




OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR

**2023-2024
Annual Report**





Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network Limited
(ACCAN)
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For the year ended 30 June 2024

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WHO WE ARE



The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation representing individuals, small businesses and not-for-profit groups as consumers of communications products and services. ACCAN focuses on goods and services encompassed by the converged areas of telecommunications, broadcasting, the internet and online services, including both current and emerging technologies.

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.

OUR VISION

Communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible, and available for all.

OUR MISSION

ACCAN's mission is to:

- ◆ Represent consumers and the public interest, with particular attention to the needs of consumers for whom the market is not working;
- ◆ Inspire, inform, enable and equip consumers to act in their own interests; and
- ◆ Research emerging consumer communications issues to provide evidence-based policy advice.

OUR VALUES

As an organisation we will:

- ◆ Act with courage
- ◆ Operate openly
- ◆ Be inclusive
- ◆ Build relationships
- ◆ Value people

CONSUMER WINS

ACCAN's advocacy has contributed to several consumer wins during the 2023-24 financial year:

The announcement and implementation of the Telecommunications (Financial Hardship) Industry Standard 2024 which, for the first time, saw directly enforceable consumer protections established for consumers experiencing financial hardship.

Revisions to the NBN Special Access Undertaking now include a commitment by NBN Co to engage with consumer advocacy groups. This win sees consumer perspectives being placed at the heart of discussions about the future of NBN revenue, expenditure and service standards for the first time.

The Special Access Undertaking revisions also clarified the treatment of infrastructure assets, putting downward pressure on consumer internet bills.

The extension of the Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2023 imposed minimum timelines, service and compensation requirements for landlines.

In May, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Enhancing Consumer Safeguards and Other Measures) Bill 2023 was passed. This expansion of the Statutory Infrastructure Provider regime to private networks ensures that uniform wholesale service standards and benchmarks can be established by the Minister.

The revised Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code now requires that providers offer 2 fee-free payment methods (one manual and one automatic).

ACCAN released its Affordable Devices tool for consumers.

ACCAN released its Financial Hardship guidance materials for consumers and financial counsellors.

After receiving broad support for our retail registration policy position, the government commenced consultation on the development of a registration or licensing scheme for carriage service providers.

In May, the Government set aside funding for ACCAN to represent consumers in the forthcoming regulatory reset process for NBN expenditure and service levels. This new function will see ACCAN represent consumer interests in these critical discussions.

CHAIR'S REPORT



Julian Thomas: Chairperson, ACCAN Board

On behalf of the ACCAN Board, I am pleased to present this report on ACCAN and its work over the past 12 months. The past year has presented many challenges for consumers in the Australian telecommunications sector, and some promise of positive change. It has been a privilege to chair ACCAN as we work to support consumers in navigating our dynamic communications environment.

This year has also been one of significant change for ACCAN. In February, our CEO Andrew Williams retired. Andrew made a major contribution to ACCAN in his role as CEO, and as a senior member of staff before he took up that position. He steered the organisation with effectiveness, care and consideration through the very challenging period of the pandemic, at a time when the critical importance of communications for all Australians was sharply underlined. Under Andrew's leadership, ACCAN grew into a more flexible, capable, and distributed organisation, with a growing reputation as a trusted and expert voice for communications consumers.

The Board wishes to express our warmest thanks to Andrew for all his extraordinary work for consumers and ACCAN.


In July, we welcomed Carol Bennett as ACCAN's new CEO. She is only our third CEO since 2010, and the first to join from outside the organisation since our inception. The Board was delighted to appoint Carol as CEO and we look forward to with her as she leads the organisation through an exciting new period of transition.

The Board has seen other significant changes over the last year. We farewelled two members, Holly Raiche and Scott Winch, at the September AGM. Both have made substantial contributions to the organisation. I wish to thank them both, and Holly particularly for her longstanding dedication to ACCAN, its members, and to consumer interests. She has been part of ACCAN from the very start.

Our staff and Board members have learned a great deal from her deep expertise and wise counsel over many years.

We were delighted to welcome Bobbie Blackson and David Havyatt to the ACCAN Board following our 2023 AGM. Bobbie and David bring significant experience within the communications and consumer sectors, and have played a constructive role in ACCAN governance throughout the year. I would to thank Bobbie, David, and all our Board members for generously committing their time, experience and expertise to ACCAN through a very busy year.

ACCAN can be proud of many achievements throughout the year. Through 2024, national attention has been drawn to the needs of communications consumers as cost-of-living pressures hit hard.



The closure of 3G networks has also emphasised the importance of public safety and the provision of clear and accurate consumer information.

ACCAN has been an important player in several key consumer outcomes. Consumers now have much improved protections through the Financial Hardship Standard, and the tide is turning against self-regulation generally in the telecommunications sector. We saw significant steps taken to crack down on scams, resulting in the first-ever decline in consumer scam losses. ACCAN provided consumer views to the National Anti-Scam Centre throughout the year. We saw legislation before Parliament to introduce a SMS Sender ID Register and significant budget allocations for mandatory scams codes. The team has had an excellent year.

ACCAN held a highly successful Communications Consumer Congress in September 2023 — our first in person congress since the pandemic. Headline speakers included Gerard Brody (Consumers Federation of Australia) and Commissioner Angelene Falk (Office of the Australian Information Commissioner). I attended with a number of our current and former Board members, and we recognised the calibre of attendees and the importance of discussions conducted over the two days.

The ACCAN Independent Grants Program continues to fund valuable research projects which benefit consumers. It was particularly competitive this year, with 69 applications. Thank you to our Independent Grants Panel for their time and dedication in assessing the applicants.

I would like to thank all our ACCAN members for your ongoing support. We are your voice on communications policy and advocacy issues, and your advice, guidance and close collaboration are the essential factors driving ACCAN's success.

Finally, I want to thank our extraordinary ACCAN staff. This year has seen leadership transition – rarely an easy process – and high team workloads. ACCAN's successes reflect the extraordinary dedication and commitment of our people. Their work is deeply appreciated, and consumers are benefiting from their efforts.

CEO REPORT



I am pleased to present ACCAN's Annual Report for 2023-24.

Carol Bennett: Chief Executive Officer

When I commenced as CEO of ACCAN in early July this year, my focus was on contributing to the national effort to improve access, affordability and functionality of communications for all Australians. No small task, but I am pleased to say ACCAN has continued its outstanding work in support of equitable access to fundamental services that enable Australians to build and sustain social connections, work productivity, health and safety. It's hard to imagine a more important area when it comes to improving quality of life for consumers.

