

The Cost of *Still Waiting*

The *Still Waiting* survey carried out by Colmar Brunton surveyed 2,994 Australians, representing the general population, and found that 1,035 consumers who were solely or jointly responsible for communicating with their telecommunications provider had contacted their provider in the last 12 months. These respondents were asked to think about their most recent issue and how they contacted their provider regarding that issue.¹ The survey covered key aspects relating to wait times and issue resolution. The respondents were asked *only* about their most recent issue in order to aid recall. The research revealed the proportion of respondents who contacted their provider between February 2019 and February 2020 (35%) as well as the average time spent resolving their issue. The table below summarises the survey results.

Table 1 Average total time and average number of contacts made in order to resolve an issue, February 2019- February 2020²

Contact method used	Average total time	Average number of times contacted
Phone	65 minutes, 5 seconds [†]	2.4
Live chat	37 minutes, 2 seconds ^{††}	2.3
In person at a store	32 minutes, 5 seconds	1.9
Email	19 minutes, 8 seconds	2.4
Webform	18 minutes, 8 seconds	1.9
Crowd support/ community help forum	15 minutes, 11 seconds	2.6
Social Media	13 minutes, 8 seconds	2.7

[†] (52% of this time was spent on hold)

^{††} (37% of this time was spent waiting to get the first message back from a customer service representative)

Using this data, ACCAN has costed the time spent by consumers resolving a telecommunications issue by applying the concept of opportunity cost of time (“time forgone”), the value of time depends on the utility, or disutility, of an activity compared with the value of the next best alternative activity. Therefore, ACCAN has calculated the cost of time spent resolving an issue, compared to the value of a leisure or work activity which the consumer could have been carrying out instead. This analysis combines the data from *Still Waiting* and the findings of *Please Hold: Costing Telco Customer Wait Times* published by ACCAN in 2019, which recommended the value of time per hour when resolving an issue.³ These recommendations can be seen in the table below. ACCAN’s *Please Hold* report identified four steps in the resolution process. Some values are multiplied by 1.4 to account for the

¹ Colmar Brunton (2020) *Still waiting...Costing wait times for telecommunications consumers*. <http://accan.org.au/our-work/research/1805-still-waiting-cost-wait-times-for-telecommunications-consumers>

² Ibid.

³ Synergies Economic Consulting (2019). *Please hold: costing telco customer wait times*. <http://accan.org.au/files/Reports/Please%20hold%20-%20costing%20telco%20customer%20wait%20times.pdf>

added frustration felt by consumers of having to wait during handovers between service representatives and re-explain the issue to another operator, as recommended in *Please Hold*.

Table 2 Recommended values of time⁴

Step in process	Recommended value, \$/hour (2018)	Recommended value, \$/hour (2019) †
Wait for answer	\$13.67	\$13.89
Explain issue to operator	\$13.67	\$13.89
Transfer to another operator	\$13.67 * 1.4 = \$19.14	\$19.44
Explain issue to next operator	\$13.67 * 1.4 = \$19.14	\$19.44

†Values adjusted for inflation

By applying the average time to resolve an issue per contact method with the recommended values of time, ACCAN has been able to produce an estimate of the cost to a consumer contacting their provider to resolve an issue, as shown in the table below. The higher figure includes the penalty for contacting multiple times, as recommended. The lower figure is calculated without it.

Table 3 Average cost to a consumer by contact method used

Method of contact	Average cost to an individual consumer
Phone	\$15.07 - \$18.58
Live chat	\$8.57 - \$10.51
In person at a store	\$7.43 - \$8.83
Email	\$4.43 - \$5.46
webform	\$4.20 - \$4.99
Crowd support/ forums	\$3.51 - \$4.38
Social media	\$3.04 - \$3.81

The *Still Waiting* survey revealed that between February 2019 and February 2020, 35% of respondents had contacted their retail provider about at least one problem or issue. As this sample was representative of the Australian population, we have calculated that this represents over 6.9 million Australians adults.

Extending the experience of the average consumer to the entire population of over 18-year old's, we were able to reveal the total cost to consumers from resolving telecommunications issues between February 2019- February 2020.

