



Media Release

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Reliability, broadband performance and affordability are telco consumer priorities

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](#)) is holding its *Meet the People Forum* at Parliament House in Canberra today to highlight important telecommunications consumer priorities for 2016 to Federal Parliamentarians. The Forum will bring the voice of consumers to Canberra, to talk about their experiences with fixed line connection, fault repair and reliability; expectations of broadband performance that are mismatched with actual experience; and the challenge of affordability as a barrier to getting and staying connected.

ACCAN is proposing three key policy initiatives to help address these consumer priorities: a reformed Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) and service reliability benchmarks; independent broadband performance monitoring to inform the market and guide consumer choice; and a review of the current Centrelink Telephone Allowance to match the needs of low income consumers today. These issues and others make up ACCAN's [2015-16 Policy Priorities](#).

"Access to reliable communication services is vital for Australian consumers and is essential for social and economic participation," says ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. "But the current CSG only protects the Standard Telephone Service (STS). This is out of step with changes in consumer usage patterns, which are now overwhelmingly moving towards mobile and broadband communications."

The lack of transparency about broadband performance will be discussed at the event. A [recent ACCAN survey](#) found that consumers were disappointed with their broadband services. Gaps in consumer knowledge mean consumers have little visibility of what affects the performance of broadband. Without this information, consumers cannot choose services that suit their needs based on performance, and can struggle to identify and rectify poor performance when it occurs.

"Currently consumers can only see part of the picture when shopping for broadband plans," says Ms Corbin. "We hear from many consumers who are struggling with broadband services that offer poor performance. In our survey consumers said price, monthly data allowance and performance are their top three important factors for broadband. The missing piece is information on performance. ACCAN is calling on the Federal Government to support an independent broadband monitoring program to fill the gap in consumer information."

Affordability of telecommunications services is becoming more important as government and other essential services move online, leaving consumers on lower incomes struggling to pay for upfront connection and ongoing costs. [Figures released last week](#) show that for households with children under the age of 15 who did not access the internet, the main reason given for not accessing the internet was cost (43 per cent). This was also given as the third

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The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

most significant reason overall for not accessing the internet at home (after no need and lack of confidence or knowledge). To address these issues ACCAN is proposing that the Centrelink Telephone Allowance be reviewed, as it is no longer fit for purpose.

“Voice and data services are essential to the social, economic, and community participation of low-income Australians, y,” adds Ms Corbin. “We would welcome an Allowance with broadened eligibility to include all people on the lowest income support payments and increased rates to ensure that affordability barriers don’t lead to ongoing lack of connection. It makes economic sense to support public investment in the NBN, and the digital transformation of government services by making sure that as many consumers as possible can stay connected.”

After the Forum, Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield, will launch ACCAN’s [Top tips for phones and internet](#) consumer information pack. The pack consists of five brochures that give tips and advice on mobile data, choosing an NBN internet plan, broadband quality, scams and making effective complaints. The issues covered in the brochures are ones that consumers regularly ask ACCAN about. As we know, competitive markets work best when consumers are well informed. The pack is a go to guide to help consumers navigate the often confusing telecommunications market. Download the brochures for free on the ACCAN website.

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