Day 2, 2015 Conference – Communications Affordability, the Way Forward

Teresa Corbin: Please start to get seated. We've got a video to kick off the session. We'll call the panel up after the video.

(VIDEO SHOWN)

Teresa Corbin: OK. So, we decided that that particular video was a really good one to start this session with. We felt that this person was a really good representation of what most consumers tell us all the time. So this session is all about the way forward. We've got a great panel that's going to come up from the telcos. If I can welcome them to the stage - David Epstein from Optus, Matt Lobb from Vodafone, Gerard Mansour from amaysim, Jeremy Way from Jeenee Mobile, and we actually have an apology from iiNet. I don't think it's got anything to do with the merger, but maybe it's... (Inaudible)... And, yeah, Robert - how could I forget you?! Robert Morsillo, the most important person on the panel, from Telstra!

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: What we're going to do is we're going to kick off with presentations. Hang on, Paul - I need you to switch out down the front for a bit. This is a very complicated session. We're trying something entirely new. It's too complex for me! The plan wasn't good, was it?

(LAUGHS)

Teresa Corbin: Robert, can I get you to switch one more seat over? We're going to be a bit militaristic about this. The idea is we've got a panel of telcos and we've got a group of speakers who have been thought leaders in this area who are going to put forward a short presentation, then they're going to join the panel for a short time, and we'll talk about that idea and see whether it's a good idea or whether it's something that could actually work in some way and whether the telcos, you know, can see any challenges or any benefits, and perhaps give us some suggestions about a way forward. Then we're also going to weave into this conversation the ideas that have come from our Ideas Garden. Some of them have been posted up on Post-it notes, and have of them have been put online. So it is a bit of a challenging session. But it was the only way we thought that we could actually have a conversation really start to take the discussion forward. Because from this session, ACCAN is going to start to develop some policy platforms and some ways forward after this conference. Like the conversation doesn't stop here for us at ACCAN - in a lot of ways, the work only just starts.

I now want to introduce our first intervener, or our first thought leader, Peter Gerrand, who has many, many hats, and you can read the program for that, but I know him quite well in relation to having lots of discussions about affordability over many, many years. So if I can just welcome Dr Peter Gerrand to the podium...

(APPLAUSE)

Peter Gerrand: Thank you very much, Teresa. I would love to live in a country with such an enlightened government that it funded free, entry-level broadband to all its residents - all those who couldn't afford to pay for a better broadband service. But we don't live in such enlightened times. So, with the proposals I'm putting today, I'm very much looking to the enlightened self-interest of the telcos in providing such a service to eligible end users and not assuming any increase whatsoever

in the current levels of government subsidies. I find it useful to begin by going back 20 years, when it was a telephone service which was an essential service to bind society, and when a particularly brilliant self-funded service was launched by Telstra - the InContact service. As many, but possibly not all of you know, the InContact service is a service which is free to eligible users under financial stress where, basically, the only outgoing calls they can send are free calls, whether 1800 or emerging services, but can accept all incoming calls.

In fact, it pays for itself by the fact that Telstra already has a sunk cost in the network connection, and the terminating charges and incoming calls, on average, will offset or better the operation maintenance costs of the services. I regard it as a beautifully crafted service because it's simultaneously progressive, has no stigma attached because it looks like an ordinary telephone service, and for that reason it's not widely known in the community. It uses real-time certification of eligibility by an independent authority - Centrelink - it's economically viable for the reasons I've just given, but it's also pro-competitive, as the revenue-earning income calls come from any service providers, and it can easily be upgraded to a normal phone service when finances improve. I ask myself, 20 years later in 2015, when all the speakers yesterday and this morning have agreed that internet access is now essential to participate in modern society and the economy, can we craft a similar entry-level broadband service? What would such a service comprise?

I suggest it would be a service which would allow access to all websites that are not prescribed by - prescribed - by government, I mean. Secondly, it would allow internet banking - obviously the ability to receive and pay for bills, to use email, to use very cheap voice services such as Skype and voice over IP. However, the big deterrent or big incentive, I should say, for upgrading that service when your financial situation's improved is it would not include video services, which of course is the big driver - entertainment - for the commercial broadband services. This last restriction suggests a bandwidth limit to the entry-level broadband service. If it was via fixed-line access, given NBN Co is bitterly providing broadband access to, in theory, every premise in the country, I suggest that perhaps a one-megabit-per-second product for a fixed-line access service, and for the mobile carriers, speeds corresponding to the 3G service. Now, the question - and it's really to the telcos - after I've suggested some solutions - can either of these low-bandwidth solutions, with a corresponding low-download cap, be subsidised by the infrastructure provider, such to provide a very low cost or free service in a commercially sustainable way?

Firstly, solutions via NBN access. We've got a structural problem here in that the sunk cost is by NBN Co, not by the retail service provider. The cheapest of NBN's current range of products is at $24 a month. For a download speed of $12 megabits per second, so that even a well-meaning RSP or telco trying to provide such a free service to eligible customers is up against the fact that they're going to have to pay $24 a month for that access. In fact, it raises the question, to me, as to whether Telstra will be able to continue providing its InContact service once the corresponding phone lines get handed over to the NBN. I just hope that Telstra's smart enough to develop a new business model that can sustain an ongoing service like that for those who need it. Or, morph it into an entry-level broadband service. I think the best opportunity for a free, entry-level service via the NBN would be for the telcos, the retail service providers collectively, to lobby NBN Co to provide a cheap, one-megabit-per-second downstream wholesale product for this service, ideally priced at around $5 a month. It's well within the current government telephone allowance, which averages about $13.50 per month, allowing some leeway for the retail service provider to provide a wi-fi modem to that household.

It's a pity we don't have a representative on this panel from NBN Co. NBN Co might counter that perhaps it's not economic for them to provide such a service if there's only going to be, at best, 200,000 users. But in fact, I believe a cheaply priced one megabit per second service would be commercially useful for a whole lot of other applications for the internet of things, if the NBN were

to connect traffic lights, speed cameras and, indeed, CCTVs whose black-and-white video could be accommodated within one megabit per second. So, that's my idea for an entry's level service for which the telcos or any of the retail service providers could fund from the eligible client's regional telephone to provide it. I'll seek responses from the telco representatives soon.

With mobile access, we have a number of mobile operators who actually own their network infrastructure. Can an entry-level low-speed broadband service be offered sustainably? Ideally, free to the eligible end users? At low speeds and corresponding low monthly download caps? The mobile carriers have got the ability to restrict SIM cards to using 3G access speeds only, which would block video, and of course they've got the ability to set download caps. There's little attraction, for most customers these days, to use a 3G-only product as the entertainment value of video has such big usage. We're well aware that Telstra and Optus are attempting to phase out their GSM networks over the next two years, but I'm talking about their ability to control those 3G-type speeds even if it's a full LT environment. So, my second question to the mobile carrier reps - would it be feasible for you to subsidise, or would cover such a level at an entry-level service? Again, using the government telephone allowance, if necessary, to pay for it, in order to gain or attain a customer suffering financial distress?

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: So maybe we can start with Telstra, because Telstra's had such a revolutionary service for many years with InContact. It must take you back to the beginning of that InContact service, Robert - it was quite an unusual thing to do, and it was significant because it made a big difference. So let's start with you.

Robert Morsillo: Thanks, Teresa. Thanks, Peter. I've got two or three comments to make, generally. I do remember InContact. There was certain opposition to InContact back in those days, from consumers, it seemed. Getting it over the line was an interesting process - no different than today, I suspect, in terms of the discussions we'd have. In terms of the fixed idea, um, conceptually - I'll just talk conceptually - you know, it merits further consideration, I would think. It could be a pro-competitive sort of way of being able to address a market that's in some need. ..of further support, and allows innovation amongst a range of fixed providers., not just us, of course. In terms of coming up with something that might be suitable for this sort of market, for social housing - different carriers, different service providers, could have a think about it. I know John de Ridder has already published something around entry-level pricing ideas that NBN could, perhaps, consider. But that's something, perhaps, for a discussion.

Peter mentions - and others have mentioned here - Oval - the government telephone allowance. I actually do think, over my 20 years, that that's become a hidden sort of, you know, it's got rolled up into the general supplement payment. To me, in this context of digital inclusion and so on, more focus and greater visibility needs to be given, and policy attention needs to be encouraged, in terms of income support recipients in respect of the government telephone allowance, so-called. I can't say a lot about the mobile idea. I think, in general, there are many service providers in the market who do differentiate their service on all sorts of things, such as price. There was announcements today in CommsDay ask yesterday in CommsDay from various members of this panel, for example, on pre-paid mobile data. That's a dynamic and highly competitive sort of area. It raises, for me, the question of information. Are people aware of what some of the options are? I can only speak for ourselves. We have plans that range from 15 cents a minute for phone calls and things like that. Up to all sorts of other pre-paid plans.

I'm sure the other service providers also have a range of things that, you know, makes sense for certain people and so on. That brings us to the issue of pre-paid. We do know, from the research and from feedback from, you know, Anglicare and many others, that that's how many low-income people choose to manage the affordability, and the fact that, yes, running out of credit often is an issue. But I guess for me, pre-paid is pretty close to InContact, really, because you can keep the service and you can still receive incoming calls, and you can top it up when you can and when you need, from time to time, but the account - so to speak, the actual network connection and your account with your service provider - generally remains for a few months and things like that. You pay for what you need, when you need it. To me, that's as close as you can get to the InContact type of model. For me, that's where the solutions lie in terms of mobile.

