations to ensure that the transition to a new NRS contract meets the needs of users, provides the range of services required and keep Australia's NRS a worlds-best service.

For more information, contact Luke Sutton on [luke.sutton@accan.org.au](mailto:luke.sutton@accan.org.au) or 0409 966 931. For the latest updates, follow ACCAN on [Twitter](#) or like us on [Facebook](#).