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Media Release

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Telco customers experiencing domestic and family violence (DFV) require improved protections

Telecommunications consumers experiencing domestic and family violence must see mandatory protections through direct regulation, say consumer advocates, in the wake of an important speech by the Chair of the ACMA which raised questions about the effectiveness of the current co-regulatory regime.

Consumer advocates including the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC), the Centre for Women’s Economic Safety (CWES), and the Economic Abuse Reference Group (EARG) represent and assist consumers in vulnerable circumstances, including those facing DFV.

A [recent speech](#) by the Chair of the ACMA, Nerida O’Loughlin, gives consumers hope that direct regulation may soon be implemented. Ms O’Loughlin pointed out that “more than 99 per cent of Australian victims have experienced technology-based abuse as an extension of the coercion and harassment they experience in their daily lives,” and shared harrowing stories of victim-survivors impacted by inadequate industry practices. Consumer advocates welcome these remarks from the Chair.

The ACMA has previously stated that they have the evidence required to introduce direct regulation for the areas where industry is unwilling to improve the protections it offers consumers.¹ Consumer advocates are now calling for action and urging the government to step in to implement direct regulation to protect consumers facing DFV.

In October 2023, ACCAN [called upon](#) the Federal Government to implement direct regulation, via a service provider determination, to protect consumers facing DFV. Since then, the evidence base and consumer sentiment that voluntary industry codes provide insufficient protections has only grown.

ACCAN looks forward to working with government, regulators and industry to see this important change occur.

Quotes attributable to Dr Gareth Downing, Acting CEO of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network:

“Victim-survivors facing serious risks to their personal safety need mandatory, readily enforceable protections that provide strong incentives for industry participants to comply.

¹ ACMA position paper, 2023: *What Consumers Want*, https://www.acma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/What%20consumers%20want%20Consumer%20expectations%20for%20telecommunications%20safeguards_ACMA%20position%20paper.pdf

“In other essential services sectors, such as energy, there exist consumer protections for DFV with penalties for non-compliance of up to \$10 million. In contrast, in telecommunications there is a voluntary, unenforceable guideline underpinning how providers recognise, assist and protect consumers.”

Quotes attributable to Stephanie Tonkin, CEO of the Consumer Action Law Centre:

“What I hear from our front lines is appalling, some telcos are still compounding the impacts of family violence and compromising the safety of customers experiencing or recovering from family violence, and this shouldn't be happening in 2024.

“Voluntary regulation is not working. We complained to the regulators this year about what we are hearing and the telco industry has a long way to go in supporting their customers to stay physically, psychologically and financially safe.”

Quotes attributable to Rebecca Glenn, Founder & CEO of the Centre for Women's Economic Safety:

“Not only are victim-survivors experiencing tech-facilitated abuse through devices, they're also experiencing financial abuse through the sale of products and accounts. Unfortunately, the response to victim-survivors from telcos has been inconsistent and generally under-informed. This has to change.

“It's vital that people experiencing abuse can safely maintain access to affordable telco products and services.”

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communication consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.
