

Media release

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Better television captions a win for the whole community

Disability advocates are today celebrating the passage of legislation in both houses of Parliament that mean television viewers will soon enjoy better closed captioning on television.

Closed captions refer to the on-screen text that describes the speech and other audio during television broadcasts.

Changes to the Broadcasting Services Act include a requirement for quality closed captions to be readable and comprehensible. ACCAN is hopeful this will mean more pre-prepared captioning and the use of live 'scrolling' closed captions will only be used during truly live broadcasts.

"We'd like to congratulate Senator Stephen Conroy and Parliament for the bi-partisan passage of this important legislation," said ACCAN Disability Policy Officer Wayne Hawkins.

"Up until now, the quality of closed captions on television has varied considerably, with delayed, inaccurate and occasionally incomprehensible captions making TV viewing a very hit-and-miss experience for many Deaf and hearing-impaired people."

It is expected that by 2020, more than five million Australians are expected to be affected by hearing loss.

But research conducted by the Australia Institute last year found that it's not only people with hearing-impairments who use closed captions. While 18.7% of the population have some form of hearing loss, the research found that 30% of television viewers say they sometimes use captions.

"It's not just hearing-impaired people who use closed captions – these changes will benefit the whole community. We hope that the Australian Communications & Media Authority will be active in promoting these new requirements and that TV executives will see that offering their audience quality captions as part of normal programming makes good business sense."

ACCAN, Deaf Australia, and Deafness Forum, who lobbied for the changes over a number of years, say they will continue to promote best-practice accessibility for Deaf and hearing-impaired television viewers.

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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.