



17 June 2016

Re: New data supports call for a review of the Centrelink Telephone Allowance to provide increased financial support so people on low incomes can access telecommunications

New survey results support a call to review the current financial assistance to people on low incomes to enable access to telecommunications. The survey explores the experience of Centrelink beneficiaries and the adequacy of the [Centrelink Telephone Allowance](#) (CTA). The CTA is a quarterly allowance designed to help consumers on income support payments to stay connected to telecommunications services. The survey was commissioned by ACCAN and the South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS). A summary of results that discusses the key findings is attached to this email.

The survey found that many low income consumers are struggling to pay their telecommunications costs with 62 per cent of respondents either experiencing difficulty paying, having to cut back on, or stop using one or more telecommunications services for financial reasons in the last 12 months. Half of respondents said they had difficulty paying their ongoing phone (50 per cent) and internet (49 per cent) bills, highlighting that current payment rates and eligibility criteria do not address the financial challenges to staying connected.

The key findings are that many low-income Australians are experiencing financial difficulty using telecommunications services, and that the CTA:

- Is not adequate to alleviate this financial difficulty.
- Is not available for all low-income earners experiencing the most financial difficulty with their telecommunications costs, and for those who have the highest financial need.
- Fails to provide all recipients with assistance for the costs of an internet connection, which is an essential telecommunications service for social and economic participation in Australia today.
- Provides inadequate assistance for families with dependent children.

In light of this new data we are calling for the future Federal Government to review the CTA to ensure that low-income consumers can stay connected to vital telecommunications services. We ask you to support such a review, as part of your party's election commitment, taking into account our key findings.

In our digital age telecommunications services are just as essential as water and energy. Accessible, available, and affordable communications have the potential to increase the social, economic, and community participation of all Australians. Additional financial assistance is vital so that low-income earners can fully participate in the digital age.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa Corbin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Teresa Corbin, ACCAN CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Womersley". The signature is highly stylized and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent part.

Ross Womersley, SACOSS CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Guthrie". The signature is cursive and clearly legible.

Fiona Guthrie, FCA CEO