I joined the organisation at a time of significant change in the communications sector. Consumer protection issues are coming to the fore, due in no small part to ACCAN's advocacy. Regional consumers face policy change and challenges through various reviews and the imminent shutdown of the 3G network. Consumers, industry and government continue to grapple with the implications of new satellite communications technologies.

Amidst changes and challenges, ACCAN's role as the primary voice for Australian communications consumers has never been more important. It is a privilege to lead the team championing the interests of Australian consumers to an affordable and accessible essential service.

A special thanks to my predecessors for their tireless work over the past year. Andrew Williams, who departed as CEO in February, laid an excellent foundation for the organisation going forward. Gareth Downing, current Deputy CEO of ACCAN, provided solid leadership in the interim as Acting CEO, and I look forward to working with him and the team as we chart the opportunities and challenges presented by a changing and uncertain landscape that is communications policy.

Everyday Australians, community organisations, politicians, regulators and government bodies all recognise how vital communications are for daily life.

Last year's nation-wide Optus outage reminded us of this. Temporarily stripped of the ability to contact friends and family, work and study via the internet and pay for goods and services, many consumers realised what ACCAN has argued for some years: communications is an essential service. ACCAN and others have contributed to the Bean review which has already led to some important improvements in for example, triple zero access measures. There is still much work to do until we see appropriate legislative and regulatory steps to address outages in the future, but important learnings and actions have been adopted as a result.



ACCAN's output during the past year has been quite extraordinary. Examples include 67 policy submissions, oversight of 7 projects as a part of our Independent Grants Program, over 500 mentions in the media and representing consumers on 28 key advisory committees.

The impact of our work this year has been significant. Among many highlights, we have seen:

- ◆ Much-improved consumer protections, including the introduction of the Financial Hardship Standard at a time when consumers around the country are finding it harder to meet bill payments.
- ◆ The introduction of mandatory scams codes for banks, telcos and social media companies, with robust funding for monitoring and enforcement.
- ◆ Credible improvements to the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code in relation to payment options.

I would like to thank the ACCAN team for their dedication and fantastic work this year. The output that an organisation of our size is able to achieve is a testament to the quality of its employees.

A special word of thanks to our members and important stakeholders, who continue to inform and enhance the work that we do. ACCAN would not have the impact that it does if it couldn't draw upon their experience and guidance about critical issues of importance to communications consumers.

Finally, I thank the ACCAN Board and particularly Prof. Julian Thomas (who is sadly stepping down at the 2024 AGM) for their leadership and guidance to ACCAN throughout the year.

As we look ahead to 2025, ACCAN will continue to strongly advocate for communications consumers in the endeavour to make these essential services trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all Australians.



ACCAN IN THE MEDIA

ACCAN continues to offer trusted and expert opinion on Australian communications issues to media outlets.

We contributed to 75 media pieces in 2023-24, spanning television, radio, print and online outlets. Excerpts from our media releases and consumer information resources appeared in a total of 518 media mentions throughout the year. We issued 13 media releases covering topics such as the direct regulation of financial hardship, the need for domestic and family violence protections, consumer complaints, the shutdown of 3G networks, ACCAN tools and resources, new NBN regulations, news of ACCAN's CEO transition, and various notable reports and research.

This is particularly impressive given the leadership transition which ACCAN experienced during this time. Media contributions have remained strong despite capacity constraints with an Acting CEO and the onboarding of our new CEO, Carol Bennett.

INTERVIEWS

ACCAN's spokespeople provided live or pre-recorded interviews on a wide array of topics. These included consumer protections, scam activities, major and minor telecommunications outages, 5G performance, price hikes and affordability, the 3G shutdown, emergency resilience and data breaches, alongside general discussions about telecommunications and consumer advice.



During the Optus network outage in 2023, ACCAN spokespeople gave 18 separate interviews, many in-person, in a matter of 2 days - a significant effort from all concerned. A highlight was then-CEO Andrew Williams appearing on The Today Show in a one-to-one interview with Karl Stefanovic.

WEBSITE

ACCAN's website continues to be a popular hub for consumer information and resources. During the year, we accrued 201,000 page views, with our most popular resources being anti-scam resources, guides on solving poor mobile reception, and our 'introduction to social media' consumer guide.

SOCIAL MEDIA

ACCAN's social media channels continue to grow steadily, now reaching an audience of over 5,500 followers across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Pleasingly, ACCAN's Accessible Telecoms (AT) project launched a social media presence towards the end of the financial year.

The part-time communications assistant engaged to create and administer this account will move to a full-time position covering AT and ACCAN social media in the 2024-25 financial year, a promising step for the growth of audience size and content quality of both brands.

COLLABORATIONS

ACCAN has been an active participant in the National Anti-Scam Centre Communications and Awareness Working Group throughout the year. This forum gives ACCAN input and visibility into cross-sector anti-scam efforts.

Our collaboration with Google during the national Scams Awareness Week in late 2023 was an enormous success, with 12.9 million impressions on our YouTube scams awareness guide, and an 850% increase in visitation to our scams tip sheet as compared to the year prior. We look forward to continuing this partnership in the coming year.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



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MEDIA RELEASES



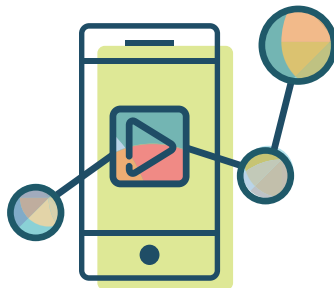
9
BLOG POSTS



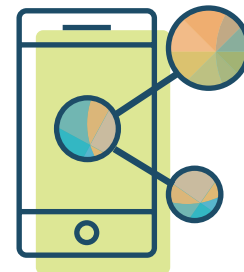
201,000
WEBPAGE VIEWS



12,100
FACEBOOK REACH



5,200,000
YOUTUBE REACH



ALMOST **6,000**
FOLLOWERS ACROSS
TWITTER, FACEBOOK,
LINKEDIN AND INSTAGRAM

ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

ACCAN regularly engages with members and stakeholders across Australia, both in-person and online. Here is a sample of the activities we undertook to connect with the community.

