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Media Release

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A reduction in telco complaints may signal that consumers are giving up

A report from the Telecommunication Industry Ombudsman (TIO) of a 14.6% reduction in consumer complaints over the past year is unlikely to be an indication of improved satisfaction with communications services. The reduction in complaints is more likely to indicate that telco consumers are increasingly giving up on the complaints process.

Over 50% of consumers report having at least one problem with their communications service in the last year. This fact alone should temper any industry claims that a reduction in complaints is a good outcome. The disconnect between customer's experiences of their telco provider and a reduction in the level of complaints suggests the telecommunications complaints mechanism is not working or not fit for purpose.

A recently released report from the Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) - *Barriers to Effective Dispute Resolution in the Telecommunications Industry* - has found that Australian consumers have lost confidence that their telco issue will be resolved through a complaint.

ACCAN CEO Carol Bennett expressed concern about the reduction in complaints, suggesting that consumers have 'tapped out' of the complaints process, and policymakers must consider consumer experiences rather than relying on headline statistics from an ineffectual complaints mechanism when assessing the health of the industry.

"The truth is consumers are disengaging from a complaints system they've lost confidence in," Ms Bennett said. "We know that most consumers who experience a telco challenge don't actually lodge a complaint. Of those who choose to lodge a complaint, only 10% will escalate their issue to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, despite broad dissatisfaction with complaint outcomes and timeframes."

"What we hear from Australians is that the complaints process is too laborious, and is simply not worth their time," Ms Bennett said. "It's a sad indictment on our communications industry that in 2024 our major telcos rank among the most distrusted companies in the Australia – with Optus actually the least trusted of them all."

ACCAN is hoping to work more closely with telcos and other stakeholders to rebuild trust with the Australian community. As part of this work, ACCAN will be engaging in the upcoming revision of the Complaints Handling Standard as part of its work to improve outcomes for the one million consumers who complained to their telecommunications provider in the 2022-23 financial year, and many more who appear to have given up on the telcos complaints process.

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communication 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.

ACCAN is committed to reconciliation that acknowledges Australia's past and values the unique culture and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. [Read our RAP](#)
