

ACCAN Quarterly Progress Report

Period: 1 December 2023– 29 February 2024

Overview

Executive summary of activity in the quarter for publication on ACCAN website.

ACCAN has continued to see significant policy developments over the period, reflecting the continuation of several consultations on regional, rural and remote communications and the consumer safeguards framework. ACCAN has continued to engage with inquiries into the 2023 Optus outage, emphasising the importance of reliable communications services. ACCAN was invited to appear before the Senate Inquiry into the Optus outage on 9 February, which ultimately was cancelled.

The new Financial Hardship Industry Standard introduced this quarter reflected several of ACCAN's recommendations, marking the first form of direct regulation of telecommunications consumer protections in around five years. Our submission to Treasury's Pre-Budget consultation outlined priorities for 2024-2025, calling for a concessional broadband service, an independent comparison tool, consumer representation in digital platforms policy, improvements to accessibility of telecommunications goods and services, and further rounds of the Mobile Black Spot and Regional Connectivity Programs.

During the period ACCAN generated 76 media hits across national print, online, TV and radio, an average of 25 items per month. ACCAN responded to a total of 24 media enquiries on topics including scams, fines for telco regulatory noncompliance, the 3G shut-down, emergency mobile roaming, outages, affordability, financial hardship and the TCP Code.

A key priority for the reporting period was the progression of the business case to support consumer representation following the acceptance of the NBN Special Access Undertaking. Discussions have been highly productive and resulted in the submission of several options to the Department.

As part of a TIO Board and Executive Management meeting on 19 February ACCAN's CEO was invited to provide a short presentation on ACCAN's needs and expectations of the TIO in 2024.

ACCAN's [Affordable Devices](#) database is now published. It will be officially launched 20th March at a [forum with the Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance](#) discussing device donation and reuse in Australia.

The 2024 Round of the Independent Grants Program opened this quarter, receiving a higher volume of enquiries, and applications, than usual. A briefing was provided to the Independent Grants Panel on 16 February and assessments have begun.

UTS researchers have continued their look at the telecommunications enforcement landscape, by widening their research to better understand the data uncovered in part 1 of this work. This report is now complete.

In early February ACCAN was awarded a \$40,000 grant from the auDA Foundation to promote digital inclusion and digital innovation. ACCAN's project is titled "Digital Skills Finder: A freely available, national, digital capacity and skills hub for people with disability." This project will address the digital inclusion disparity faced by Australians with disability, by creating a comprehensive, easy-to-access map of available disability-centric digital literacy initiatives in Australia.

ACCAN staff participated in 85 different outreach, consumer engagement events, member events and consultation discussions this quarter. Issues covered during the period included our submission to the Uniform Services Obligation reform consultation. ACCAN's Deputy CEO participated in a delegation to Parliament House in Canberra to promote the ongoing issue of scams in Australia. ACCAN also convened the second Quarterly Affordability Policy Supporters meeting.

ACCAN represented consumers at 15 Committee meetings throughout the period, engaged with government and regulatory bodies on 30 different occasions and industry bodies on 20 occasions. Staff have travelled extensively to engage with members and others, including our first visit to Tasmania for a number of years, primarily to re-connect with the Small Business community as well as local politicians, and a delegation to Alice Springs to attend the ICPA Northern Territory Conference and meet with a range of ACCAN members.

ACCAN staff have held a number of funding discussions with Government and Industry during the period to progress ACCAN's funding proposal for resourcing to undertake consumer engagement and representation in keeping with the revised NBN Special Access Undertaking Replacement Module Application process.

Following a four-month transition, ACCAN's CEO Andrew Williams finished with the organisation on 1 March. An executive search organisation was appointed to manage the CEO recruitment process, with shortlisting and first round interviews with the Board selection panel occurring in the latter half of February. Final interviews and appointment of the preferred candidate is anticipated for early March. We also filled the newly created Accessible Telecoms Communications Assistant role in mid-February.