Teresa Corbin: Alright. We'll come back to Pete in a minute for his thoughts on pre-paid. Matt, the mobile suggestions. Being a mobile-only provider, what are your thoughts?

Matthew Lobb: Um, well, certainly I think Robert's right that pre-paid does deliver quite a useful, um, service - very similar to InContact, which I'm happy to say I was involved in setting up with Telstra. Pre-paid on Vodafone - if you pay $20, you can get, for the whole year, a service very similar to InContact. Assuming you're not making big calls - that's what you're talking about - for about $1.20 a month, that kind of service is available. So I think pretty much the InContact service is something that the pre-paid delivers quite effectively. I think we'll all do a plug on what the various pricing is. That basically would deliver that service. In regard to - again, in regard to what mobiles might offer low-income consumers, I think - there's no doubt that mobile is now, um, way ahead when it comes to affordability services.

I note that, if you look at, say, home-loan budget for Telstra, which is seen as Telstra's flagship affordability service, it's $24.95 a month, and then you pay 30 cents for local calls, 40 cents for 13 calls, $1.17 for a 2-minute call from a fixed to a mobile, $1.05 for a long-distance call. If you look at the pre-paid plans of the mobile services, for $30 a month, I think amaysim, Optus and Vodafone all offer unlimited calling, plus broadband services. And all of this with 4G. I think Vodafone is - we offer 1.5 gig as part of that plan. I think one of the key things is, for consumers, is information. What has definitely happened in this market is mobiles - and particularly pre-paid - is affordability's friend. I think that really does draw to attention the issue we have, which is fixed line is now extremely expensive in this market, and Australia suffers across the board the most expensive fixed-line voice services in the OECD. That's my plug for mobile.

Teresa Corbin: I'd just like to come back to Peter. Just pull the mike over to Peter. This might have taken a different direction to what you expected? You might want to pick up some of your thoughts?

Peter Gerrand: The responses are encouraging, but I did pick up from some of the researchers speaking yesterday that those people in need of - who are Centrelink registered and really financially distressed find that the pre-paids they can afford to pay for tend to run out halfway through each month, after two weeks, I was given. While it's great to know there's unlimited calling available for $30 per month, I got the distinct impression from the research findings with the people looking at the 10% poorest in the community, and particularly the 5% or so who would be extremely financially distressed, they could not afford to pay $30 a month.

Matthew Lobb: You were talking about InContact. I was giving an example of InContact. For $10 on pre-paid on Vodafone, we provide a service with $100 credit. So $10 a month, $100 credit. Yes, you can't make unlimited calls, but you can certainly make a large number of...

Teresa Corbin: Does that include 1300 numbers?

Matthew Lobb: It includes 1800 numbers. But yeah, the $100 credit includes 13.

Teresa Corbin: MM. OK. I don't know if either of the other three want to have a comment there on this one?

Jeremy Way: I'd like to say a few things on disability.

Teresa Corbin: OK. Peter, did you want to ask anything else of the panel or make a final comment?

Peter Gerrand: Look, I think that's encouraging so far, but I think we should still be looking at trying to get some better value out of this huge NBN investment. The network is being laid out to connect all houses. I think that, ah, particularly in the case where the household has several occupants - that could be a family of children, or several people sharing the house - the ability to have free access to the internet - if there's an eligible person in that house - would be a huge plus for digital inclusion. It would obviously not only help governments and other service providers, but also indirectly helps the telcos in extending the level of digital inclusion of the whole community.

Teresa Corbin: Alright. Thanks for that, Peter. I might get you to hop out of that hot seat and go into the front, so when we go to the open conversation, there might be some other points you want to make. I now want to bring Fiona Guthrie from Financial Counselling Australia up to the stage. Just while we're doing that, one of the comments that's been on the Ideas Garden - please come up, Fiona - was that disclosure is not a replacement for affordability. So it's interesting how you've said maybe there needs to be more information or better information. I think there's lots of different angles to that information discussion. Stand here, Fiona.

Fiona Guthrie: Thanks, Teresa, and good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning. I thought your idea was fantastic, Peter, just as a little bit of feedback from somebody in the audience. I work for the peak body for financial counsellors, called Financial Counselling Australia. I have a cold and I can hear it coming through the microphone! Financial counsellors help people in financial difficulty. There's about 2.5 million Australians households living in financial distress, so it can be pretty busy. We have a national helpline where you can see a financial counsellor in a face-to-face service, they work in local community organisations. Not surprisingly, I've been asked to look at the affordability lens through the topic of making hardship policies more effective. So that's what I'm going to focus on in my five minutes. To begin with, I want to acknowledge the difference the telecommunications industry has made in this space. So there has been a lot of positive change.

We worked together with ACCAN and other consumer organisations and organisations on the podium behind me, with the TIO, to develop this document here, which is called "Responding to customers in financial hardship: principles and practices for telecommunications providers". And there's no doubt it has made some difference. But there is a little bit more to go. At our conference, which was in May this year. We had around 450 people in the room - about two thirds of those were financial counsellors - and we had a panel which had banks, telco utilities, water providers, insurance companies, and we did some audience polling. We asked our sector, which industry has the most to be proud of in the last twelve months? And the answer by a long way was banking. I'm doing an air graph here - this is an air graph! So it's about here for banking. The next most common response were debt collectors and water companies, which were about here. Because they have done a lot of work - and that will surprise people in the room, I suspect, around debt collection. I won't go into that but there's some good reasons why they have had to change.

And then down here with telcos and utilities. So there's still some room to go. And insurance was right down the bottom. Poor insurance companies. Now, I'm going to make three points this

morning. But before I do that, I want to put some context around what I'm going to say. So can you just do something for me, just in the back of your minds, to perhaps understand financial hardship and make it a little bit more real - I want you to think for a moment about what your monthly expenditure is. How much do you spend per month? More than what you expect is generally the answer. Have you got that figure in your mind? Now I would like you to think about how much money you have in the bank and what your savings are. Got those two figures? If you divide those two figures together, that will tell you how long you would last if you were to lose your job, or get really sick or someone close to you got really sick and you couldn't work as much. Or perhaps your relationship broke down. Before, you, too, would find yourself in financial hardship. I was asked the other day, "What is the face of financial hardship" and I said, well, actually, it's the person sitting next to you on the train or the bus or the person sitting in front of you when you look in the mirror, because it could happen to any one of us.

Throughout the course of a lifetime, the chances are, it probably will. So there are good reasons why we want to address financial hardship and do it really effectively. Our ability to recover is going to depend, of course, on your family and friends, our levels of savings, the ability to get another job. It's going to depend on whether you've got insurance. But some people don't have those fall-backs. I want you to do one more little exercise for me and this time I'm going to ask you to talk to the person next to you. Some of you are sitting a little bit isolated, so you might need to move over. But just for 30 seconds, could you talk to the person next to you or behind you, I'm looking at you, Nigel, and you will have to move around, for example. If you could talk to the person beside you about what you did on the weekend, for 30 seconds. And panel, could you do that too, please? OK, thank you. Thanks, everyone. You obviously have way too much fun on the weekend! Now just for another 30 seconds if you could talk to the same person, but this time I'd like you to tell them how much you earn, how much money you have in the bank and how good you are at paying your bills! Off you go!

(LAUGHTER)

It's alright! Now, you all know - you all understand why you found that hard, don't you? We don't talk about those things in our society. Lots of societies don't talk about those types of things. But if you get into financial difficulty, what are you going to have to do? You are going to ring your telco in this case, or your bank, or your utility provider, possibly speak to someone who's 25, living at home with mum and dad, about some really personal issues that you may not want to share. So I wanted you to understand how difficult it is to have those conversations and these frame the three ideas that I would say to the telecommunications industry about how you would make financial hardship policies more effective. The first thing you would do is make it really easy for people to contact you. You would make it really easy for them to find you. It is not that easy, sometimes. I have to say, Telstra, you are doing a great job of that.

A couple of years ago it was really, really hard. But it's now much, much easier. The banks, for example, on the home page of every bank website, there is a button that says something like, "Are you in financial difficulty"? And, "Click here". And it makes good business sense, doesn't it? Surely you want people to come and tell you early that they're having problems. We know the earlier you contact a creditor, the more chance you have of getting back on top of your problems. The second thing you would do is, you would treat people with empathy and respect. And I mean, that's just a basic common sense thing I would have thought. It doesn't always happen. People are sometimes put through the wringer. Prove to me what your situation is, prove to me how long you are going to be out of work - those kind of things are still said in conversations. People are not believed. The third thing I would say is, to believe what people tell you what they tell you what they can afford. And sometimes people can't afford very much. Just for interest, how many people in this room had a budget? Hands up. It wouldn't even be 10%, I don't think. And how many of those people who have a budget

Follow it rigorously? Probably zero, one! But that's also the advice we give to people in financial hardship. Where's your budget? It's a very difficult thing to do and to get right. It's a very difficult thing to follow. But people generally have a pretty good idea of what they can afford. So when people say, "I can afford X", believe them. There will be people at this end who are in a temporary situation who are just really, "I promise to pay, I can pay you next week". There are people who fluctuate, who go in and out of financial hardship, and they just might need a little bit of assistance for a short time. And there are a group of people up here, who are in persistent, long-term hardship. They have what we call in financial counselling, "Unrecoverable debt". This is a group of people that the bank industry is now responding to really effectively. So someone with unrecoverable debt, there is no point trying to hassle them about that debt. They have an incredibly low income. They have no assets. Those two things are never going to change. You are wasting time and resources on trying to collect that debt. You are also putting incredible stress on people.

