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**Complaints about unexpectedly high bills have doubled over the past year**

**MEDIA**

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*The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia’s peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the* *Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.*

Peak consumer group ACCAN says annual report data released by the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) today shows the number of customers who have gone to the TIO about an unexpectedly high bill has doubled over the past year.

“The past year has seen a big increase in the number of people who have made a complaint about an unexpectedly high bill,” said ACCAN Chief Executive Teresa Corbin. “This is a worrying trend, because unaffordable phone bills can lead to serious credit problems for consumers if they want to apply for a credit card or a mortgage later on.”

Disputed internet charges complaints are up 150% as the number of Australians using smartphones increases.

Once customers go over their monthly smartphone data allowance they incur excess charges ranging from 10c per MB to 50c per MB, depending on the provider.

“One of the main issues is that most people have trouble gauging how much data they’ve used - or how many megabytes are required to say stream video or download emails. We’re pleased that some providers have already started sending out SMS warnings to their customers when they are at or approaching their data limit,” said Ms Corbin. “People need timely, accurate information about their data usage to avoid an unexpectedly high bill.”

Under new rules from September 2013, all major providers will be required to send SMS alerts to customers when they have used 50%, 85% and 100% of their monthly data allowance. Smaller providers have until September 2014.

ACCAN says another worrying trend from the TIO data is that complaints about global roaming bills are up by 69%.

“The worst stories we hear are about high global roaming bills. People typically get caught out with data charges if they don’t realise they need to adjust the automatic roaming settings on their smartphone when they go overseas,” said Ms Corbin. “This is such a problem that the Minister, Senator Stephen Conroy, has stepped in so that soon all mobile phone customers travelling overseas will receive an SMS from their provider about the costs involved.”

ACCAN says the good news stemming from the report is that the total number of complaints is down by 2%; however there is still a long way to go.

“While any decrease in the number of customers experiencing problems is welcome, 193,702 people having to resort to the Ombudsman to get their problem fixed is still far too many,” said Ms Corbin.

**ACCAN has a range of tip sheets for telecommunications consumers. Visit** [**www.accan.org.au/tipsheets**](http://www.accan.org.au/tipsheets)