



Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network



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Media release

Television networks need to tune in to audience's appetite for captions

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* Media release in Auslan (video): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLl_pw4gT8Q

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](#)) and Media Access Australia ([MAA](#)) are calling on the major television networks to include comprehensive captioning on digital free-to-air multichannels after [new research](#) has found a high level of awareness and use of closed captions – even among those who aren't hearing impaired.

The research into the use of closed captioning, conducted by The Australia Institute, found 30% of the population say they sometimes use captions and 3% always use them.

This research is significant, not only because it is the first comprehensive national survey of caption usage conducted in Australia, but because the percentage of people who say they sometimes use captions (30%) is higher than the 18.7% of the population who have a hearing impairment.

"This tells us people use captions for different reasons that aren't necessarily hearing-related – it could be to watch TV late at night without disturbing the household, or in a noisy environment when the sound cannot be adjusted," said ACCAN Disability Policy Adviser Wayne Hawkins. "It also shows that the networks are missing out on a large potential audience at a time when they are attempting to attract viewers to their new digital channels."

Hearing loss is an age-related condition, with 2.6 million people aged over 60 affected to some degree. But the study found that younger people aged 18-24 years of age were the group that most often reported using captions "sometimes".

"We think this is likely due to young people's ability to multitask – they might have the TV on in the background while they're chatting to someone on Skype or doing their homework," said MAA spokesman Chris Mikul. "Gen Y's are typically pretty good with technology as they've grown up with it. This tells us that they are not only aware of how closed captioning works – they're turning it on."

The groups say it's likely that the television networks' digital multichannels will be required to have the same caption levels as their main channels when analog television is switched off in 2013 but that it needs to happen sooner.

"Good quality, timely, closed captions mean that people who are Deaf or hearing impaired can watch television like everyone else," said Mr Hawkins.

"Under the current rules, programs which previously screened on one network don't need to be captioned if screened on another network's multichannels, even though captions would be available," said Mr Hawkins. "So some networks are choosing not to caption them. It's infuriating for viewers when they turn on a series that they used to watch with captions and the captions aren't there. We'd like to see all programs captioned as standard practice."

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Read the full results of the survey click here: http://www.accan.org.au/campaign_full.php?id=26
For further information on captions go to: <http://www.mediaaccess.org.au/>