Table 4 Total cost to all consumers per contact method, February 2019 – February 2020

Method of contact	Total cost to all consumers	
	Lower amount	Upper amount
Phone contact	\$77,053,375.07	\$95,013,080.02
Live chat	\$14,811,741.47	\$18,156,866.67
In person at a store	\$5,133,243.73	\$6,104,808.00

⁴ Ibid.

Email	\$4,285,791.86	\$5,284,730.03
webform	\$2,611,154.42	\$3,105,365.19
Crowd support/ forums	\$1,214,645.47	\$1,513,312.24
Social media	\$840,518.66	\$1,051,976.24
TOTAL	\$105,950,470.68	\$130,230,138.38

OUR ANALYSIS

On the phone

On average, consumers who phone their provider spend a total 1 hour and 5 minutes resolving their issue. It takes on average 2.4 calls until the issue has been resolved. The average length of a phone call is 27 minutes and 7 seconds.

To calculate the minimum cost to the consumer of resolving an issue via phone, we have multiplied the average time spent on the phone (1 hour and 5 minutes) by the value of time recommended (\$13.89/hour). The average minimum cost of using this method to resolve an issue is \$15.07 in time forgone.

However, ACCAN's *Please Hold* report recommended that consumers' time should be valued at a higher rate when they experience discomfort or frustration, through having to re-explain themselves or being transferred to another operator. To account for this added frustration, we first calculated the cost of making one phone call by multiplying the average length of a phone call by the recommended value of time, \$13.89 /hour. Therefore, the cost of the initial phone call (average length 27 minutes and 7 seconds) is \$6.28. On average a consumer calls again, 1.4 times. The consumer's time during the subsequent phone calls is valued at a higher rate of \$19.44 /hour, resulting in a value of \$12.30 for time spent in subsequent contacts. In total, the time spent trying to resolve an issue for a consumer via the phone amounts to an average of \$18.58 in time forgone.

Please note results of figures in report have been rounded.

Table 5 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue via telephone – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours)†	A	0.452
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	C = A * B	\$6.28
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	1.40
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	E = A * D	0.633
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	G = F * E	\$12.30
Average cost of resolving an issue	H = C + G	\$18.58

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Case Study 1: NBN outage

On 23.02.20, Suzie’s Vodafone NBN internet service was repeatedly dropping in and out. The Vodafone-supplied modem did not show any issues. After turning the modem off and on again, Suzie called the Vodafone customer support line. Suzie was on hold for over two hours without a response from the customer support team.

Suzie gave up and spoke to Vodafone via live chat where they informed her they were upgrading the NBN service (without prior notification to the consumer). Suzie then asked why their 4G back up in the Vodafone-supplied modem wasn’t working and they asked the customer to call customer service. The customer eventually gave up and unplugged the HFC box which forced the modem onto its 4G network.

The time spent on the phone trying to resolve this issue cost the consumer \$27.78 in time forgone.

The customer was unable to recall how long they spent on live chat.

The Still Waiting survey revealed that between February 2019 and February 2020, 35% of respondents had contacted their retail provider about at least one problem or issue – this represents over 6.9 million Australians. 74% of respondents who had contacted their provider did so by phone at least once as part of resolving their most recent issue, noting that 27% of consumers used more than one contact method when resolving an issue with their provider. ACCAN estimates that over 5 million consumers contacted their provider via telephone between February 2019 and February 2020. This took 5,547,399 hours and cost those consumers between \$77,053,375.07 - \$95,013,080.02 in time forgone.

Table 6 Total cost to consumers from contacting their provider via telephone, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18’s†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	C = A * B	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	74%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	E = C * D	5,114,382
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$15.07
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$18.58

Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$77,053,375.07
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$95,013,080.02

†source: ABS, 2020⁵

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Live chat

On average, it took a consumer 37 minutes and 2 seconds over 2.3 chat sessions to resolve an issue via live chat. At a minimum, this time represents a cost of \$8.57 in time to consumers.