They don't answer the phone because of debt collectors, or whoever, is ringing to try and contact them about that money. So there is a group here with unrecoverable debt and the telecommunications industry, it would be nice talking to you about how to deal with it in the same way we've had a productive conversation with the banking industry. Because what the banking industry do with this group is waive those debts and that's what a large part of the debt collection industry is doing with those debts - they waive them. And one of the things that has worked really well in the water industry has been incentive payments. So, you make one payment, for example, on a payment plan, or two payments, or three payments, or four payments and the creditor will match it. That has been a terrific incentive for people trying to get back on top. So they are my three ideas - make it easy for people to contact you, treat them with empathy and respect, believe what people tell you and make sure those arrangements are - you know, they respond to the actual person's situation, not some sort of hypothetical situation. I will finish with a quote, because I just love quotes. I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas - I'm frightened of the old ones! So I don't think I've given you any new ideas, I think I've given you some old ones and I hope they are some good ones. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Thanks, Fiona. OK, so who wants to - who's champing at the bit to tell us all about how you deal with financial hardship or what you think about some of Fiona's suggestions?

Gerard Mansour: Hi, I'm Ged from amaysim. First I will tell you what my budget is - yeah, that wouldn't go very well!

(LAUGHTER)

Gerard Mansour: But that was really insightful, first up, and it's helpful to hear these kinds of things because for me they're always a wake-up call because at amaysim we think we're doing a pretty good job but there's always more we can do. And I will sound like I'm jumping on a barrel here, in terms of pre-paid being the holy grail, but one of the things we try to do and peers in our industry are starting to do as well, is first we look at the product or plan people are on and from there, before we go into the horrible debt collection process, which no-one wants to be a part of, a lot of the time pre-paid is a better solution for people, just to stop them getting into further debt because you can't end update with a surprise bill that way. And from there we treat people on a case-by-case basis and it's not just about cutting people off. But often we don't publish what spend limits are but you can limit the debt people get into by having the suitable plan for them, spend limits to limit the amount of debt and then a personalised case-by-case approach to how you handle people in financial hardship to stop them getting to the point where sometimes it's almost good money after bad for the person in debt and the provider providing the service.

David Epstein: Do you want to say something, David? Sure. Well, look, I mean, I think the first thing to note is that we all immediately leapt to the mobile market conversation about pre-paid. But I also think that's quite appropriate, because I mean, at least - at the very least you are providing a voice service, you are also recognising some of the - you know, even if it's unintentionally, some of the mobility and housing issues. And I gather that was discussed earlier this morning, certainly before I arrived. About, you know, housing infrastructure and fixed line. At risk of jumping on the bandwagon, yes, again, I would say pre-paid but I would also pick up the other two points about contact and empathy. I think both of those things are very important, particularly against the background of this industry. I mean, I note the point made about what people are saying, you know, in terms of the performance of debt collectors, water utilities, telcos, banks, et cetera. The telco industry is perhaps not all bad, but it's still not brilliant.

And that's the case in Australia. But it's also the case in most advanced democracies, although I would say it's interesting, looking at reputation rankings for industries and brands, in that in telco in Australia up until quite recently, we've probably lagged a little bit over the last decade, and there's reasons for that. The reasons, quite frankly, are, you know, this is an industry that has come off the back of explosive growth and has had to learn the lessons of customer retention, for a start, and the commercial benefits of actually learning to treat its customers a bit better. Now, I wouldn't claim that altruism is on the industry's side, not all of that is driven by altruism and concern for the consumer, but I think the industry has become more mindful of these sorts of things. It has moved from an industry that in effect you could have argued with some legitimacy that, five or ten years ago, it outsourced a lot of its customer relations and certainly its customer complaints to the TIO and that is now no longer the case.

People are now more upfront with their contact and access points and I think companies are learning the lessons of having to work more closely with customers and, indeed, all customers. And that doesn't exclude the low income people. I think it was very telling yesterday, though, that Diane Carmody from the TIO, who is the acting ombudsman pointed out that around half of the complaints still, even though they have dropped significantly, around half of the ones that do end up at the TIO are about billing and financial hardship. Yeah, well, look, I don't know whether that's necessarily telling or not. It might actually, you know, be common sense in that, you know, there are certain developments in the marketplace, et cetera. A lot of them are around product logistics and that they can be cyclical. Whereas, unfortunately, the core remains in this area. But, you know, I would say, yes, it is a dominant area of complaints, but the overall - you know, the nominal number of complaints, which is actually another point that Di made, and you would be familiar as a TIO board member, is coming down. I mean...

Teresa Corbin: Yeah, 40% down, yeah.

David Epstein: And I think the lesson to be learned is that we all probably have to focus a bit harder on what are the residual foundation issues and these are some of them.

Teresa Corbin: Having said that, that is not new. I mean, billing and financial hardship have always been a significant area of complaint.

David Epstein: As I said, these are core foundation issues and we need to work a bit harder.

Teresa Corbin: So, Matt, did you want to say something about the financial hardship practices?

Matthew Lobb: Yeah, I think we have made progress, but we do have a long way to go. The key thing is - and I think we've all started recognising it - is that financial hardship is a very challenging part of someone's life and there would be nothing worse than having a utility making life even more

difficult. And one thing that I think we've learned now, to David's point, is we rapidly evolved to where we are now. Mobiles ten years ago wasn't even an industry. So it has been an enormous game-changer and the industry has had to learn to come to grips with now being, you know, the mass market service. So one thing we've learned is, if you deal with someone badly, particularly when they're very stressed, like financial hardship, they will never forgive you. So we know we have to assist at times of crisis. Could we do better? Absolutely. And I think what we need and what we're learning at Vodafone is we need to have a dialogue with the experts to work out how to learn from, you know, what are the requirements and lessons. So that's an ongoing discussion.

Teresa Corbin: That's a really good point, Matt, because that document that Fiona pointed out was developed - I think we published it a year ago, didn't we? And the idea was that, on a twelve month basis we might revisit it and see how we're going.

Matthew Lobb: Very worthwhile. That was a really useful document and we used it to improve our processes, but we need that dialogue. So we need to keep that going.

Teresa Corbin: Yeah, yeah, great.

Jeremy Way: Can I just jump in? Just to give a little bit of a plug for the telco sector, more than anything else. I'm from Jeenee Mobile and we are a small, niche mobile service provider. So we sit as a customer of Optus, and we started because we saw a need in the disability space. So we actually formed the telco not because we wanted to be a telco but because we saw the need. Telco didn't play nicely with disability. It just didn't. We had numerous stories of customers in our segment that were signed up to contracts that were confusing, expensive, who didn't have informed consent - the full bit. We decided that we had to solve that problem, and we actually had to become a telco ourselves to do that. Now, that was 2010. And I've got to say that now, the industry is so much better. There's still a long way to go, but the industry does play better with disability, I've got to say. The TCP code of 2012 has driven a lot of that. And I've got to say, in terms of financial hardship, proactively alerting customers to their spend as they move through their caps is an enormous thing. And that's something that the industry should be justifiably proud of delivering. There's still a long way to go, there really is, but just some of the things that we do at Jeenee Mobile, because we deal in the disability space, because we deal - we're open to all Australians to sign up, please! We need the revenue!

Teresa Corbin: No advertising!

(LAUGHTER)

Jeremy Way: We're a not-for-profit, it's OK! So some of the things that we do. We deal specifically with one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, alright. By definition, if you live with a disability, then you are more than likely to be on some sort of benefit. You are the poorest of the poor. So digital inclusion is not just about internet connectivity, it's about do you have a phone and can you use it? We started from the basic premise of, if we're going to work with this sector, if we're going to work in this sector, we have to make accessibility safe and secure and affordable from the get-go. So some of the things that we do to actually help prevent people proactively getting into financial hardship is, we do simple things like auto-barring. We are a past-paid service. We deliberately decided to go down the post-paid service, because we didn't want a situation where people that needed immediate support were not able to use their mobile service because they had run out of credit.

So we went down the post-paid path, but that opened up a whole can of worms in terms of affordability for people. So we auto-bar people. You don't have to have that, but if you want it, we

will auto-bar you. We will help you manage the process - particularly data, data is where people get themselves into a lot of trouble. We are proactive in terms of all the monitoring and alerting we do to people. In fact we add an extra layer of alerting to people to let them know what's going on, and if you are someone who's living with a disability and you may not have informed consent, then we will send the alerts to a family member, as well, to help them manage through that process. So there are ways of upstream, of waiting for people to get into financial hardship, of actually proactively helping people manage their spend to prevent that happening. And I've got to say that the industry, by and large, has come an enormous way to help that.

Teresa Corbin: Thanks for that, Jeremy. Robert, perhaps if you do a short comment, but I realise Telstra probably has the longest history of doing work in this area. But maybe you could add something quickly?