ACCAN COMMUNICATIONS CONSUMER CONGRESS

In September 2023, ACCAN hosted a two-day Communications Consumer Congress. The first day was dedicated to consumer-focused forums, while the second followed a traditional conference format, open to all stakeholders. The consumer forums provided valuable insights on key policy priorities, including frontiers in consumer harm and connectivity. The Congress was well attended with close to 140 delegates.

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION FEDERAL CONFERENCE

ACCAN attended the Isolated Children's Parents' Association Federal Conference in Darwin in July 2023. The conference provided an opportunity to raise awareness of ACCAN's role for consumers and for discussion around the 3G network closure and upcoming 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLORS' ASSOCIATION OF WA CONFERENCE

ACCAN hosted an exhibition table at the Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia Conference in October 2023. The conference theme, 'Opening Doors', emphasised the importance of access for all. The event offered a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of ACCAN's policy work and the Accessible Telecoms service.

FIRST NATIONS MEDIA AUSTRALIA CONVERGE

ACCAN attended CONVERGE 2023 in Canberra in November 2023. The event was hosted by First Nations Media Australia's inDigiMOB team and focused on remote telecommunications and digital connectivity. ACCAN participated on the Indigenous Digital Leadership Forum Panel. Topics discussed included network resilience, the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and the 3G mobile network shutdown.



COSBOA SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS LUNCH

In February, ACCAN travelled to Hobart to attend the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) Small Business Leaders Lunch. The event provided an opportunity to discuss telecommunications issues, including the resilience of networks and the USO with small business community stakeholders and policymakers.



FCVIC SUMMIT: THE CHANGING FACE OF HARDSHIP

In March 2024 ACCAN hosted an information booth at the Financial Counselling Victoria Summit in Melbourne. ACCAN developed and distributed targeted materials about new telecommunications financial hardship protections.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

ACCAN attended the national Financial Counselling Australia conference in Perth in May 2024. The conference provided the opportunity for ACCAN to be part of the conversation about easing financial stress for communications consumers.

ROUND TABLE ON INFORMATION ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH PRINT DISABILITIES INC.

Held in Perth in May 2024, ACCAN participated jointly with a representative from Vision 2020 as feature speakers on Accessible Procurement and the Disability Royal Commission.

AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENT RETIREES (AIR)

ACCAN was very pleased to accept an invitation to present at the AIR – Brisbane North Branch monthly meeting in June 2024. Topics included the 3G mobile network shutdown and its impact on consumers, affordable devices, affordable plans and tools, and ACCAN's Accessible Telecoms service.

ENDURING POLICY PRIORITIES

The 2023-24 year has been significant for the ACCAN policy team, which submitted to a broad range of consultations across its policy priority areas. The year also saw a change to our approach to setting priorities, with ACCAN adopting 3 enduring policy priorities which reflect our critical and ongoing work.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

A key focus has been engaging on the revisions to the NBN Special Access Undertaking (SAU), the regulatory framework which determines NBN pricing and service levels. Throughout our engagement, ACCAN has continued to advance the need for affordable broadband services for all consumers.

Regional communications and the divide in access to infrastructure has also remained a focus, with ACCAN actively contributing to ongoing reviews into the modernisation of the Universal Service Obligation (USO) and the Regional Telecommunications Review (RTR). Ensuring regional, rural and remote communities have equitable access to fit-for-purpose infrastructure services remains a core area of work for ACCAN.

Throughout the year ACCAN has actively engaged with the development of the draft digital inclusion roadmap by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG).

CONSUMER PROTECTIONS AND A FAIRER TELCO MARKET

After many years, the collective advocacy of ACCAN and the broader community sector saw the Minister for Communications issue a direction to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) to directly regulate the protections available for consumers experiencing financial hardship.

Another key focus has been ACCAN's engagement with proposed revisions to the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code. Following the withdrawal of other consumer advocates from the TCP Code review process, ACCAN has acted to represent consumers on key issues, while highlighting the shortcomings of the voluntary self-regulation framework.

In October ACCAN released a policy position setting out the need to move to direct regulation to provide fit-for-purpose consumer protections for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. ACCAN continues to advocate for strengthened protections for vulnerable consumers and continues to engage with government and industry on the need for changes to support consumers.

In February, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Centre for Media Transition released an ACCAN-commissioned report into the enforcement of telecommunications consumer protections.

The report identified material shortcomings in the data available on ACMA enforcement actions and provided a sound evidence base for further reforms to regulatory arrangements to modernise and strengthen the ACMA.

RELIABLE, RESILIENT AND ROBUST INFRASTRUCTURE

Following the November 2023 Optus outage, ACCAN has been actively engaging with government and industry on how to improve the resilience and reliability of critical communications systems, including Triple Zero. In April, ACCAN welcomed the recommendations of the Bean Review which will see important reforms to the administration and oversight of the Triple Zero system and reduce the risk of future outages of critical Triple Zero services.

Throughout the year ACCAN's Deputy CEO, Dr Gareth Downing, participated in the Telecommunications Sector Risk and Resilience Profile (TSRRP) expert panel. The TSRRP is the first project in Australia to seek to develop an all-hazards, sector-wide telecommunications risk and resilience profile. ACCAN looks forward to engaging with key outputs which provide a strong evidence base for reviewing the regulatory arrangements underpinning reliability and resilience in the telecommunications sector.

POLICY THEMES

Within the context of the enduring priorities above, ACCAN set 3 policy themes to reflect areas of proactive focus for the year:

- ◆ Connecting the community
- ◆ Frontiers in technology-facilitated consumer harm
- ◆ Advancing our accessible roadmap

CONNECTING THE COMMUNITY

ACCAN has been working closely with members and community stakeholders to advance the need for a concessional broadband service for low-income consumers through the NBN Low-Income and Digital Inclusion Forum (LIDIF).

Another highlight for the 'connecting the community' theme was the announcement of funding for community Wi-Fi projects in First Nations communities, reflecting the advocacy of many community sector stakeholders over several years.

The work of this policy theme will continue into the new year, with the award of an ACCAN grant to RMIT to progress research on the critical role that neighbourhood houses and centres play in the development of digital skills.

FRONTIERS IN TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED CONSUMER HARM

Where resourcing has allowed, ACCAN has continued to engage with stakeholders on debates about emerging challenges and opportunities of digital communications services. During the year ACCAN engaged with diverse topics including new ACMA powers to combat disinformation and misinformation, third party data brokers, web search services and artificial intelligence.

The work of this policy theme will continue with the award of an ACCAN grant to progress research on strategies to protect women and gender-diverse people from technology-facilitated abuse on social media.

