Accessible Telecoms – a new nation-wide disability telecommunications information service goes live

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) has today launched Australia's first independent information resource for telecommunications products suitable for people with disability.

Known as the Accessible Telecoms project, the interactive website and call centre will be the much needed one-stop shop for information about the accessibility features of both mainstream and assistive telecommunications equipment suitable for people with disability. It is made possible thanks to a National Readiness grant from the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

As Australia's peak body representing communications consumers, ACCAN has been advocating for a service that will eliminate the growing information vacuum about equipment and services suitable for people with disability in our increasingly digitally connected society.

"There is an acknowledged lack of up-to-date, appropriate and independent information about telecommunications equipment and services available for Australians with disability," said Wayne Hawkins, ACCAN Director of Inclusion.

"We're pleased that the NDIA understands the significance of this project in assisting Australians with disability to be able to utilise telecommunications to enable greater participation in all aspects of Australian life – economic, social, and cultural and community."

Telecommunications are now a vital part of our everyday lives, from accessing government services, to keeping in touch with family and friends. This is no less true for the more than 4 Million Australians who identify as having a disability. It is essential that every one of us is able to connect and communicate using telecommunications.

Accessible Telecoms will provide information about the accessibility features of telephone handsets (fixed, mobile and teletypewriters) as well as the accessories which make them usable for people with disability. The service will also provide information about available set-up, training and on-going support that can provide people with disability with the skills and confidence to maximise the benefits of telecommunications access. Over time the information available will expand to include accessible tablets, mobile apps and software that can enable people with disability to connect with the telecommunications networks.

"I am excited about the new service from ACCAN. The community needs better information about accessible telecommunications suitable for people with disability, and the ACCAN referral service has the potential to provide this," said Alastair McEwin, Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

"It is so important that we facilitate connectedness and participation across our communities, and creating accessible communications are essential to that."

ACCAN has enlisted IDEAS (Information on Disability Education and Awareness Service) to deliver the information via their website and call centre.

"It may be a surprise to many people who live without disabilities that accessing truly accessible telecoms hardware and software is very complex. While apps and screen modifications on smart phones can be of some assistance to people with disability, these specifications may not be right for people with particular mobility, sensory, and memory or cognitive conditions," said IDEAS CEO, Diana Palmer.

"Through Accessible Telecoms, we're excited to offer people with disability up-to-date and independent telecommunications resources that can be accessed by web, live chat or phone. This is a momentous undertaking, as it marks the first time that people with disabilities will be able to engage with a resource to help them determine exactly what they want from their telecommunications products."

Accessible Telecoms is available at www.IDEAS.org.au, or by phoning IDEAS on 1800 029 904.

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