

## **Indi residents experiencing a range of telecommunications issues**

Last week ACCAN's CEO, Teresa Corbin, and Director of Policy, Una Lawrence, travelled to the Electorate of Indi (northeast Victoria) to meet with residents and discuss issues around telecommunications services.

ACCAN was invited to attend community meetings and a meeting with local government representatives and businesses by Indi's Federal Member of Parliament, Cathy McGowan. Meetings were held in Beechworth, Wangaratta, Benalla and Oxley.

The issues experienced by residents are not unique to Indi and are experienced by many living in rural and remote areas. Availability and accessibility of quality communications services are key focus areas of ACCAN's work.

At the meetings, local residents shared stories about landline issues including services that drop out and are susceptible to bad weather.

Problems with internet services were highlighted. Telstra's fixed wireless network is available in the area, however, residents are frustrated by slow connections, dropouts or inability to get a connection at all, due to congestion. These problems are especially frustrating during school holidays, on weekends and after 3pm on weekdays.

Poor mobile communications is an issue that affects residents and the tourism industry. The mobile network can't cope with the increased congestion if there is a local event or festival taking place. It was reported that text messages have taken days to be received during these peak times. Local businesses are impacted by this as tourists are becoming disgruntled with the lack of connectivity.

Even more worrying is that Indi is a bush fire prone area. In previous emergency situations residents have received broadcast text messages several days after the emergency. There are calls for mobile services to be treated as an essential service and to be universally available because of these dangers and due to the poor performance of landline services.

Positively, the residents of Indi will benefit from 30 new mobile towers being built in the area with funding from the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Programme. The rollout of the Programme will begin by the end of 2015 and will continue over a three year period.

Throughout Indi there is a strong belief that access to telecommunications services can transform people's lives. Residents fear that the world is leaping ahead of them as they continue to be poorly served.

Quality telecommunications services are essential for all Australians. ACCAN continues to work on these issues and encourages any consumers who are experiencing poor services who cannot find a solution with their service provider or the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO), to get in touch with their local MP.