Factoring in the penalty for having to make multiple contacts, the time represents \$10.51 to consumers. As respondents spent an average of 16 minutes and 6 seconds on their most recent chat with their provider, we estimate that an initial live chat costs the consumer \$3.72 in time forgone. For the live chat sessions following the initial chat, the penalty has been added to factor in the frustration to consumers. This amounts to a total of \$10.51 incurred from time spent resolving an issue via live chat.

Table 7 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue via live chat – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.268
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$3.73
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	1.30
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.349
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$6.78
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$10.51

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Of those who contacted their provider between February 2019 and February 2020 about a recent issue or problem, 25% used live chat to do so, representing over 1.7 million consumers in the general population. Based on the average time it took to resolve an issue via this method, we estimate that Australians spent 1,066,360 hours trying to resolve an issue via live chat. This equates to \$14,811,741.47- \$18,156,866.67 in time forgone.

Table 8 Total cost to consumers from contacting their provider via live chat, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2020). *Australian Demographic Statistics, Dec 2019*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/D56C4A3E41586764CA2581A70015893E?OpenDocument>

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	$C = A * B$	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	25%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	$E = C * D$	1,727,832
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$8.57
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$10.51
Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$14,811,741.47
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$18,156,866.67

†source: ABS, 2020

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

In Person

On average, it took a consumer 32 minutes and 5 seconds to resolve an issue by going into a store in person. At a minimum this costs the consumer \$7.43 in time forgone.

As it takes an average of 1.9 visits to a retail store to resolve an issue, we have factored in the added frustration of having to return to a store in order to get the issue resolved; we calculate that on average one store visit takes 16 minutes and 53 seconds. The costs to a consumer of an initial store visit is \$3.91 in time forgone. However, as it takes more than one store visit to resolve an issue, the average cost of resolving an issue by this method amounts to \$8.83 in time forgone.

Table 9 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue in person at a store – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.281
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$3.91
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	0.90
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.253
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$4.92
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$8.83

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Case Study: Incorrect Billing

Freddie recently changed retail provider when migrating to the NBN but found he was still receiving bills from his old provider, Telstra. As this occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, Freddie couldn't get through to anyone on the phone. We do not know how much time he spent calling on the phone before he decided to go into the store.

Freddie made 7 trips to the nearest Telstra store to have this issue resolved. As he didn't say how much time he spent in the Telstra store we have applied the average of 16 minutes and 53 seconds to each of his trips. This cost him \$36.73 in time forgone.

Of those consumers who contacted their retail provider to resolve an issue between February 2019 and February 2020, 10% went into a store to do so. We estimate that consumers spent 369,563.98 hours going into a store to resolve an issue. This amounts to \$5,133,243.73- \$6,104,808.00 in time forgone.

Table 10 Total cost to consumers from contacting their providers in person at a store, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	$C = A * B$	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	10%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	$E = C * D$	691,133
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$7.43
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$8.83
Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$5,133,243.73
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$6,104,808.00

†source: ABS, 2020

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Email

On average it took consumers 19 minutes and 8 seconds to resolve an issue via email, costing a minimum of \$4.43 in time forgone.

As it takes an average of 2.4 contacts to resolve an issue, we calculate each contact to take on average 7 minutes and 58 seconds. The initial contact costs a consumer \$1.85 in time. However, as it takes more than one email to resolve an issue, we have factored in the added frustration of having to contact

the provider multiple times, the maximum average cost of resolving an issue via this method amounts to \$5.46 in time forgone.

Table 11 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue via Email – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.133
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$1.85
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	1.40
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.186
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$3.62
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$5.46

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Of the 6.9 million consumers who contacted their provider between February 2019 and February 2020, 14% used email at least once. Based on the average time it takes for consumers to resolve an issue via email, we estimate that consumers spent 308,552.33 hours emailing their provider in order to resolve an issue, amounting to \$4,285,791.86 - \$5,284,730.03 in time forgone.

Table 12 Total cost to consumers from contacting their providers by email, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider in Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	$C = A * B$	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	14%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	$E = C * D$	967,586
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$4.43
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$5.46
Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$4,285,791.86
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$5,284,730.03

†source: ABS, 2020

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Webform

On average it took consumers 18 minutes and 8 seconds to resolve an issue via webforms on retailers' websites, representing a minimum of \$4.20 in time foregone.

