

Media release

For immediate release Wednesday 20th June 2012

Six new telecommunications consumer advocacy projects for seniors, children, and people experiencing financial hardship

Peak consumer communications group ACCAN today announced the six new consumer research, education and advocacy projects awarded funding through the 2012 Round of the \$250,000 ACCAN Grants Scheme.

The projects, which will be undertaken by leading Australian research and community groups, are designed to help a wide range of consumers – from developing an online computer training course for seniors to providing a comprehensive website for young mobile consumers, and research into how small businesses fare in the communications market.

A research team at the University of Melbourne is undertaking research into “digital death”, which is the term used to describe what happens to a person’s email, social media and other online accounts after death, with the view to informing policy discussions that may shape future regulation.

Another innovative project being funded called “Know Your Gizmo” will see young people in regional Australia pair with seniors to take part in a six-week program to assist the older people to learn to use a “gizmo” of their choice, strengthening community ties and teaching young people about the difficulties older people face.

“The range and scope of these projects is impressive and we have no doubt that we’ll see some innovative research and consumer advocacy taking place as the projects are completed over the next 12 months,” said ACCAN Deputy Chief Executive Narelle Clark.

“The competitiveness of the scheme continues to grow with a record 75 applications this year. ACCAN would like to congratulate the six groups who were awarded funding. The Independent Grants Panel would also like to thank every group that submitted an application for funding – the quality of the applications this year was again of a very high standard.”

The ACCAN Grants Scheme, now in its fourth year, provides over \$250,000 in funding each year for projects that align with the organisation’s vision of available, affordable and accessible communications for all Australians.

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Full details regarding the projects funded under the **2012 ACCAN Grants Scheme** follows and is also available online at www.accan.org.au/grants

To view this media release online please visit www.accan.org.au

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.

2012 ACCAN Grants Scheme Projects

Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA)

As the NBN rolls out, it is estimated that 1.5 million seniors will need training on how best to use and enjoy its benefits. ASCCA, with experience delivering effective training and resources to seniors all over Australia, is uniquely positioned to reach seniors where present programs are restricted by lack of volunteers and the tyranny of distance. ASCCA proposes that efficiencies in training can come from adding to existing programs, using Interactive Education techniques delivered across the internet. ASCCA seeks to develop a curriculum and training standards and to provide evidence to assist ACCAN and ASCCA to lobby for the interests of seniors. The proposed outputs include a Draft Framework for interactive training materials for seniors, the trialling of pre-existing training materials (using video/interactive online), and training events for at least 100 seniors.

Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau (VRB): Know Your Gizmo

This project will see 20 Year 10 students assist older community members to improve their skills with a communications technology of their choice. Older people in the community will be invited to attend a six-week program with whatever "gizmo" they choose to bring along, with young volunteers helping them learn how to use the technology to its full extent. Young participants will be given an opportunity to understand some of the frustrations that many older people face, and increased confidence with technology will help older participants engage with family and community. Increased knowledge and confidence will allow both groups of consumers to challenge some of the issues they face as consumers and advocate for the way new technologies are developed, produced and marketed to the community.

Department of Information Systems, University of Melbourne (Dr Martin Gibbs, Dr Tamara Kohn, Dr Michael Arnold, Dr Bjorn Nansen)

Just as the internet has been integrated into everyday life, it is also increasingly entwined with the processes of dying, grieving and memorialising, presenting new challenges to consumers. Planning and managing online assets and profiles is a growing and increasingly urgent issue for internet users, yet there is little evidence about the implications of this issue for Australian communications consumers. This project will contribute an evidence-based assessment of the issues and implications, which will help to inform policy discussions and regulations affecting all aspects of consumer experience. The project will also produce educational material for consumers.

Financial Counselling Australia (FCA)

As the peak body for financial counsellors in Australia, FCA will produce a comprehensive report that makes recommendations for improving the hardship policies and practices of the telecommunications sector. The grassroots experience of financial counsellors will provide evidence about what is working and where there are problems with current hardship policies. Financial counsellors also have considerable expertise about how hardship is dealt with in other industries. This project seeks to harness those lessons to provide guidance to the telecommunications sector for ultimately improving outcomes for consumers.

National Children's and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC)

NCYLC will create a consumer law resource designed to empower children as mobile phone consumers. The project aims to determine the greatest needs and problems of young mobile phone consumers and to enable them to make well-informed choices about mobile phone ownership. NCYLC will participate in policy and regulatory reform discussions to encourage telecommunications companies to increase transparency and child-friendliness in their advertisements, phone plans and contracts. Outputs include a report on major policy issues and a series of fact sheets and resources, including an online one-stop-shop of mobile phone information tailored for children and young people.

Market Clarity Pty Ltd

Small businesses as communications consumers are one of the least understood market segments, with little representation or buying power in regards to telecommunications service requirements and experiences. At the small end of the business market, many organisations are reported to be confused when dealing with telecommunications carriers, are often unable to distinguish between consumer-grade and business-grade services and frustrated at complaints resolution processes. This project is designed to achieve a broad-based, statistically valid understanding of the experiences of small businesses as communications consumers.