

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.

Telecommunications services are a critical part of modern Australian life, powering everything from our businesses to our healthcare services. As Australia's peak body representing telecommunications consumers, ACCAN has argued that better regulation in telecommunications is needed to safeguard the interests of consumers.

"Australians are being left in the dark when it comes to their right to reliable home broadband," said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin.

"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."

Currently, only Telstra home phone customers are able to access guarantees for service reliability and repair timeframes.

"Australia's communications needs have changed; this is clearly an outdated approach to protecting consumers and there is an urgent need for reform," said Ms Corbin.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.

"Weekends and public holidays can push out the timeframe for many consumers to have their service repaired, which unnecessarily delays them from connecting to an essential service," Ms Corbin said.

To protect vulnerable consumers, those with a medically diagnosed life-threatening condition need to have access to faster connection and repair timeframes, as well as backup services in order to maintain their connections to emergency services.

"For individuals and small businesses, continuous and reliable access to voice and internet services are vital; it is key that repair timeframes reflect that."

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 is pleased to see that many of the ideas in the Department's consultation paper are consistent with ACCAN's [policy position on reliability that was released in 2016](#). The policy position, called "A Guarantee for the Future" identified key requirements needed to support the delivery of reliable voice and broadband services for the future. The policy position was developed following extensive consultation with ACCAN's members and the industry.

ACCAN looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Communications and the Arts to embed telecommunications consumer protections for Australians with the upcoming release of Part C of the Consumer Safeguards Review, focusing on Choice and Fairness.

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