Robert Morsillo: Just very quickly, for me, there's the customer aspect, obviously, but also having dialogue with Fiona and you know, we actually have meetings twice a year at least with financial counsellors and stuff, so working at that level is really useful, as well. The big thing, I think, is picking up my colleague here's point - the prevention side has come forward. So, you know, people hear the words, "Big data" and it is not all black and dark and that kind of thing but the use of customer data in an almost real-time basis does allow you to do a lot of preventative work and that has been a big focus for us in terms of credit management and outbound notifications and all of that sort of thing and not one size fits all but just getting right down to very detailed data. The final thing I want to say is, I just really - I sometimes get really tempted to ring the financial counselling because I think they've got the sexiest 1800 number there is! 007 007!

Teresa Corbin: We'll never forget it now!

Fiona Guthrie: Licence to help!

(LAUGHTER)

Teresa Corbin: Alright, on that note, Fiona, how about a response?

Thank you for that lovely segue, Robert! Just a short one. I'm very encouraged but everybody's very positive responses, acknowledging the progress and acknowledging there's more to do. So thank you for the opportunity, ACCAN, and it's really good. It's a very important area and it's good that people are understanding that we can do a bit better.

Teresa Corbin: OK, great. Now, Fiona is going to swap from the hot seat to Alex Varley, who is stepping in for Scott Hollier, who is unwell. Thanks, Fiona. Maybe while Alex is coming up, one of the Ideas Garden issues that got put forward was, wouldn't it be great if the telcos could do what the banks do and actually put their financial hardship contact deals on the front of their websites? So that's just something for you guys to take away. Alex, come straight to the podium.

Alex Varley: Thank you, Teresa. So, for those of you who were hoping to see Scott, I am sorry, he had a minor operation last week, but had some complications, so he was unable to come across from Perth, so I'm stepping in. Unfortunately, I'm neither a doctor nor legally blind, but I do know a bit about disability access to mobiles and tablets and other media and information. So that's what I'm going to briefly talk about. What I might start off talking about, actually, is we were lucky enough to get an ACCAN grant this year, and it's actually called "Affordable access", and just by a strange coincidence, after we put the application in, we found out the conference was going to be about affordability, so that was very fortunate. When we talk about access, we're talking about access to people with disabilities and that's really more about, you know, what are the particular challenges

that a person with a disability might have around using devices or using apps and other services on mobiles, tablets, and those kinds of things. The grant is actually looking at various things, so it will end up producing a micro-site for consumers and for anybody else that's interested, and that will have lots of information about the different devices that are out there in the market.

What I should stress is we are totally interested in mainstream. So, there are lots of organisations and people doing good work with what I would call the more extreme end of disability, where people have complex communications needs that generally need specialist solutions. We don't deal with that. We deal with the Samsung Galaxies and widows phones and Apple devices and all the other mainstream things that everyone else uses and the accessibility of those. What we will be doing as part of that information, as well as looking at practical accessibility, ie what can you do on those different devices at different price points, we're also going to look at user profiles. Because one of the things I think that came up yesterday, which was quite interesting, listening to the conversations about different groups of people, was that there's this tendency to put large groups of people into a single niche, and something I'm always asked is, "So, what are the disability community's needs" and I said, "Well, there's no such thing as the disability community, it's a meaningless concept". It's like saying, "What is the non-English speaking background need"? If you are a Chinese speaker, your need will be different to Greek or anything else. You speak a different language.

And so the only thing disabled people have in common is a disability but that can be a massive range in what that means. So what I will talk about today in the context of the way forward for the telcos is actually, because I'm very much about positive and moving forward and getting started and getting on with it, I think it's actually a massive opportunity, because if we remember that about 20% of the population has a disability that affects their lives in some way, and, OK, they skew it a little bit towards older people, but, you know, that's still a fair-sized market. You know, how do you actually get to those people and sell them stuff? Because I think at the moment, the telecommunications industry doesn't do that very well at a retail level. There is a number of good programs that deal with what I call the extreme end and specialist equipment programs and those kinds of things, but that's really at best tens of thousands of people. I'm talking about millions of people and they're everywhere. And often they don't necessarily identify as having a disability. They might just have issues around their sight or hearing stuff or a bit of mobility problems or whatever it is. So that's what my challenge is.

So there's five things that I want you to think about. So the first one I've said is disability is not a single niche market. So if you, for example, think about, say - and these are the two of the profiles we will pick up on in our affordable access program - if you think about a student with a disability and what they might need out of a mobile device or a tablet. Well, they will be someone who's attending classes. These days they are likely to have a lot of the material for those classes that will be online so they need to access that and that's obviously going to use up a lot of data. They are probably going to need to have a good battery life, because they're attending classes all day. And they are going to have to upload stuff to submit assignments and everything and because they're students and young people they are going to use a lot of social media. Whereas if you contrast that with, say, like, a senior - and we know from some other work we've done with people like Council for the Ageing, for seniors it's all about grandchildren and hobbies and dealing with government services, especially health-related services.

So different kinds of needs. That is the first thing. The second thing I would say is that what's happened over the last five years is that non-Apple devices have suddenly become extremely accessible. So they're rapidly catching up with Apple, which was always the gold standard around accessibility. And that even goes down into those incredibly cheap tablets you can buy on the internet from China that may cost $80. They have built-in accessibility features for mainstream use.

The other thing is that mobile devices and tablets now are universal devices. So if you think of it in terms of, what that phone or tablet does, you are probably using about 5%, 6% or 7% of its capability but it's actually cheaper to just manufacture that en masse and you use whichever bits you use and others use other things. So that means that people with disabilities can also use those devices and that is what you want to sell them. So as a retail telco, and I've got two more points to go, what you should really be thinking about is what price point that person is at, what needs they have based on what they do in their lives and then which features of particular phones or tablets will meet their disability needs? And in most cases it will be a lot of those devices.

Then the last thing I will say is that you've also got to remember that for everybody, but especially for people with disabilities, that that device that they're using is much more a central part of their life and a really quick example of that that I heard about yesterday is, there's a pilot program being run in the UK called Barclays Beacons, and it is a banking thing, where you preload all the information about yourself, including your accessibility needs, into an app and when you talk into a bank, because it's using the GPS, the bank is alerted that you have walked in, a photo of you comes up and somebody comes and greets you and they know exactly what your accessibility needs are. So they're starting off from that point. I think that is a really good example of how you can adapt your customer service to meet somebody with a disability using technology. So thank you.

Teresa Corbin: That's an interesting thing. I know Telstra's shops are starting to experiment with that when you walk in the shop if you're a Telstra customer - well, one of the Telstra shops does it, anyway. Robert, I'll go to you first. Telstra's done an enormous lot in this space. But also, a couple of years ago, helped us bring M-Enabling to Australia. The focus of that conference was really all about mainstreaming and the fact that, now more than ever, these services are more available to everyone.

Robert Morsillo: Thanks, Alex. A one-word response is basically, "Agree!" I think you're right about the diversity, and that's obviously a challenge for us in terms of mass-market, want to sell a million of them rather than, you know, 20 of this or 200 of those or those sorts of things. Obviously the issue of apps and software innovation is fantastic. So, same device but different apps. We heard from Ron McCallum yesterday - the amazing things that are possible in that sort of way - segmentation and so on. It's nice to hear non-Apple devices are catching up. ..which obviously makes for a difference in terms of price points. We certainly support quite a wide range of devices. Also, I welcome the micro-site, giving information and helping people choose and so on, those sorts of things.

I think for Telstra, as you say, we're coming to the end of our sixth Disability Action Plan. And trying to basically make accessibility front and foremost. I think there's the opportunity to do a bit of a refresh in that sort of - from that point of view. I think the NDIS and NDIA and the moves there about customer folk or customer choosing what they need to do, what they would like to have as their communications devices, and we'd like to sell those devices, obviously - those create opportunities. There's also issues like, if you look at TIO complaints, then people with disability do feature a bit there. And so, certainly we've noticed that there's more work to be done to try and make sure those things don't get to the TIO, and that we can resolve those sorts of things. I guess, for us at Telstra, we're looking at a new plan - accessibility and inclusion - and it's trying to basically work - the time has come, it seems, that the business is now realising that these issues are front and foremost for customer service for reducing complaints, for addressing a market in terms of NDIS, et cetera. So there's quite a few things aligning. But that's a very general comment, obviously. But that's a bit where we're at, other than obviously having done quite a lot over the years in that sort of space.

Teresa Cobin: Sure. We might go to the other end of the spectrum and a really small provider, or newer provider, with amaysim, and see what your response might be.

Gerard Mansour: For us, as someone that doesn't bundle the device with the mobile service, we like to look at it a lot about education and being prepared when you buy that device, so you're not having a ticking time bomb in your hand. Especially in this generation, it's about making sure you don't end up with bill shock and all these things when you buy the device. As Alex was describing, you may style your planned data use to your budget. Recently, there's a calculator that is easy to use - it slides left to right. Before you jump into buying it, it suits you and your lifestyle - you know how you're going to use it to a pretty set degree of accuracy. That way, you're not surprised 1-2 months later. It's about doing that research before you get the mobile.

Teresa Corbin: We had that idea that came through on the video yesterday from Able Australia - deaf Australia comes to us frequently and has this conversation - "Can we have a data-only plan? We don't use the rest of it." I know you might want to say something about that, Jeremy?