ACCESSIBLE ROADMAP

Advancing ACCAN's accessible roadmap has been a key focus over the course of the last year. This year has been pivotal for ACCAN's work in accessibility, with the retirement of ACCAN's Director of Inclusion, Dr Wayne Hawkins, in December. Dr Hawkins' contributions to ACCAN's accessibility policy work over many years cannot be understated and he will be missed.

Throughout the year ACCAN continued to advocate for improvements to the quality of captions and the expansion in funding of audio described content. A particular highlight has been engaging with members and stakeholders as part of the recontracting of the National Relay Service (NRS). While the tender is still underway, we continue to engage with community representatives on opportunities to strengthen the delivery of the critical services the NRS provides.

In May, several of ACCAN's member organisations and other peak disability representative organisations were advised by the Government that their funding for policy and advocacy would not be renewed. This announcement, while disappointing, highlighted the need for greater effort from ACCAN and other community organisations to continue to advance accessibility, which will remain a policy theme into the new year.

SUBMISSIONS



ACCAN engaged in an extensive range of consultations with industry, government, regulatory and other bodies in 2023-2024. The following submissions can be found on our website:

accan.org.au/submissions

JULY 2023

- ◆ Draft Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Direction 2023
- ◆ Public inquiry into the declaration of the domestic transmission capacity service, fixed line services and domestic mobile terminating access service
- ◆ Schedule review of C564:2020 mobile phone base station deployment code
- ◆ NBN SAU Variation: Floor and Ceiling Modified Pricing Options
- ◆ Modified Adoption of ISO 22458:2022 Consumer vulnerability - Requirements and guidelines for the design and delivery of inclusive service
- ◆ Approach to expiring spectrum licences
- ◆ Initial Data and Digital Government Strategy Submission

AUGUST 2023

- ◆ New ACMA powers to combat disinformation and misinformation
- ◆ Customer Service Guarantee Standard
- ◆ Digital Platform Services Inquiry – March 2024 report on data brokers

- ◆ Request for Information (RFI) relating to the National Audit of Mobile Coverage
- ◆ Consultation on the Draft Direction to the ACMA on the financial hardship industry standard
- ◆ Peri-Urban Mobile Program Round 2 Draft Guidelines

SEPTEMBER 2023

- ◆ Proposal to make the Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Record-Keeping Rules 2023
- ◆ 2026 Census Topic Review Phase 2: Consultation
- ◆ Amendments to pit and pipe exemption criteria under Part 20A of the Telecommunications Act 1997
- ◆ NBN Co SAU Variation (August 2023)
- ◆ Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
- ◆ Environmental and sustainability guidance
- ◆ Proposal to remake the CSG Record Keeping Rules
- ◆ nbn Product Consultation: RMID1150
- ◆ Developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

OCTOBER 2023

- ◆ Digital Identity Bill Consultation
- ◆ Draft G651:2023 Customer Authorisation Industry Guideline
- ◆ 2023 Strategic Review - Compliance and Enforcement Policy and Priorities

NOVEMBER 2023

- ◆ Proposed changes to provide better mobile connectivity in new developments
- ◆ Inquiry into the Optus Network Outage
- ◆ Proposed Telecommunications Financial Hardship Industry Standard
- ◆ IPND Code Revision 2023
- ◆ Discussion Paper: Carriage Service Provider (CSP) registration or licensing scheme for the telecommunications industry

DECEMBER 2023

- ◆ Extending telecommunications security reform instruments
- ◆ Queensland Government Digital Inclusion Consultation paper
- ◆ Department Inquiry on the Optus Outage
- ◆ LIDIF – Ministerial request for information

JANUARY 2024

- ◆ Draft Captioning Quality Guidelines
- ◆ NBN Co proposed Cost Allocation Manual
- ◆ Response to Disability Royal Commission final report
- ◆ 2024-2025 Pre-Budget Submissions
- ◆ Scams – mandatory industry codes consultation

FEBRUARY 2024

- ◆ Public inquiry into the declaration of the domestic transmission capacity service, fixed line services and domestic mobile terminating access service
- ◆ Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Enhancing Consumer Safeguards and Other Measures) Bill 2023 [Provisions]
- ◆ Review of the Telecommunications Numbering Plan 2015

MARCH 2024

- ◆ Better delivery of universal services
- ◆ Australian Cyber Security Strategy: Legislative Reforms
- ◆ DR C570:2024 Mobile Number Portability Industry Code

- ◆ DR C657:2024 Inbound Number Portability Industry Code
- ◆ Consultation on Remaking of Telecommunications (Statutory Infrastructure Providers—Circumstances for Exceptions to Connection and Supply Obligations) Determination 2021
- ◆ SMS Sender ID Registry - Fighting SMS Impersonation Scams
- ◆ ACMA Compliance Priorities 2024-2025
- ◆ Comment on Communications Alliance Guideline: G522:2016 Calling Number Display
- ◆ Comment on Communications Alliance Guideline: G596:2013 Communication Support for Emergency Response

APRIL 2024

- ◆ Effectiveness of telecommunications facilities and tower access regulations
- ◆ Ministerial Policy Statement—Expiring Spectrum Licences
- ◆ DPSI September 2024 interim report issues paper
- ◆ NSW Fair Trading Strategy and Regulatory Priorities Discussion Paper
- ◆ Review of the World Wide Web Advisory Note

- ◆ Inquiry into mobile telecommunication failure during widespread power outages in Western Australia
- ◆ Stream 1 of the Minister's ask – Transition pathways to support SSBI families from January 2026

MAY 2024

- ◆ Draft Five-year spectrum outlook 2024–29
- ◆ National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1) Bill 2024 [Provisions]
- ◆ Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- ◆ Consultation on the revised ACMA CCF terms of reference
- ◆ Shutdown of the 3G mobile network
- ◆ Review of Australia's Credit Reporting Framework

JUNE 2024

- ◆ Funding of universal telecommunications services (RBS Review)
- ◆ Draft exemption orders and target reduction orders for consultation
- ◆ Expiring spectrum licences (stage 2) – information gathering, and views on uses of frequency bands and alternative licence conditions

INDEPENDENT GRANTS PROGRAM

ACCAN has continued to evolve its Independent Grants Program to maximise impact for communications consumers. To better highlight the importance of community sector work, our Grants Guidelines were further enhanced to highlight the variety of projects that ACCAN's grants program is able to fund. We are not only about research. So much of our impact can be attributed to the fantastic collaborations with community sector organisations, particularly when it comes to consumer education, advocacy and representation.

