



## Policy Priorities 2019-20

ACCAN's purpose is to work for "communications services that are trusted, inclusive and available for all." Our Strategic Plan can be viewed at [accan.org.au](http://accan.org.au).

In 2019-20 ACCAN efforts will be focused on the following priority areas. At the same time, we will be responsive to emerging issues, and engage with government and industry consultations in areas of significance for telecommunications consumers.

Our policy priorities were developed in close consultation with ACCAN members, and are informed by our knowledge and analysis of the communications market.

### **Increased reliability**

Stronger foundations are necessary to support the delivery of essential communications services. Our communities and small businesses are more reliant on telecommunications than ever before, and yet arrangements to support increased reliability have not changed substantially in 20 years.

ACCAN will advocate for the introduction of arrangements for fast connection times, prompt fault repair, punctual appointment keeping and consumer and small business compensation if timeframes are not met, as well as network reliability measures for all networks to minimise disruptive outages. We will seek robust, accelerated arrangements for priority assistance customers, to assist those with serious health conditions stay connected while at home.

### **No Australian Left Offline - affordable telecommunications for all**

Home broadband services have become increasingly expensive, and are out of reach for many households facing tight budgets and more financial demands.

ACCAN's priority is that No Australian is Left Offline – that all households that can benefit from connection to a fast NBN broadband service are able to do so. We will continue to advocate for the delivery of an affordable, concessional, home broadband service for households on limited incomes. Cost savings for government service delivery are significant, and the social and economic benefits of NBN will be maximised with greater take-up of services.

We will also work to ensure that programs to deliver direct relief to low income individuals are available across a choice of providers, and that consumers have the information they need about services suited to their budget where choice is available.

Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)  
*Australia's peak body representing communications consumers*

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## **A fairer telco market**

The harm for consumers caused by poor customer service, questionable selling practices, unfair treatment of vulnerable consumers, and information asymmetry in the telecommunications market is underestimated.

We will work for reforms to deliver stronger consumer protections to underpin a fair and competitive communications market that delivers for all consumers and small businesses. We will provide a strong evidence base to support measures to lift performance, increase transparency and accountability, and rectify systemic issues. We will also prioritise underlying reforms to support positive consumer outcomes and a fairer market.

## **Growing consumer confidence**

Consumers want to engage online, but have many deep concerns about the security of their personal information, manipulative practices, and fraud. Others feel disempowered by the lack of transparency surrounding how their personal information is gathered, stored and shared by third parties. Many consumers lack the opportunity and confidence to use the internet and are challenged by technology that could improve their lives. The ACCC Digital Platform Inquiry has shown consumer concerns are justified.

We will work for improved privacy protections for Australian consumers that are comparable to international best practice, and for measures to tighten protections for consumers at times of vulnerability and abuse. We will support the introduction of the consumer data right in telecommunications, but only if consumer privacy is not compromised and consumer information protected from exploitation. We will support initiatives to assist consumers to get online, particularly for remote communities that could benefit the most.

## **Better infrastructure**

NBN means a home broadband infrastructure upgrade for most Australians, but there remain many that are underserved. Some are waiting for NBN to become available, for others NBN services have not met expectations. There is strong demand for increased mobile network coverage in regional areas, as well as on important transport corridors. Technology used to deliver fixed voice services in remote and rural areas is aging and unreliable, and an estimated 235,000 premises are connected to ADSL outside NBN's fixed footprint with no adequate future plan for service transition if ADSL is withdrawn.<sup>1</sup>

We will advocate for place-based solutions to better match infrastructure to the needs of consumers, whether over NBN, smaller fixed line networks, local fixed wireless or mobile. We will engage with Federal, state and territory governments to deliver funding for infrastructure improvement programs, and support the creation of a statutory infrastructure provider regime as a legislative priority.<sup>2</sup> We will focus on future service delivery arrangements that support the best outcomes for regional and remote consumers and small businesses.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/development-universal-service-guarantee-summary-report>, p.17

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=r5923](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r5923)

## **Improved accessibility**

Communications technology has the potential to make life-changing differences in the lives of people with disability, but there are many barriers to access that must be overcome. National Relay Service (NRS) users are significantly concerned about the ongoing provision of services; Australian television is inaccessible for people who are blind or have vision impairment, and can also be inaccessible for people who rely on captioning; and real-time access to emergency services for consumers who are Deaf, Deafblind or have hearing or speech impairment is still not possible. Access to online government services also remains difficult for some people with disability.

We will work with our members in our advocacy for stability and improvements in the NRS as it transitions to a new provider, including advocating for all NRS call options to be available 24/7 and better information about how to use the NRS. We will engage with emergency services agencies, telcos and government to support the introduction of 000 real-time text. We will advocate for consumer rights to be central to an Australian Artificial Intelligence framework, with a particular focus on the rights of people with disability. We will continue calling for a whole of government procurement policy for accessible ICT. We will ensure that people with disability have access to the most up-to-date and accurate information about devices that are best suited to their needs, and that help them stay connected.

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