



Media release

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New “talking” set-top box means everyone can enjoy digital television

Disability advocates say a “talking” digital set-top box specially commissioned by the Digital Switchover Taskforce under the Household Assistance Scheme (HAS) will ensure blind and vision-impaired Australians still have access to television when the analog signal is switched off.

ACCAN, Blind Citizens Australia (BCA), Media Access Australia (MAA) and Vision Australia (VA) today welcomed the announcement made by Senator Stephen Conroy that from next month the talking set-top box will be provided to eligible consumers at no cost.

“We are thrilled that the talking set-top-box will now be available for HAS recipients who are blind or have low vision,” says Michael Simpson, General Manager Advocacy and Campaigning, VA. “The ability to identify what is currently on air and move quickly between the channels is something most people take for granted. The talking set-top-box will make a huge difference to people’s lives.”

Ms Robyn Gaile, Executive Officer of BCA agreed, saying, “Not only can people who are blind or vision impaired now become digital ready along with the rest of Australia, but this announcement has greater implications in furthering the independence and social inclusion for hundreds of Australians for whom television has previously been largely inaccessible”.

The HAS was set up to help people on low incomes make the switch from analog to digital television through the provision of a set-top box. The analog television signal will be switched off at the end of 2013.

The groups say the inclusion of a talking STB in the HAS is a major achievement because prior to the Digital Switchover Taskforce commissioning them there weren’t any available to purchase in Australia.

“As well as benefitting those eligible for the HAS, significantly, the device will now be available for anyone to buy for the first time in Australia,” said Chris Mikul from MAA. “This is a great example of government listening to [blind and vision impaired] advocates and getting a really good result for all Australians.”

ACCAN Disability Policy Officer Wayne Hawkins says this is exactly the sort of outcome that advocates are working towards: affordable, available and accessible communications that enhance people’s lives.

“We are living in a digital age and technology is developing fast,” said Hawkins. “It’s vitally important the people with disability aren’t left behind. Access to television is really important and we’re really pleased the Government and the Digital Switchover Taskforce has ensured thousands of people with disability still have access even after the analog signal is switched off.”

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For more about the Household Assistance Scheme visit www.digitalready.gov.au or phone 1800 20 10 13.

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 enhance the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.