Jeremy Way: That's us. Firstly, I agree entirely with everything that Alex has said. One of the things that I would challenge to my colleagues here, particularly in the mobile space, is to Alex's point - disability is 1 in 5 people in Australia. The NDIS is coming. It's the biggest social change in Australian history. 22 billion dollars of government investment. It's going to be huge. Disability, though, tends to be categorised as one big, um, amorphous sting. It's not, to Alex's point. Disability is uniquely individual. My disability, my capability, is actually very different to yours. We need to, as providers, as organisations that put products into market, start to think about our customers from that perspective. One of the reasons why we launched a very simple plan - having listened to what the deaf community told us, which was, "Why is it that we pay for a mobile phone plan that has voicing? We don't use voice." The fact that standard response from the market, from the telcos, was, "If you don't want it, don't use it," was not good enough, because that was seen as highly insulting. Because if you're hearing-impaired or in the deaf community, that's talking about your culture as being different. I heard a great representation from an advocate in the Deaf community that said, "I'm not hearing-impaired. You're Auslan-impaired."

(LAUGHTER)

Jeremy Way: It doesn't take much. What we did was put a plan into market with no voice component, unlimited text, and as much data as you wanted to choose. Simple as that. We had been talking to providers for a long time about doing something with this, and no-one had listened. It was not seen as a marketplace. Now, there are all sorts of things that you can start to do when you look at the disability community as a whole, when you start to look at the segmentation within that as you would with any other marketplace and start to treat it properly. There are all sorts of product opportunities that will come to fruition in a very competitive, mature marketplace where we're all keen to grow the pie. Let's start taking it seriously. Our objective as an organisation is to make the need for our organisation go away. Our business plan is to make the need for our services disappear. I would love it if the big guys would take this over and do it properly. Because the whole thing about, um, a rising tide lifts all boats - that's what we're all on about here. But we have to start to treat disability properly. And to do that, we have to treat people living with disabilities as individuals, and individual consumers with individual rights and choices. There's a different lecture. Alright.

Matthew Lobb: One of the great things about being in telecommunications is that what we are is a facilitator of communication and information, and people use our services in an absolute multitude of ways. The people that are using it are very different people. One of the things that's absolutely amazing now is the move to data being the key driver for telecommunications. The point you're making about how disability consumers are all very different - I must say, the great opportunity now

is we're now moving to the smartphone world, an app-based revolution. That is the key opportunity. I forgot the name of the former disability commissioner - Graeme Innes. I actually Googled him and found his name. Graeme has a video, and it was great to hear all the fantastic things that he's able to use and basically transforming and making his life easy. The opportunities are there. It's a very exciting time. We are a facilitator, so we're not the only solution. We are constantly surprised about how people use our services. I mean, the most famous one is SMS. We had no idea that was going to explode. ..in the industry. That was the first killer app. It's got better and better from there. It needs to be a dialogue.

We need to - one of the things that's come out of this discussion is there does need to be an upgrade of what the opportunities are and how best to avail your services. We're just talking about, really, pre-paid is now a far better solution than fixed-line. Just on that data-and-voice point, I think mobiles, in particular, is moving away from voice being the primary service that we offer. All payphones in market plans are now - we have infinite calling, it's just something that's in the background. What you pay - if you have a higher plan, you're paying for more data. That's the future. Again, fixed is severely lagging in that space. I mean, I don't know if it's still the case, but it was when I bought it - the requirement to have a fixed phone and to be able to buy broadband seems completely anachronistic these days. I think that's the real opportunity that NBN brings, because NBN is just a data pipe, and voice is a capability.

Teresa Corbin: Sure. And iiNet - the cat among the pigeons - but it brought out its naked DSL plans in that too. David?

David Epstein: Sure. I've got to say, I found this particular session, led by Alex, taking it in what I find a more heartening direction than, perhaps, with all due respect, Peter was taking this - the reason is, Peter was talking about base-level services and things like that. But they were very technologically and channel-defined. To pick up something that - Matt was talking about looking up details on Graeme Innes. He said that Graeme had a really good video. Well, under Peter's model, you might not be able to get access to that video if you are a base-level consumer. That was some of the debate that Robert alluded to about InContact - is it fair to cut people off? Exactly. And we are in a world of individuals, and I think the point has been amply made in this part of the panel discussion that, you know, even some of the broad categories we are used to talking about are actually far more divergent and more to the point, we have the capacity, and it's not just the capacity in the individuals' devices, it's the capacity in the networks these days.

Increasingly, the old distinction used to be very much you had a telco network and the telco also had an IT system which was its operating system. You are very hard-pressed to work out where the line is divided in the telco in terms of its technical infrastructure these days. You know, what is IT in crude terms, in inverted commas, versus what is the network infrastructure? This allows for a lot more differentiation in how we operate networks and how we connect with our customers, and then you integrate it with what's happening with the handset or the tablet, et cetera. Increasingly, all of us major telcos and, indeed, the NBNOs, are tending to operate differentiated services and differentiated services via apps, where we're probably lagging is the capacity of those to tailor themselves to customers who may suffer either financial or some form of medical disadvantage. ..or any other capacity disadvantage. And I think the way is open to pick those sorts of things up a lot more, and that's the sort of thing we should be looking at - and to pick up the other points about data. I think the only inhibition these days around just tending to look at things in terms of data is just people's thinking.

The point's been made about the Jeenee product - one on one, it's not that different - it's just a different way of presenting the bill, in reality. Matt's made the same point, and Telstra can make that point. We can make that point. But there is a bit of a perception thing in the marketplace -

people are still struggling with what does data actually mean when you are talking about, for example, voice or text communication? What do you get for your buck, and that sort of thing? That is not entirely the consumer's fault. I mean, it's also a bit of the fault of the industry because of the way the industry used to charge and used to present its offerings, et cetera. We're gradually getting there in terms of a new paradigm. I think it will be a more neutral paradigm, which will allow for a greater discussion of solutions to the sorts of problems that are being thrown up. But what it does say is customisation is something we should be looking at more and more, but interestingly, it's at a time when we had greater capacity to deal with customisation.

Teresa Corbin: Robert?

Robert Morsillo: I just want to make one further point, more or less about the general discourse. I get that word from Christopher Newell, may he rest in peace. Yeah. Disability - people think about it in different ways, whether it's needs or customisation... Heaven forbid, but "innovation" is such a fantastic word. I just love the word "disability" to have the connotation of innovation. That's where it's all happening. Yeah. So, yeah. And everybody here, and us, need to change that discourse, I think, in terms of "It's not just a market. It's not just whatever-whatever." Innovation is really important for our economy and all sorts of things. For me, this is a way of actually approaching it.

Teresa Corbin: Thanks for that, Rob. Alex?

Alex Varley: Thank you. I'll join with the other speakers in saying the encouraging comments there. I suppose the thing I just wanted to leave you with is to say I think the technology has enabled you guys to actually provide better offerings to a whole range of people, and what you need to do in the disability space is what you've been doing for many years with everybody else. I'm an old marketer, and I spend my life dealing with different media across the world, and my starting point with them always is, "You're here to make money. You want some new customers. Let me help you find and communicate with those customers." That's what this is really about.

Teresa Corbin: Alright. Thank you, Alex. Well, we might get our next speaker up, which is Justine Humphry, who has done a research project with ACCAN on homelessness. She's got lots of other hats, but I'll leave you to check her programs out in that regard. Justine.

Justine Humphry: Thank you, Teresa. OK. Some fantastic ideas and insights already by the speakers and panel members, so I hope I can contribute to those. Today I'm going to be talking about affordability barriers for people experiencing homelessness. ..and then hone in on what solutions to these barriers might look like for this diverse group. But to start off with, I'd like to place affordability in a broader context. Gerard Goggin, from whom I've drawn a lot of inspiration, and whose work on technology and disability is well-known by many of you here, has spoken about technology-enabled citizenship. In talking about this, he's referred to the Canadian political philosopher Darren Barney in his discussion of how technology has become the setting in which citizenship is defined. I think that any discussion of telecommunication affordability needs to grasp this fundamental societal shift.

The access to and use of mobiles and the internet is not only necessary for a society trying to be more inclusive of its citizens - it's actually become a requirement of citizenship. My research on the use of mobile phones and the internet by people experiencing homelessness clearly illustrates this. So this research was of 95 clients of homelessness services. It was carried out last year, supported by ACCAN. We found that young people, adults and families who are homeless are finding it increasingly necessary to have an internet-enabled mobile phone to interact with government, health, housing, employment and financial services. So even to be eligible for some of these services, you have to be contacted. I mean, it's the ultimate irony that if you are homeless in order to stay on

the social housing eligibility lists, you have to be able to be contactable on a mobile, or have a fixed phone address that Housing can contact you on.

But it's the use of the mobile as a survival resource that is one of the most striking findings. So being homeless, whether it's living on the street or couch surfing, can mean greater exposure to health and safety risks from a lack of basic needs such as food, housing and money to other physical and emotional needs. Mobiles are essential in this situation - they have been described, and they are, a lifeline. So in the study, participants identified using their phone to contact emergency care support services, medical assistance, as the most important uses after contacting friends and family. This survival dimension becomes more significant when you consider that mobiles are the primary and exclusive device for the majority of people who are homeless, and that alternative sources for voice calls and other telephony features are few and fast diminishing, particularly with the conversion of many payphones to wi-fi hot spots.