Sixty nine Expressions of Interest were received for the 2024 Round, amounting to over \$4.6 million worth of consumer research, education and representation. The Program continues to attract far greater demand than it can satisfy, considering that on average, our Program has approximately \$270,000 available for disbursement per annum.

If you have a project idea, it's never too early to discuss. Contact the Grants Team at grants@accan.org.au or via the NRS.

This year we farewell 2 of our Independent Grants Panellists. Mr Len Bytheway and Dr Fiona Martin have both brought outstanding rigour to our assessment process and we thank them, and their colleagues, Dr Robbie Fordyce and Prof. Katie Ellis, for their fantastic support of the Program.

This means that calls for new assessors will be opening in the latter half of 2024 – keep an eye out and be in touch if you are interested in contributing to this important role.

Three new grants projects have been funded under the 2024 round:

- ◆ WorkVentures (\$85,000): Enabling First Nations digital citizens through a National Device Bank
- ◆ RMIT (\$78,045): Developing design strategies and policies to protect women and gender-diverse people from technology-facilitated abuse on social media
- ◆ RMIT (\$38,404): Social infrastructure for digital skills development

More details on these, and others, can be found on the Grants section of our website. accan.org.au/grants





PROJECTS COMPLETED THIS YEAR

CO-DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL ON INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY (SACID)

People with intellectual disability are at greater risk to the dangers of the online environment. However, there is limited educational information presented in formats accessible to people with intellectual disability. This project has built on an existing co-designed introductory online safety workshop to develop a series of accessible training resources. A co-design approach was used to develop, test and refine the products, and gather information about communications related barriers to inform future advocacy.

Tim and Aerina from the SACID team delivered the keynote address at the organisation's annual conference, officially launching the suite of resources. They are available free of charge on the Cyber Wise training page.

HAWKESBURY DIGITAL MENTORING PROGRAM

DIGITAL LITERACY FOUNDATION

In partnership with local Council and community organisations, Digital Literacy Foundation has delivered locally-based, face-to-face digital mentoring services for people in the Hawkesbury region. Workshops were built on a successful pilot program focused on increasing consumers' access to online information, communications products, and services.

With many services digitised, older Hawkesbury residents have become increasingly isolated, as the region's rivers, bushland, unsealed roads, and devastation following fires (2019) and multiple floods (2020, 2021, 2022 and 2024) has reduced access to physical services. The Hawkesbury region has a higher proportion of 50 to 84-year-olds than Greater Sydney (Census 2021), a group which, according to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, are more likely to experience digital exclusion. The program has helped improve access to communication channels with community, family and government, including telehealth, and provided opportunities for increased social connectedness and participation in online social and economic activities.

CONTINUING PROJECTS

FORTIFYING "WHAT STANDARDS? THE NEED FOR EVIDENCE-BASED AUSLAN TRANSLATION STANDARDS AND PRODUCTION GUIDELINES"

DEAF AUSTRALIA

Since publication of the 'What Standards?' Auslan translation guidelines in 2015, the NDIS and pandemic have significantly reshaped Auslan user needs. This project evaluates and updates these guidelines by reviewing current usage and compliance across Australia, improving the guidelines for Deafblind consumers, and incorporating emerging Auslan-first products, often viewed as a better alternative to translations. Ultimately, the findings will provide Auslan translation guidelines for current and foreseeable requirements, deeper consideration of Deafblind needs, and an understanding of when Auslan-first products should be produced instead of Auslan translations.

...CONTINUING PROJECTS

PLAN CANCELLATIONS FOR ALL: SUPPORTING CONSUMERS WITH DISABILITY IN IDENTIFYING ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT PROCESSES BY TELCO PROVIDERS

CENTRE FOR ACCESSIBILITY AUSTRALIA (CFAA)

Consumers with disability have reported to the CFAA that there is a lack of adequate mobile plan cancellation options with support limited to text-based AI chatbots and no alternative phone, email, or teletypewriter (TTY) support. This project will evaluate the support and cancellation process of all Australian companies providing a mobile SIM and create consumer resources for disability groups. Telcos will be provided guidance to improve their support offerings and accessibility to consumers with disability.

While their work with telcos is ongoing, see the CFAA projects page for their report, as well as their 2020 report 'Telcos for All', which was also funded by an ACCAN grant.

DEFINING COMMUNICATION IN A DIGITAL ERA: WHAT BEST PROTECTS DIVERSE CONSUMERS?

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

This project explores how communication is defined and implications for reforms to the laws of information privacy, telecommunications surveillance, and digital markets. The team is conducting focus groups with diverse communities to enhance consumer advocacy and representation in submissions to proposed reforms and improved consumer protections.

FIRST NATIONS DIGITAL INCLUSION IN WESTERN SYDNEY

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

Indigenous people in Western Sydney are experiencing an acute digital divide. This interdisciplinary project is co-designed with an Indigenous scholar and overseen by an Indigenous Research Governance Committee. By building on established relationships with Indigenous residents in Western Sydney, the project provides needed data on Indigenous digital exclusion in Western Sydney and provides Indigenous co-designed recommendations for closing the digital gap.

SMARTPHONE SHARING WITH INTIMATE PARTNERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS CONSUMER CYBERSECURITY

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

While cybersecurity self-help advice is readily available to consumers, most resources are focused on preventing unintended sharing of devices, passwords, accounts, and personal information. This advice is ill-suited to intimate relationship contexts where sharing is common. A lack of baseline knowledge about smartphone-sharing practices and the reasons behind them has hampered Australian efforts to strengthen consumer cybersecurity. This project creates a new evidence base to understand everyday consumer smartphone sharing in intimate relationships using a survey and interviews with diverse consumers, to improve privacy protections and cybersecurity for all Australians.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH PROGRAM



Our research program provides ACCAN, and the sector, with an easy to use and consumer-focused evidence base on a range of policy issues. See our full range of publicly available resources on the ACCAN website: accan.org.au/research

AFFORDABLE DEVICES

Based on research conducted by Action Market Research, ACCAN has put together a list of options to help consumers access more affordable devices. This first-of-its-kind resource allows people to select their state or territory and the type of device they are looking for, to see what's available. Most offer refurbished devices at a reduced cost, but some options provide new or free devices.

