

Media release

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Much more than infrastructure needed to connect remote communities

Peak consumer body ACCAN say the results of a study released today shed a stark light on the challenges involved in connecting up remote indigenous communities, where very few residents have been online and many have never used a computer.

The baseline study is the first of the three-phase Home Internet Project being undertaken by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Swinburne University (CCi), the Centre of Appropriate Technologies (CAT) and the Central Land Council (CLC). The study was funded through the 2010 round of the ACCAN Grants Scheme.

Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with people living in three central Australian communities about their computer and internet use. Of the 48 participants only six owned computers and just one had access to the internet at home.

ACCAN Director of Research & Grants Ryan Sengara says the Project's initial research demonstrates much more needs to be done to address the enormous digital divide between those living in cities and those living in remote parts of Australia.

"This study provides evidence of just how far behind communications services are in remote indigenous communities, and details the affordability and accessibility issues faced by indigenous Australians living in these communities," said Mr Sengara.

"What this initial study tells us is that infrastructure alone is not enough to improve the situation. So, while the National Broadband Network will deliver broadband to these communities, in order for indigenous Australians to see some of the benefits of connectivity, issues of affordability, skills, training and equipment must be addressed."

ACCAN says the release of this research is timely, with the Government's announcement earlier this month of the Regional Telecommunications Review (RTR) Committee. The RTR will commence later this year with a report due back in March next year.

The Committee, which includes former ATUG Chief Executive Rosemary Sinclair and former ACCAN Board member Heron Loban (ICAN), will review telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia and aims to find initiatives that will enable remote and regional communities to participate in the digital economy.

In June the Home Internet Project was awarded funding from the Australian Research Council which will enable the partners to continue the second and third phases of the project over the next three years. The second phase of the project, already underway, will see computers and internet introduced into households in the three remote communities that took part in the initial study.

About ACCAN

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's 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.

Link to report: <http://bit.ly/pgG5UP>

Background

The Home Internet Project is a collaboration between the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Swinburne University (CCi), the Centre of Appropriate Technologies (CAT) and the Central Land Council (CLC).

The baseline study was funded by an ACCAN Grant with the infrastructure funded out of the Aboriginals Benefit Account.

The Project has also been successful in securing funding from the Australian Research Council and is being supported by CAT, ACCAN and the Australian Government's Broadband Guarantee Scheme.

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