Survival is at the front of the experience of homelessness, but mobile and internet use goes well beyond their use for survival. I think this is really important and key - contact with friends and family topped the uses for mobile, and this included connections with social media. So remember that about 60% of people who are homeless are young people. They're under the age of 35. In general, the social world of young people is digitally mediated. Social media platforms are important because these, and the creative practices, afford and open up new spaces to escape the challenges of the everyday. So being able to imagine new possibilities. For that reason, I'm really weary of making a clear distinction between what is a "basic" service and what is a "luxury" service. Because in many cases, that is just as important. I just realised I've got a lot less time than I first imagined. I'm going to jump to thinking about some of the kinds of affordability solutions, because it's actually affordability which is the major barrier for people who are homeless. Getting hold of a phone, we found, is difficult, but it's not the biggest barrier.

It's the ongoing costs of a mobile and internet access. ..and also the kind of broad connectivity infrastructure conditions, difficulties, that people who are homeless find themselves in because of lack of access to power, lack of access to a safe place to sit, lack of access to a place to store your belongings, to not feel surveilled, to feel a sense of privacy, and to not fear for your safety. I think this is one of the main things that defines homelessness - not being able to have control over the space that you find yourself in and spatial relations. I'm going to put forward a radical proposal here to the panel. I would really like to see a tailored telecommunication affordability program for people who are homeless. I think what this would look like - and we're talking here about 100,000 people in Australia who are, at any given time, living as homeless - I would like to see that, for anybody who fronts up to a homelessness service, or who becomes known to a telecommunications provider either through customer service or through one of the financial hardship teams - I would like all phone calls and all internet access to be free until that person obtains secure housing. I think that would make all the difference in the world. It would assist people to be able to find homes. ..to find jobs. To move out of homelessness. To recover. To move from surviving to thriving. I think I'll just end it on that point.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Hopefully you might get a chance to still...I feel like I've suddenly started chairing the Forum for Dangerous Ideas. Anyway. Let's give it a go. Who wants to have a go at providing those kinds of services for homeless people?

Gerard Mansour: I'm going to steal the word from "conceptually" - my personal disclaimer, I think it's a great idea. But it's something that would need amazing amounts of collaboration not just with the telco industry, but the dreaded words "government" and "subsidies" to make something like this

a reality. Unfortunately, there is a commercial reality as well, which we need to consider. I think we would definitely have to be able to clearly distinguish necessity from luxury, as we're going down this path. That said, I don't think any of these things should get in the way of the telco industry and government looking at how this can be progressed and explored before it gets knocked on the head through bureaucratic red tape or something like that. I would like to see a broad discussion about it, at least.

Teresa Corbin: Also picking up from David from the Infoxchange earlier, talking about the homeless people's app which they're working on at the moment, which is definitely something which is on the cards. The door will be knocked on and you will be asked about this if you haven't already been. Who wants to go next, talking about this issue?

Matthew Lobb: I was just thinking, I think it was 12 years ago, Robert, that InContact came about. Who would have thought that we'd be talking about - that was seen as a real innovation - a fixed-phone innovation. Who would have thought that now, the necessity is a phone that connects to the internet, preferably at a fast speed? It's a remarkable technological shift. I think it's absolutely right - from a telco point of view, that's a relatively straightforward proposition. What we don't know is who those people are, and those people in need. It needs to be a dialogue and a collaboration. Like I said, the telco component is straightforward. Obviously you need a handset-to-handset that's straightforward. One thing's for sure - Australians are probably at the wealthy end of probably the greatest upgrades of phones in the world - there's plenty of second-hand phones in Australia. Again, there are lots of opportunities. But like I said, we're a facilitator. We are can't - we need to collaborate. So it does need to be something led from the homeless sector, I think.

Teresa Corbin: Do you think that, if the homeless sector and ACCAN approach the telcos, maybe through Comms Alliance or something, it might be an initiative that would be explored? What's the right forum to do that?

Matthew Lobb: Absolutely. And Telstra certainly does this very well - a dialogue with the various disadvantaged groups of people is a very important part of it. That needs to be part of an ongoing discussion. One thing I wouldn't mind saying, because I think it is very important - there are issues about accessibility and issues about affordability. The real elephant in the room - I did start by saying this - is that, overall, Australians are paying too much for their telecommunications services. So it's not a segment-specific issue. Fixed-line pricing is the highest in the OECD. It's 65% above the OECD average. There are serious structural problems in regard to market power. I know that's a bit - it's not really the topic, but to me that's actually the fundamental challenge when it comes to affordability. The other issue is regional Australia and making sure there's competition in all parts of regional Australia so they can choose, so they can get the best deal. Those are foundational issues that need to be tackled. Then the segment issues are a dialogue with industry, but in a way that the industry can digest, because if you say to us, "Please solve problems when we don't know who the clients are or the customers are," we can't help. But if we can collaborate, we're certainly there to do it.

Teresa Corbin: Mm. OK. That was a throw to you there, Robert...

Robert Morsillo: Well I know some of the things Matt was talking about, those discussions happen in other places, but I want to talk about wi-fi. To me it does, potentially, offer that sort of opportunity of let's say having a free wi-fi pass for an extended period, or whatever, where that can be accessed in a whole range of - and of course, I'm alluding here to our own Telstra Air sort of opportunities in terms of that sort of ubiquitous wi-fi but I know there's public wi-fi and RMIT and others are mapping that sort of thing in terms of public wi-fi. So, to me, in terms of practicalities and if you wanted to get something done fairly quickly, I suspect going the wi-fi route, which you can use your

handset, download your app and do things you might want to do, to me, it seems to me there's a lot less barriers and whatever in terms of getting to some end point with that.

Teresa Corbin: David

David Epstein: I might drag the topic back to where you started, Teresa, because it has drifted a bit - thanks to Matt! He will get a fixed line network some day!

(LAUGHTER)

David Epstein: But, look, I think what you put forward - it's always useful to have practical suggestions and what you put forward was a useful suggestion. The first thing we need is actually a framework to work out what the hell we're talking about and what would be first steps. I think the groups you identified are the ideal groups to sit down and do it and certainly we'd be interested in collaborating with that. Great. But you can pick up things like the various offers of public wi-fi. I would hesitate to say - I don't think that should be the background way, given the topography of this country and given the various things people need to gain access to. I don't think we're quite there yet. But, yeah, I mean, if you were to put forward that sort of thing, we'd certainly be happy to participate and I'm sure - I probably shouldn't speak too much for John Stanton, although he does occasionally speak for all of us! I'm sure John would be happy to provide a bit of a framework from the telco side of things.

Teresa Corbin: Good. Justine, do you want to have the final word?

Justine Humphry: Just to say that really I welcome all of these ideas and also the enthusiasm for coming up with a solution that does cater for people who are experiencing homelessness specifically. And I don't want to downplay issues of affordability for low income groups in Australia in general, because, of course, that's key to this cohort, as well, and there is a lot of common issues there. But I think that this is a group that does require a targeted program. And the value of it is that it takes that burden of telecommunications out of the equation. And that, yes, it does need to be a collaborative effort. I think that all of those comments are completely valid and that government has a role to play, because of the fact that moving into an online digital first environment, a self-service environment, actually, you know, without actually taking some responsibility for that, it could lead to a new digital divide. And that's something that we're actually just at the point of starting to overcome. We don't want - you know, we can't afford to go back in that direction and reinforce existing digital divides. And I think a free wi-fi pass is a fantastic idea. I think wi-fi is already something that is well-utilised in this demographic. And it has a really crucial role to play. But it is not the only role, because telephony services and SMS is also fundamental for client support service interaction so that's really just one piece of the puzzle, but it is a very important one.

Teresa Corbin: Thanks for that, Justine, and thank you for your presentation.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Our last thought leader today is Paul Budde, who is going to come up and I don't think he needs an introduction!

Paul Budde: Thanks, Teresa. And thank you for the invite. I'm honoured to be here and I think everybody in the telecommunications industry, you know, should actually be exposed to the sort of discussions that we are having here today. It is so important for our society that we address these issues. We call ourselves a connected industry, we call ourselves things - well, things like access and accessibility, et cetera, and quite often I think we are not really taking that through. That's actually one of the topics that I would like to address with the panel, because I think what is going to be far

more - what will be happening far more and in a far different way is actually things that are happening outside this industry. I think that the disruption that we are seeing, you know, in newspapers, in music, in movies, et cetera, was not driven by the telco industry - it was put upon the telco industry and the telco industry had to respond to that. I believe that we will have a similar sort of situation in the sort of areas that we are talking about today and that's where I believe that the disruption is going to be along the lines that Robert was talking about - innovation - along the lines that we've been talking about here with Alex, you know, technology and things like that. They are going to be the big changes that are taking place

Now, I've been involved with the disability community, with organisations such as ACE and Conexu with Rachel, for the last five years, so I've been really exposed to one particular group, the deaf and hearing impaired people, and I mean every single time I go there, I really like it, you know, to really see the enormous effect that our industry has on those people. It's just amazing. You always come back smiling because those people are so incredibly happy with the sort of things that we are bringing. And sometimes I'm really totally ashamed, because some people are still using telewriters, that were 60, 70 or 80 years ago and we have not been effective in actually upgrading that. It's only now, with the apps, that from the other side of the industry changes are coming. But from the traditional telco industry, we left those people for 50, 60 or 70 years with telewriters. So that's I think where the disruption is coming. And the disruption is coming in from a different angle. The disruption will be in numerous ways - obviously, Alex talked about the various technologies that are coming in, but I also think it comes in different business models. We heard figures today, you know, 20% of the population is in one way or another affected by this, 100,000 people are homeless, you know, there's 2 million people who have to talk to people that are hearing impaired or deaf - I mean, these are huge numbers. Hey, guys, this is a market! There's money to be made.