Corollary to this research, we also found a range of programs targeted toward community organisations or schools seeking to access devices to distribute to their communities. This new resource is the sister publication to ACCAN's list of more affordable telco services.

THE ENFORCEMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROTECTIONS REPORT

Better public information on regulator enforcement is required, according to this new work undertaken by researchers at UTS' Centre for Media Transition.

The report highlights the importance of reliable public information on enforcement. It details the enforcement actions undertaken by the ACMA from January 2010 to June 2023 to ensure compliance with consumer protections.

Key findings and recommendations from the report include:

- ◆ The ACMA should increase transparency and accountability around how they enforce telecommunications rules by establishing a public register of enforcement actions.
- ◆ According to public information, from January 2010 to June 2023 the entire telecommunications sector may have paid \$6,143,160 in infringement fines for breaches to consumer protection rules.
- ◆ According to public information, from January 2010 to June 2023, the ACMA obtained only 3 civil penalty orders against telco providers totalling \$1,077,625 for breaches to consumer protection rules.

DISABILITY AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

As a collaboration between ACCAN, Western Sydney University and the University of Sydney, this project aims to break fresh ground to offer a scoping study on disability and digital citizenship in Australia.

Our hope is that the project will provide an essential foundational stone for the development of a research, policy, and practice agenda to tackle disability and digital citizenship in Australia – paving the way for the essential collaborative work needed. We also hope the study will provide a useful contribution to international work on disability, digital technology, and social participation and equality.

ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR AUTOMATED DECISION MAKING AND SOCIETY

ACCAN is one of several foundational supporters for this national, cross-disciplinary research centre. Hosted at RMIT, it works to create the knowledge and strategies necessary for responsible, ethical and inclusive decision making.

Our partnership facilitates timely translation of results into practical resources for consumers and helps build trust and understanding of these new technologies.

ACCESSIBLE TELECOMS

The Accessible Telecoms (AT) project is Australia's first independent and up-to-date guide to mainstream and assistive telecommunications products and services: accessibletelecoms.org.au

This free service helps to address the lack of consolidated, independent and up-to-date information about accessibility, particularly for people with disability and seniors.

Since the service began in 2020:

- ◆ More than 850,000 people have visited the AT website
- ◆ More than 1400 enquiries have been taken over phone, email, live chat and SMS.

FUNDING CONTINUITY HAS FACILITATED GREATER INTEGRATION OF THE INSIGHTS OF AT

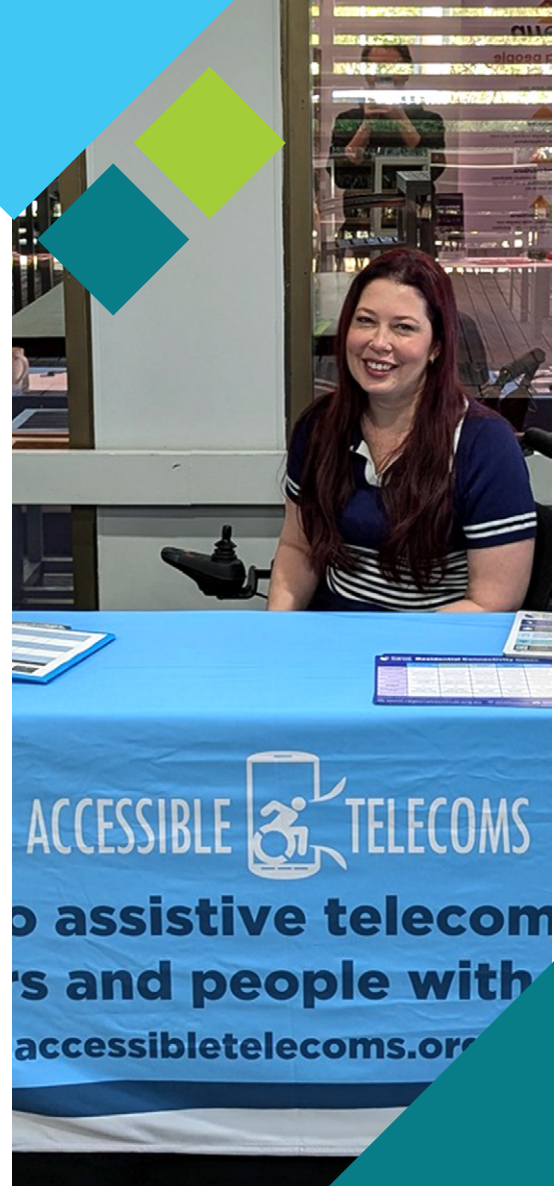
The Commonwealth of Australia funds AT through a grant made under section 14 of the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999*. This grant is funded through the Telecommunications Industry Levy.

This funding has enabled ACCAN to strengthen AT to better meet consumer demand. In the 12 months to July 2024:

- ◆ Over half a million 'events' have been recorded on the AT website, including content downloads, device searches and resources viewed.
- ◆ AT web pages have been uploaded nearly 200,000 times
- ◆ A new part-time communications assistant has launched AT on social media and new promotional channels, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.

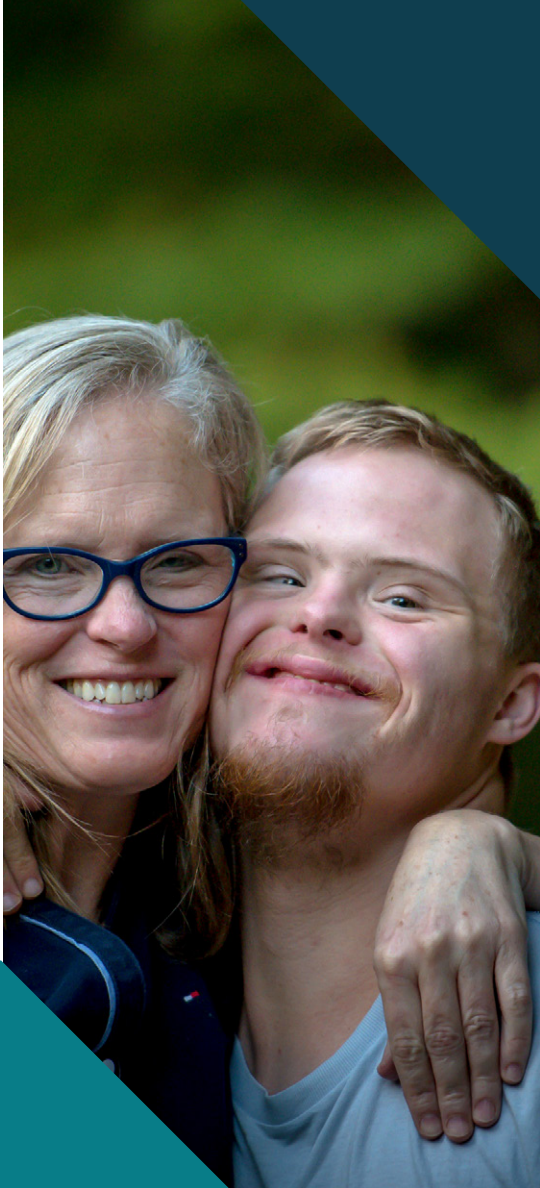
The continuity of funding has also allowed ACCAN to increasingly integrate the insights generated by AT with data, case studies and experiences captured by the service, providing new and meaningful insights into our policy work.

