

## Media release

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### **Government funds Lifeline calls but long-term 13/1800 solution needed**

Consumer advocacy group ACCAN says telecommunication providers need to stop charging mobile customers expensive per-minute rates for 13, 1300, 1800 calls to essential services, government agencies and businesses.

ACCAN welcomes today's announcement that the Government is providing funding to the telcos to make Lifeline a free call from any phone but says there are thousands of vital 13 and 1800 numbers that many Australians are finding too expensive to call from mobiles.

ACCAN is campaigning to change the back-end deals that exist between the telcos so that the cost of calling 13 and 1800 numbers from mobiles is the cost of a local call and a free call respectively – as they are from landlines.

"We commend this important Lifeline initiative, but it highlights the fact that call affordability is a major issue and the cost of calling 1800, 1300 and 13 phone numbers from mobiles is preventing people from getting in touch with essential services," said ACCAN spokesperson Elise Davidson.

"Today's announcement effectively means the Government is paying the telcos the money they would have been charging their mobile customers – it's a piecemeal approach that looks at one important phone number, but we need to start working towards a much broader solution that provides fair calls for all."

"There are literally thousands of 13/1800 numbers – from Centrelink, Medicare, Kids Helpline, gambling and domestic violence helplines to banks, insurance companies, energy and telecommunications providers – and they're all important to the people that call them."

ACCAN says at the moment both the caller and the called party are being charged for these calls, i.e. the business or government agency is paying to receive the call at one end and the consumer is paying at the other.

"At the moment, the telco industry is turning an untold profit from double-dipping due to old regulation that was introduced in 1997 when the way we communicated was very different – most people had landlines and mobile phones were seen as a bit of a luxury due to higher call costs."

"In 2011, there are an increasing number of people who only have mobile phones and the per-minute cost of calling essential 13/1800 numbers is hitting them the hardest. It's time for the telcos to address this issue and work towards a long-term solution that makes these calls affordable."

Background: [Fair Calls For All campaign document](#) / [www.accan.org.au/numberwoman](http://www.accan.org.au/numberwoman)

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#### **About ACCAN**

ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. ACCAN's goal is available, accessible and affordable communications that enhances the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.