

ACCAN media release

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ACCAN to hold industry to new 1300/1800 number commitments

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network welcomes today's announcement that telcos will make mobile calls to 1800 numbers free of charge, but says it will hold the industry to its commitments regarding 1300 numbers.

"This is a great win for consumers calling 1800 numbers. For the first time these calls will be free from mobiles," said ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin. "ACCAN has been calling on the industry to provide a solution to this problem since 2010, and we ask that industry honour its own commitment to a January 2015 deadline."

The 13/1300 number range was designed to provide low cost, easy to remember numbers for fixed line calls to government and business. As such, they were adopted by many essential services like Centrelink, drug and alcohol and mental health services, as well as car breakdown services, insurance companies and banks.

"We remain concerned about the affordability of calls to 13/1300 numbers, especially for low income and vulnerable consumers, and the ongoing confusion around how these calls are charged," Ms Corbin said. "The cost of calls to 13/1300 numbers can chew through pre-paid mobile plans, which are often favoured by lower income consumers. And while there has been a significant increase in 13-friendly monthly mobile plans, the cost of 13/1300 calls can vary widely, from 3 cents/minute to \$1.39/minute."

The cost of calls to 13/1300 numbers sits within a context of difficulty in managing telecommunications expenses. Recent research by ACCAN found that two thirds of low income consumers had difficulty paying their mobile phone bill, and six out of every ten prepaid customers ran out of credit sooner than expected.

"ACCAN will continue to monitor the cost of 13/1300 numbers to ensure the industry remains true to its promises. Even as we acknowledge the progress made on this issue, we'll be calling on business and government to switch to 1800 numbers when deciding how best to communicate with consumers and citizens.

"We urge consumers to look for alternate means when making mobile calls to business and government. Use local numbers, websites and apps and – from January 2015 - use 1800 numbers."

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About ACCAN

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's new peak communications consumer organisation. ACCAN's goal is available, accessible and affordable communications that enhances the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.