For example, ACCAN's advocacy and consumer education regarding the 3G network shutdown was informed by an increase in the number of enquiries AT was receiving on the issue. In particular, consumers were seeking support to check if their devices would be impacted, as well as recommendations for upgrades that met their unique accessibility needs.



CONSUMER FEEDBACK REINFORCES THE IMPORTANCE OF FIT-FOR-PURPOSE CHANNELS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Conversations with telco consumers highlight the importance of the specialised service AT provides – many report that they struggle to navigate their telco's customer service channels. Our data illustrates that consumers rely on multiple channels to get in touch, and that this remains a vital feature of AT: 65% of contacts come via the 1800 number, 16% via live chat and 15% via email.



For Deaf or people hard of hearing, text-based communication – such as SMS, chat and email – is vital. Our current website is accessible and includes easy English content and Auslan videos. For those living with vision impairment, a fully accessible online presence – both the resources on our site and the supporting media promotion – mean the experience provides equality of access comparable to that of a sighted person. For older people, the phone line and being able to speak with ‘a real person’ is key.

ADVANCING ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH AT INTO THE FUTURE

ACCAN remains committed to improving access for those disproportionately affected when information is difficult to find or understand.

ACCAN’s Accessible Telecoms service supports our broader efforts to lead change within the sector, making significant progress towards realising the fully accessible communications environment outlined in the Ideal Accessible Communications Roadmap.

Developed in partnership with our members and the broader disability sector, this roadmap serves as a guide for expanding our influence and ensuring that accessible communication becomes the standard for everyone.

Advancing improvements in accessibility, empowering older Australians and people with disability to break down barriers to access will remain AT’s focus into the new year and beyond.

EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION

- ◆ ACCC Consumer Consultative Committee
- ◆ ACCC/AER Infrastructure Consultative Committee
- ◆ ACCC National Anti-Scam Centre Advisory Board
- ◆ ACCC National Anti-Scam Centre, Communications and Awareness Working Group
- ◆ ACMA Numbering Advisory Committee
- ◆ ACMA Consumer Consultative Forum
- ◆ auDA General Advisory Standing Committee, Access and Inclusion sub-committee meeting
- ◆ Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance Governance & Strategy Committee
- ◆ Communications Alliance Integrated Public Number Database (IPND) Working Group
- ◆ Communications Alliance Internal Public Number Database Code Committee
- ◆ Communications Alliance Mobile Number Portability Code Committee
- ◆ Communications Alliance Mobile Phone Base Station Code Committee
- ◆ Communications Alliance TCP Code Review Committee
- ◆ Communications Alliance WC91 IPND Committee
- ◆ Consumers' Federation Australia Executive Committee
- ◆ DITRDCA Triple Zero Coordination Committee
- ◆ International Telecommunications User Group (INTUG) Board
- ◆ IoTAA Executive Council
- ◆ NBN Co Low Income and Digital Inclusion Forum
- ◆ NBN Co Low Income Digital Inclusion Forum, Augmentation Working Group
- ◆ NBN Co Low Income and Digital Inclusion Forum, New Opportunities Working Group
- ◆ SBS Audio Description Advisory Committee
- ◆ Senate Economic References Committee, Influence of International Digital Platforms Discussions
- ◆ Standards Australia COPOLCO Committee
- ◆ Standards Australia IT040 Committee
- ◆ TIO Consumer Panel
- ◆ TIO Nominations Committee
- ◆ TIO Triple Zero Custodian Steering Committee

CONSULTATION

ACCAN's advisory forums were held virtually in 2023-24. The use of videoconferencing continued to offer participants from across Australia an opportunity to join our advisory forums without travel, health concerns or time constraints presenting a barrier to their participation.

MEMBERS' ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Members' Advisory Forum (MAF) is to discuss the most important issues from the perspective of ACCAN's members and the people they represent.

The MAF was held on 27 March 2024. Representatives from Consumer Action Law Centre, Consumer Policy Research Centre, Ethnic Communities Council of WA, Financial Counsellors Association WA, Isolated Children's Parents' Association, NT Council of Social Service, SA Council of Social Service, Simbani Research, WESNET and WEstjustice attended the meeting.

DISABILITY ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the disability sector.

The DAF was held on 12 June 2024. Representatives from Assistive Technology Suppliers Australia, Australian Web Accessibility Initiative, Deafness Council of NSW, Digital Gap Initiative, Deafblind Australia, Deaf Australia, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Disability Voices Tasmania, Guide Dogs Australia, Institute for Culture and Society and Vision 2020 Australia attended the meeting.

SMALL BUSINESS ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Small Business Advisory Forum (SBAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the small business environment.

The SBAF was held on 13 March 2024. Representatives from Business NSW, Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA), Hearing Connections, the NSW Small Business Commission and Small Biz Matters, plus an ACCAN individual member, attended the meeting.



INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS' FORUM

ACCAN hosted an Individual Members' Forum on 15 November 2023. The forum offered an opportunity for members to raise telecommunications consumer issues that were affecting them or their communities.

INDIGENOUS STEERING COMMITTEE

The Indigenous Steering Committee met virtually on 15 December 2023. ACCAN provided information to the Committee regarding the review of the Universal Service Obligation (USO). ACCAN has consulted further with individual Committee members since the December meeting.