OK, it's just a matter of how do you actually then build business models? The old business models as we heard from Peter and others don't really work. And, yes, what Justine was talking about, you know, talking to telcos - and yes, of course they can come up with stuff. I would like to turn the whole thing around. Justine, you are becoming the new service provider and you actually make sure that this application works. Don't ask them, do it. And then we find a business model around it. And I think that is the major change that is coming. We, in the various groups, you know, being the low affordability or Rachel is involved with deaf and hearing impaired and blind people, et cetera - guys, you are the experts. You have been doing that for 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years. You are the experts. Not the telcos. The telcos are not the experts - you are the experts. So how actually can we find models to do that? The telcos, as we have seen, are changing tremendously. We've heard it many, many times around the table. Look at five years ago and ten years ago and now the telcos are changing. It is, for us, a matter of how can we now interconnect with the telcos in order to make this happen?

Basically, what you have to look at, they are the wholesalers, you are the retailers. You are the specialists in the areas you operate in. So how can we work together that develop that area. I think that things like the internet of things and end to end are going to see more facilities opening on the retail side where organisations can tap into. What Jeremy is talking about is already an example of that sort of situation. I would like to see that more and more and more. So basically the expert organisations in this room, you know, have far more power than they believe. It's not a matter of, "Go to the government and ask for money for affordability, go to the telcos for handouts for homeless people or disabled people", et cetera. I think that through innovation, through technology and through new business models, there is a great opportunity for the disability or the affordability industry, whatever we want to call ourselves, to actually become far more active in this market and actually be the gateway to the people that we are talking about, you know. There is a gateway to the homeless people, you already have that, to the deaf people and blind people, and use those gateways and it's not that the whole world is moving to data, it's voice.

I mean, Skype, people can already use that free of charge if they want. But the whole situation is going to be about accessibility to services, accessibility to transport, accessibility to whatever. One of the big items I'm involved with at the moment is Smart Cities. I'm going to Europe and Asia over the next couple of months and talking at conferences about Smart cities. With smart cities, a very important part is, how are we making a smart city accessible, affordable, available to everybody included in that? And that goes far beyond having a mobile phone. That goes into all these other areas about transport, about electricity, about all sorts of other elements that are part of it. I think we, as the industry, should think beyond the mobile phone, beyond the tablet, beyond the computer, and start looking at that greater sort of element, where technology is the key to actually creating accessibility.

It's really - the affordability is now there. The affordability wasn't there 5, 10 or 15 years ago. The affordability is here. Yes, we do need a safety net from the ACCC and all of those, et cetera. But that's only a small safety net. There are so many options that are available in your hands and you utilise these in a disruptive way to discuss this with the telcos and others, the Googles and Apples and Facebooks of this work to make this happen. So disruption, in my opinion, is an enormous advantage to people in the areas that we have been talking about and you should grab it and use it to your advantage to advance the causes in the various areas you are working in. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

Teresa Corbin: Thanks for that, Paul. I'm conscious I want to get some questions from the floor in a minute. So if people can start thinking about the points they want to make and also our previous speakers might want to re-emphasise a point here. But I think this comes back to, not just with accessibility, but also generally how do we get the market to deliver more mainstream affordable options? And what settings do we need in place for more accessible options, more affordable options and perhaps more competition in regional areas, as well as the other ones? So that might be a good pulling together sort of thought and, I mean, this is one of the key ways that we're going to address affordability, of course. And of course we've got some very good people on the panel to put some suggestions forward here. And I mean, I might start with you, Ged, because obviously the MVNOs or the mobile virtual network operators, who don't have a network but use other people's networks, you are known in the sector as being innovators and being people who will shake it up and changes things, so maybe you would like to comment on that?

Gerard Mansour: Yeah, what Paul was saying made me think about how amaysim started, and it was four English blokes, a German bloke and a sheet of paper. And so you can do it. But a lot of it I see is shaking things up and what I'm hearing from people here presenting problems and another gentleman earlier on this morning said where there is a problem there's always a solution. I think for a lot of us in this room the solutions is affordability and accessibility are over the top - there are a lot of companies and organisations that have done things are disruptive and have shaken things up and they are the over the top players. And they're putting the smart stuff down the dump pipe - treating the telcos as a dump pipe - but when it comes to the telcos I think amaysim started something and what we're all part of now is simplicity coming into what's happening in the telco industry and making plans and products easier to compare, making affordability easier to determine.

We've still got a long way to go but I really think what's going to help all of us is if we continue down this path. I was talking about this with a colleague in the office yesterday, saying we launched our first "All you can eat" plan four years ago and then it was about counting texts and minutes. It's almost a bit of a Back To The Future moment, with affordability now, people counting gigabytes and megabytes and really asking the industry to focus on that component and make sure that affordability doesn't get lost again in the equation of complexity.

Teresa Corbin: Facebook presented at a conference, Broadband for the Bush recently, and gave a presentation talking about how fantastic Facebook Light actually is, except you can't get it in Australia and Facebook Light doesn't offer video, so it is an affordable option for people just using wi-fi or perhaps counting their gigabytes or megabytes or kilobytes on a network. David, you looked like you were going to jump in?

David Epstein: I wasn't about to jump in.

Teresa Corbin: Alright, let's go to the floor. There is a question down the front here. Nigel, who's on our board.

Nigel Waters: Thanks, it has been a really interesting session and that you all. To the extent that there has been some suggestion about wi-fi hotspots as a potential solution, for some of the low income, you know, disability groups, communal housing and that sort of thing, let's not forget the privacy and security issue there, that it seems to me, if you are not careful you are setting up a situation where you are pushing people into using inherently insecure channels for some quite sensitive stuff, like dealing with government, you know, banking, et cetera. That really needs to be borne in mind.

Teresa Corbin: Making sure people are aware of a giving them other options?

Nigel Waters: Not only that, but also the providers actually addressing that issue of the inherent insecurity of shared wi-fi.

Teresa Corbin: OK. We might take a couple from the floor before we go to the panel. I think Bruce has got something he wants to say.

Bruce Bebbington: Bruce from Bridgetown in Western Australia. It's interesting that the telcos that had the post-paid plans all suggested the best option when people were having trouble is to go pre-paid. Well I don't think it is, because all that achieves is de-risking the telcos because it's two to three months before you can get that off that post-paid plan and you've got $90 of risk. Pre-paid, you've got no risk, so disagree with that. Secondly, pre-paid isn't the option because that is not necessarily the best plan. Most of the people who have an issue with affordability, whether it's $20, $30, $40 or $50 that is the right amount for a service, we'll never get to the end of that debate. The biggest issue for people having that problem is, "Can I find $20 or $30 today to renew my plan, can I go to $40 to give myself free credit" in the case of, say, Telstra. What we should be looking at is, can we help those people by saying, "Can we match a pre-paid plan to their Centrelink payments by direct debit"? Put them on a $40 a month payment, give them that credit that can be extended for the unused portion. Let's actually start thinking about how we can help these people and de-risk the telcos.

Teresa Corbin: Bruce, you put that suggestion up on our Ideas Garden, so thank you for that, and I can see some people taking notes.

Matthew Lobb: Absolutely, I mean, I completely agree. Pre-paid and post-paid - again, it's up to the consumer to decide what's the best option and the key thing is that they're informed and that people are helping them with giving information, so they're appropriately informed. Again, the kind of solutions you're talking about, absolutely, the industry would be open to explore. But we can't tell Centrelink to engage in that conversation. It really does need to be something led by the community.

Teresa Corbin: Actually, I want to go to Telstra, because I know you did bill smoothing - in fact, you might still be doing it. I'm wondering if there's something you want to say there. Because that is a similar idea?

Robert Morsillo: Yeah, like, for example, we take Centre Pay payments, so, yes, you can pay fortnightly for your post-paid plan, et cetera. We don't take Centre Pay for pre-paid top-up. That is an interesting idea, which we have thought about previously, but, you know, just being able to do that is something I've noted down again. I would just simply raise the issue that, you know, there's always sorts of philosophical issues about committing your pension and committing your benefits and, yes, you can do that and you can choose that with Centrelink and it is totally up to you and Centrelink to do that. But it's not the - yeah, it's not the panacea in terms of for people on benefits, I don't think.

Teresa Corbin: I think Paul wants to say something here.

Paul Budde: I think in a similar line, if you start looking at the various - for example, the NDIS, you know, the new scheme that we are going to get, if you start thinking about tele-medicine and healthcare services, et cetera, there's money in that kitty. So rather than just seeing a doctor, you know, why not create a facility that you actually start offering communications services within that context? So, you know, we will have to start thinking, not then in a situation like telecommunications services, but with tele-medicine services or social services, whatever you want to call them, whatever the issue is. And then actually create a turnaround and that becomes part of the service that's provided. I quite often use the example, if you go to the newsagent and you buy a newspaper, nobody asks you to pay 10 cents extra for the paper it's printed on. So what is the difference between a social service or a medical service, where you get a service and then someone says, but you have to pay 10% extra for telecommunications?

