

Affordability and digital inclusion measures welcomed by advocates

In light of rapid increases to the cost of living, the peak body for communications consumers has welcomed new measures announced in this week's federal budget to improve the affordability of communications services and boost digital inclusion across the nation. This echoes calls made by the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) to establish a concessional broadband product for households on low incomes.

The Albanese Government announced on Tuesday that 30,000 families that have gone without in-home internet will be provided with a free NBN service for 12 months. Furthermore, the government has committed to expanding full-fibre access for an additional 1.5 million premises, including 600,000 premises in regional Australia.

"People now, more than ever, need affordable phone and internet. Unfortunately, around 900,000 Australian households have gone without in-home internet,¹ and yet more than 80% of people see it as an essential service.² It's great to see that the government has recognised that so many Australians depend on access to reliable, affordable internet in their personal and professional lives," said ACCAN CEO, Andrew Williams.

ACCAN also pointed out that in addition to affordable broadband, ensuring that students are provided with the necessary tools to learn from home is an important part of bridging the digital divide.

The peak body also welcomed an investment in online learning tools that will help schools to keep children safe online. These tools will make digital literacy programs freely available to all schools, not just those that can afford them, and will help students to exercise responsibility when engaging online.

"Equipping young people with the skills they need to recognise and respond appropriately to online harms is key, especially as a number of Australians now use digital platforms as their primary form of communication. Making sure that these skills are taught early helps to build a safer online environment," said Mr Williams.

Commenting on the Better Connectivity Plan for Rural and Regional Australia, ACCAN expressed support for the previously announced investment of \$1.1 billion to expand mobile coverage and

¹ Based on the latest figures from the Australian Communications and Media Authority (2021) *How we use the internet* and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022) *Snapshot of Australia*.

² ACCAN (2021) *Addressing Telecommunications Affordability: Evaluating Support for Low Income Consumers*

improve the resilience of communications services in regional communities. Funding for a First Nations digital advisory group, who will report to the Minister for Communications, was also commended by the peak body.

“Staying connected and accessing vital information during an emergency can be lifesaving. Those living in the regions have borne the brunt of a string of natural disasters in recent times. A \$1.1 billion investment reflects just how important it is that communications infrastructure is resilient and reliable.”

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.

Commented [GD1]: We may want to call out the funding going to set up an indigenous digital inclusion committee. This is something we want to applaud the govt on / we've previously engaged on