



Hot issues

Calling for telecommunications funding in the Federal Budget

In our [2018-19 Pre-Budget submission](#), we took the opportunity to highlight telecommunication areas that could benefit from more funding in the Federal Budget.

Our recommendations span a range of issues, from mobile coverage to affordability and accessibility. Many of these are not new recommendations, but they are ones that are important to consumers and worth highlighting once again.

Read on for a summary of our recommendations.

Where is funding needed?

Mobile network expansion

With more than 10,000 mobile black spots identified, expansion and improvement of mobile coverage is clearly a priority issue for regional and rural Australia.

Current and previous programs have resulted in further coverage. However, there are still many houses, community areas and high traffic areas with no mobile coverage.

ACCAN (and the [Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition](#)) is calling for a commitment from the Government beyond Round 3 of the [Mobile Black Spot Program](#) to fund further mobile network expansion.

Low-income measures

Current Government assistance available to help low-income Australians get and stay connected to phones and the internet is inadequate and poorly targeted.

The Centrelink Telephone Allowance (CTA) payment rates and eligibility criteria no longer meet the needs of low-income consumers. ACCAN has recommended that the Government allocate additional funding for an updated CTA with improved targeting. We also recommended that the Government investigate the possibility for a Telecommunications Concession to better target Government support.

NBN switchover

For some consumers, switching to the NBN will be too difficult to complete on their own. Failed migration may create a significant risk to the safety of vulnerable consumers by leaving them without a way to contact emergency services, except by mobile services, if they have coverage at home.

As the process for switching to the NBN is a self-install model, assistance is increasingly needed. In circumstances where consumers are not tech savvy or there are complications within the home

(such as internal wiring that needs updating), consumers could face hefty charges or be left with no services. Because of this, ACCAN has recommended that the Government provide funding to assist vulnerable consumers to switch to the NBN.

Broadband monitoring

ACCAN welcomed the announcement last year of funding for the [Measuring Broadband Australia program](#). This program will significantly improve consumers' understanding of broadband speeds and ability to choose suitable NBN plans and providers.

However, ACCAN is concerned that around one million households will not benefit from this program as fixed wireless and satellite services will not be measured under the program. ACCAN is calling for additional funding for the ACCC to expand the program to include fixed wireless and satellite services.

National Disability Telecommunications Service

While telecommunications services are now essential to all consumers, many people with disability face barriers that make it difficult and sometimes impossible to enjoy the benefits of connection. Barriers include: lack of access to appropriate equipment and devices, lack of awareness about mainstream options, lack of equipment set-up, training and ongoing support and unaffordability. To address these issues, ACCAN is calling for the development of a 'one-stop-shop' National Disability Telecommunications Service.

We envision this would be a national resource for communications product and service information, training and support. This would benefit people with disability, their families and carers, as well as increase economic, social and community participation for people with disability and alleviate many of the barriers that people with disability currently need to overcome.

Audio description

Audio description is an essential access feature that enables people who are blind or vision impaired to understand and enjoy television.

Currently there is no audio description on any Australian television service, leaving hundreds of thousands of Australians who are blind or vision impaired without equitable access to televised news, information and entertainment.

Many comparable countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada have mandated the provision of audio description services for their television broadcasters.

In December 2017, the Department of Communications and the Arts provided the Audio Description Working Group's report to the Government. The report outlines a number of possible options for introducing audio description services. It is clear from the report that Government financial support will be integral in implementing any of the proposed options. ACCAN recommends that the Government allocates dedicated funding in the Budget to introduce permanent audio description services across all Australian television broadcasters.