That doesn't make sense. But it is a matter of the industry going to the telcos and obviously talking to the NDIS, to Medicare, to Centrelink and what have you, to actually convince those innovative ideas that can be included in the scheme. There's plenty of money. Money is never the issue. So it doesn't matter if it is for homeless or whatever, it's finding the right way of getting there and if you treat telecommunications as a separate thing, always seen as a luxury good, it's a problem. If you can turn it around and build it into Medicare, Centrelink or NDIS, you have a totally new way of looking at it. That's what I mean about being disruptive - think differently, think outside the box.

Teresa Corbin: We have a question down the back there. OK, we're there, sorry. Go for it.

Helen: Helen, Women's Legal Services NSW. So I'm interested in Paul Budde's idea about how we need to move forward into becoming creators of the right services. We've recently ventured in the world of developing mobile apps for women escaping domestic violence. I can't get a developer to do it for less than $80,000. I do know that managing our own website got a lot easier when we got WordPress. So I'm wondering, is it possible one of you could develop us an app toolkit, the IKEA of apps, that I could buy in a box and manage my own tools? That would really increase our capacity to move forward into developing the affordable options we need.

Teresa Corbin: I was going to say, I can see Matt - have you still got your Vodafone Challenge you have with your apps?

Matthew Lobb: We do have that program, yes. So maybe you should get in touch and we can explore that. What we actually do is we have - I must say, it's not me, but all these people who can do all the stuff we're programming and community groups come with ideas and then the people with computers type away and figure out what the best solution is. So that's one option. Again, I think Paul's absolutely right - there's a massive and fundamental technology change and one of the - that is transforming the opportunities here and Paul is right, it's up to the community groups to figure out what they want. And one bit of advice is, stop worrying about telco technology - don't worry about wi-fi, pre-paid, post-paid, broadband or mobile, even. Think about, what is the solution

that you want? And collaborate with people to develop the solution. I think, in the past, telcos often dictated how you did solutions. That was a voice way of thinking because that was very much, the network had to be configured to deliver the solution. Now, in an IP world, the solution is up to you. We are just - we are just connecting you to more and more people and things, and so it's up to the community, I think, and again Paul is right - there is so much money around, it's about figuring out how to coordinate. So it is a very empowering time and I think it's quite a profound shift we're going through at the moment.

Paul Budde: I also think Google and Facebook can do that but I think the other important thing is - and I've been talking to Conexu about that, don't reinvent the wheel, create gateways. There are plenty of people in this room doing the same thing and that is a waste of money. Talk to each other because an application for you might be slightly different but can actually apply to somebody else. And then suddenly, instead of paying $80,000, by collaboration you pay only $20,000, you know, because it's slightly different but other groups can also use it. So think collaboration.

Teresa Corbin: Two more questions up the back.

Gerard Mansour: I'll just jump in for one second, I wanted to blow Vodafone's trumpet in relation to domestic violence apps. They've done some amazing things in Turkey when it comes to domestic violence and apps targeted at women, done in ways that the perpetrators can't actually see the app is being used. So I would say that you two should definitely get in touch afterwards to explore that.

Paul Budde: The same story, Qatar is moving people - it's amazing what they've done for women. They've got call centres for women where only women answer calls so the brothers and fathers can't actually see - internationally there are such a lot of examples that are there that are worthwhile tapping into.

Teresa Corbin: Let's go to Reg down the back, he has had his hand up for a bit. Another disrupter!

(LAUGHTER)

Reg Coutts: I just really feel as though I'm a Johnny-come-lately to this. I totally agree with Paul. It's call empowering user innovation. We've put the power of innovation into the hands of customers. Obviously, to make sense, that means groups of customers with essentially an alignment of user needs. So I can only really shout as loud as I can that this is the disruption of industry and the marketplace that I think we've been looking for for years and I think it is an opportunity at this point in time. So absolutely agree and actually...

Teresa Corbin: I'm going to say I will take that as a comment not a question. And there was one just in front of you? Is it Ben?

Ben McAtamney: It is, from Able Australia. I had a comment for the panel, as well. I think with all of this discussion about online access as being a necessary requisite for full citizenship, what we're seeing across the board in terms of the consumer group that's not accessing companies like yours is an unprecedented sort of diversity of people with different disabilities, different with people socio-economic backgrounds, language, access requirements - all these different things. A lot of the conversations that we have with industry at the sort of level that we're talking about today is very, very positive in terms of applying the TCP code, having diversity and disability policies in place - all these things are fantastic across the board. Where we see it fundamentally falling down is those policies being communicated to your frontline service staff, to the people dealing with the one-on-one interactions, particularly in our case with people with a disability, those policies are not being effectively communicated in a way that influences the way they deal with their customers.

Teresa Corbin: Thanks for that, Ben, I think that is a common theme that comes to ACCAN as well. Because quite often the people we're dealing with in the telcos are actually in complete agreement with us, and it's how do we get the message to the rest of their teams. So, is there anyone else from the floor who wants to - it's the final call. Yes, we have this gentleman who raised an idea yesterday. Yes?

Unknown audience member: We don't call it disability at all, we call it "Differently abled" because each one, although they have their difficulties somewhere, they can do things remarkably better than someone else. So I know someone who loves to download movies, every month he spends about 100GB every month, and the one thing that was brought to my attention here is it's awfully expensive with data at the moment. And listening to the speaker who said it can cost up to 17 cents a gig, which surprised me because we're paying a lot more. So is there any comparison between other countries, how much they pay for data and how we can lower our prices when NBN is here?

Paul Budde: I've just sent Teresa an email just two days ago, where we have now these examples in operation in several countries around the world and I sent an email to Teresa and said, "Have a look at this", because it's also good for us to do something like that in Australia.

Teresa Corbin: Yeah, comparison stuff is still a real - it is a science and I don't know that anybody has got it exactly right but our keynote yesterday had some interesting conversations with Claire over what they're doing in the UK, as well, so that's something we can come back to and of course we have the ACCC's speed performance monitoring for broadband that they're putting forward. Now, I'm conscious that Peter, out of all of the different thought leaders, probably has had the most comments back from the panel that perhaps have not been so positive so I want to come back to you, Peter, and see if you want to have another say before we finally wrap up?

Peter Gerrand: Thanks, Teresa. Just a brief comment. The panel's readily agreed that people with disability are not a monolithic community. I would say that people who are financially stressed are equally not a monolithic community. So clearly people who are homeless, at the extreme end of financial disadvantage, for them, a mobile solution is the only solution for access. I'd suggest perhaps the next level disadvantage are those people, particularly with dependents, whether they are children or elderly parents, who have accommodation but can barely afford to pay for the rent, electricity, et cetera, and may have the NBN connected to their home but they can't afford to use it. Now, on current trends, by the end of the NBN rollout, 2020, there will be at least half a million homes, possibly 1 million homes, which will have a NBN connection which will not be used. Thank you.

Teresa Corbin: OK. And maybe we could also get a final comment from each of the - we'll exclude Paul there, but from the telcos. Yeah, so, one last comment, if you have got a last thought about how we can address the affordability nexus.

Robert Morsillo: I was going to make a general comment about the fact it's software, software, software now and that's what's driving innovation and that's fantastic. And so encouraging our kids, get into the code clubs, and as I say, I think I saw a quote somewhere, you know, "You've got a problem with the world? Start coding."

(LAUGHTER)

Teresa Corbin: I saw that, too, yeah.

Jeremy Way: I would agree with that and I really want to point to the ubiquity of accessibility and the nexus with citizenship there. That's really, really important, we found that in the disability

community, but it's equally important across every disadvantaged group in society. Connectivity is your community. Your community is no longer just a physical geographic region, it exists out there in the ether, as well. And people are often defined by their connectivity with their communities. What we need to do as a sector and as a community generally, is to make that as accessible and affordable for everyone - regardless of who they are. And that's my closing thought.

Gerard Mansour: I agree with all of that and I think, on top of that, I would add education and education - the telcos do have a part to play in ensuring that with accessibility and connectivity we don't further create affordability issues. So, for me, that is a final layer in that piece.

Matthew Lobb: One of the lessons of the last few years - I think the TCP code is a good example - is we do need a dialogue with the community about, as technology presents new opportunities, how do we evolve with those opportunities.

David Epstein: Look, I think the lessons to be drawn out of this are, always think in terms of diversity and flexibility. You know, we've come out of a relatively long-term paradigm of voice and analog communications which was where the channels were technologically determined. And that also coincided with a period of government policy where - which was very narrowly driven in terms of delivery channels and flexibility to which government support - whether it be financial or non-financial - could be applied. We're in a different world now and we have different capacities and I think there is a recognition of that in this room. All I'd say is that I think there probably needs to be a greater recognition going forward.

Teresa Corbin: OK. Well, thank you for that, and our final note from ACCAN is one of the ideas from the Ideas Garden was that every handset that is sold in Australia should have the Emergency Plus app pre-loaded and that was something that came up with some of our work with John de Ridder, recently. So we have a slide up there and for anybody who hasn't downloaded it, seriously, this is my advertisement, it is a really good app, so have a look at it. It ensures you get access to 000 and it gives you a GPS location. Of course you have to give it permission to do that but this has already saved people's lives because on a mobile you can't always find where people are at and if they can't speak, or they are children, or they are in a place they don't know. This came from a conversation about what to do with universal service in the future. So a good opportunity to tell everybody who doesn't know about this app, get it on your phones and your kids' phones and your grandparents' and parents' phones as well. So thank you to the panel and now it's time for some lunch - well-earned.

(APPLAUSE)