

ACCAN welcomes passage of COVIDSafe app legislation with amendments

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) has welcomed the passage of the Privacy Amendment (Public Health Contact Information) Bill 2020. This is a key step to ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the privacy of Australians using the COVIDSafe app.

ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin said that she was pleased that the legislation was amended to address a number of concerns raised by ACCAN and other consumer groups across the fields of health, technology, privacy, human rights, digital inclusion, communications and community interests.

“We welcome the new transparency and accountability measures that have been incorporated into the Bill, such as a requirement for the Minister for Health to produce a report to Parliament on the operation and effectiveness of the COVIDSafe app, and an expanded oversight role for the Australian Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner,” Ms Corbin said.

However, the peak body for communications consumers continues to have concerns about the technical shortfalls of the COVIDSafe app, as well as issues relating to public education about the app.

“We know that for vulnerable groups, such as survivors of domestic violence, there is anxiety about whether someone could deduce who their close contacts are and when and for how long they have visited them.”

ACCAN has highlighted a need for clear, easy to understand education about privacy aspects of the app and how it operates both for the general population, and more specifically for multicultural and Indigenous communities, in multiple languages and in Easy English.

“There’s quite a bit of confusion amongst some consumers as to what the app does. We’ve heard cases where older Australians in particular are concerned that without the COVIDSafe app, they’re missing out on some sort of personal protection from COVID-19.”

“We need to make sure that any public messaging focuses on the app’s contribution to community safety, rather than individual safety.”

ACCAN will continue to engage with the Government and Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 on the COVIDSafe app and appropriate safeguards for consumers.