ORGANISATIONAL MEMBERS

- ◆ Able Australia
- ◆ Acceleon Pty Ltd
- ◆ ACT Council of Social Service Inc
- ◆ Adult Learning Australia
- ◆ Association of Independent Retirees
- ◆ auDA - .au Domain Administration
- ◆ Australian Council of Social Service
- ◆ Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
- ◆ Australian Independent Retirees
- ◆ Australian Privacy Foundation
- ◆ Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association
- ◆ Benevolent Society (The)
- ◆ Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia
- ◆ Blind Citizens Australia
- ◆ CARE Inc
- ◆ Carlton Neighbourhood Learning Centre
- ◆ Central Land Council
- ◆ Centre for Accessibility Australia
- ◆ Centre for Appropriate Technology
- ◆ Centre for Inclusive Design
- ◆ CHOICE
- ◆ Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW Inc
- ◆ Communication Rights Australia
- ◆ Community Broadcasting Association of Australia
- ◆ Community Legal Centres NSW
- ◆ Consumer Action Law Centre
- ◆ Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
- ◆ Consumer Policy Research Centre
- ◆ Consumers' Association of South Australia
- ◆ Consumers' Federation of Australia
- ◆ Cotton Australia
- ◆ Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia
- ◆ Council on the Ageing (WA) Inc.
- ◆ Council on the Ageing Australia
- ◆ Deaf Australia
- ◆ Deaf Connect
- ◆ DeafBlind Australia
- ◆ Deafness Forum of Australia
- ◆ Desert Knowledge Australia
- ◆ Differently Able People Association Inc.
- ◆ Digital Gap Initiative Ltd
- ◆ Digital Literacy Foundation
- ◆ Digital Tasmania
- ◆ Electronic Frontiers Australia
- ◆ Ethnic Communities Council of WA
- ◆ Expression Australia
- ◆ Family Drug Support
- ◆ Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia
- ◆ Financial Counselling Australia
- ◆ Financial Counselling Victoria Inc
- ◆ Financial Counsellors Association of Queensland
- ◆ Financial Counsellors Association of Western Australia
- ◆ Financial Rights Legal Centre
- ◆ HK Training & Consultancy Pty Ltd
- ◆ IDEAS NSW
- ◆ Illawarra Legal Centre Inc
- ◆ Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd
- ◆ Indigenous Remote Communications Association
- ◆ Infoxchange
- ◆ Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development
- ◆ Internet Australia
- ◆ Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia
- ◆ Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW
- ◆ Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland
- ◆ Isolated Children's Parents' Association SA
- ◆ Isolated Children's Parents' Association WA
- ◆ itControl
- ◆ Macdonald Valley Association (The)
- ◆ MoneyMob Talkabout Limited
- ◆ National Children's and Youth Law Centre
- ◆ National Council of Women of Australia
- ◆ National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- ◆ National Farmers' Federation
- ◆ North Melbourne Language and Learning
- ◆ NSW Council of Social Service
- ◆ NSW Farmers' Association
- ◆ OZeWAI
- ◆ People with Disabilities WA
- ◆ People with Disability Australia
- ◆ Physical Disability Australia
- ◆ Physical Disability Council of NSW
- ◆ Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- ◆ Queensland Consumers' Association
- ◆ Redfern Legal Centre
- ◆ Regional Development Australia Northern Territory Inc
- ◆ Scope (Aust) Ltd
- ◆ Simbani Research Pty Ltd
- ◆ Soundfair
- ◆ South Australian Financial Counsellors Association
- ◆ Tenants Queensland Inc.
- ◆ Think+DO Tank Foundation Limited
- ◆ Uniting Care Wesley Bowden
- ◆ Vision Australia
- ◆ Wamboin Communications Action Group
- ◆ WEstjustice
- ◆ Women with Disabilities Australia
- ◆ Women's Legal Service NSW
- ◆ Women's Legal Services Aust
- ◆ Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

ACCAN LIFE MEMBERS

At ACCAN's 2023 Annual General Meeting, Mr Len Bytheway was awarded Life Membership in recognition of outstanding service to ACCAN, and communications consumers, over many decades.

Len has been a lifelong champion of people with disabilities, particularly for the deaf and hard of hearing. He brought that commitment to the early days of the Consumers' Telecommunications Network (CTN) and then to ACCAN. He served on the CTN and ACCAN Board in many capacities including as Deputy Chair, Treasurer and member of the Finance and Audit Committee and Performance Committee. He was a member of the ACCAN Independent Grants Panel from 2020-2024.

Len has brought his unique blend of knowledge and experience in communications and information technology to his involvement in ACCAN, with his portfolio of responsibilities including disability access, emergency services and emerging technologies. Len brings to ACCAN his wealth of experience in both disability issues and communications technology including:

- ◆ Len's Churchill Fellowship in deafness and technology which led to the establishment of Deaflink. Deaflink later became the Australian Communication Exchange – for many years the operator of the National Relay Service - with Len as its founding CEO.

- ◆ Len's membership on the Board of Deaf Services.
- ◆ Len as CEO of the Abused Child Trust (now ACT for Kids)
- ◆ Len has also been a consultant and mentor to commercial and non-profit community organisations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entities.
- ◆ Len has also developed communications strategies and resources for the education and community sectors, incorporating accessible media.

ACCAN, its members, and so many consumers owe Len a huge debt of gratitude for his knowledge, his experience and his ongoing commitment to people with disabilities. The ACCAN Board is proud to award Len a Life Membership of ACCAN.

Len joins the following list of ACCAN Life Members

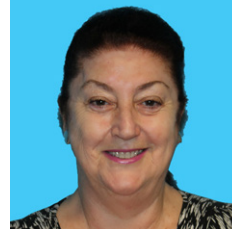
- ◆ Andrew Stewart
- ◆ Gunela Astbrink
- ◆ Ian Binnie
- ◆ Nan Bosler AM
- ◆ Gerard Goggin
- ◆ Johanna Plante
- ◆ Sue Salthouse AM (deceased)
- ◆ Nigel Waters
- ◆ Robin Wilkinson



ACCAN BOARD



Julian Thomas
Chairperson
Re-elected: 2021
Term Ends: 2024



Victoria Rubensohn AM
Deputy Chairperson
Elected: 2021
Term Ends: 2024



Chris Dodds
Director
Elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



Keith Besgrove
Director
Re-elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



Vince Humphries
Director
Elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



Scott Hollier
Director
Elected: 2023
Term Ends: 2026



Delia Rickard PSM
Director
Elected: 2023
Term Ends: 2026



David Havyatt
Director
Elected: 2023
Term Ends: 2026



Bobbie Blackson
Director
Elected: 2023
Term Ends: 2026



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You can contact
ACCAN through the
National Relay Service:
www.relayservice.gov.au



**Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network**