As consumers contacted their provider 1.9 times via this method, we have calculated each contact to take on average 9 minutes and 33 seconds. The first contact costs a consumer \$2.21 in time forgone. However, taking into account the fact that a consumer uses this method 1.9 times before the issue is resolved, the total time it takes for a consumer to resolve an issue via this method amounts to \$4.99 in time forgone.

Table 13 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue via Webform – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.159
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$2.21
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	0.90
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.143
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$2.78
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$4.99

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Of those consumers who contacted their provider between February 2019 and February 2020, 9% used a webform at least once. Based on the average time it takes for consumers to resolve an issue via webform, we estimate that consumers spent 187,988.08 hours contacting their provider in order to resolve an issue, amounting to \$2,611,154.42 - \$3,105,365.19 in time forgone.

Table 14 Total cost to consumers from contacting their providers by webform, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider in Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	$C = A * B$	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method**	D	9%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	$E = C * D$	622,019
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$4.20
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$4.99

Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$2,611,154.42
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$3,105,365.19

†source: ABS, 2020

††Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Crowd support and forums

When asked how they contacted their provider, consumers who chose crowd support and community help forums said on average this took 15 minutes and 11 seconds of their time to resolve an issue. At a minimum, this represents \$3.51 in time forgone.

However, as it took consumers 2.6 interactions before the issue was resolved; we have calculated the cost by factoring in the frustration of having to contact multiple times. As on average each interaction took 5 minutes and 50 seconds, the initial contact costs a consumer \$1.35. As a consumer uses this method 2.6 times before the issue is resolved, the total time it takes for a consumer to resolve an issue via this method amounts to \$4.38 in time forgone.

Table 15 Calculation for the average cost of resolving an issue via crowd support and online forums – Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.097
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$1.35
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	1.60
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.156
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$3.03
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$4.38

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Of those who contacted their retail provider between February 2019 and February 2020, 5% used crowd support websites and forums to do so. Based on the average time it takes consumers to resolve an issue via crowd support, we estimate that consumers spent 87,447.48 hours in order to resolve issues with their provider using this method of contact. This amounts to \$1,214,645.47 - \$1,513,312.24 in time forgone.

Table 16 Total cost to consumers from contacting their providers via crowd support and forums, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647

Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider in Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	$C = A * B$	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	5%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	$E = C * D$	345,566.3
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$3.51
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$4.38
Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	$H = E * F$	\$1,214,645.47
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	$I = E * G$	\$1,513,312.24

†source: ABS, 2020

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Social Media

On average, it takes a consumer 13 minutes and 8 seconds to resolve an issue via social media. At a minimum, this represents \$3.04 in time forgone.

However, as it takes 2.7 times on average to contact their provider before the issue is resolved, we have calculated the cost factoring in the frustration of having to make contact multiple times. As each interaction takes 4 minutes and 52 seconds on average, we have estimated the initial interaction to cost the consumer \$1.13. As consumers contacted their provider 2.7 times on average before the issue is resolved, the average cost to consumers of using this method amounts to \$3.81 in time forgone.

Table 17 Calculation for the average costs of resolving an issue via social media - Upper amount

Description	Item	Value
Average time spent on an initial contact (hours) †	A	0.081
Recommended value of time for initial contact (\$/hour)	B	\$13.89
Average cost of initial contact	$C = A * B$	\$1.13
Number of subsequent contacts†	D	1.70
Average time spent on subsequent contacts (hours)	$E = A * D$	0.138
Recommended value of time for subsequent contacts (\$/hour)	F	\$19.44
Average cost of subsequent contacts	$G = F * E$	\$2.68
Average cost of resolving an issue	$H = C + G$	\$3.81

†Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

Of those who contacted their retail provider between February 2019 and February 2020, 4% did so via social media. Based on the average time it takes a consumer to resolve an issue via this method, we estimate that consumers spent 60,512.50 hours trying to resolve an issue through social media. This amounts to \$840,518.66 - \$1,051,976.24 in time forgone.

Table 18 Total cost to consumers from contacting their providers via social media, Feb 2019 – Feb 2020

Description	Item	Value
Population of over 18's†	A	19,746,647
Proportion of consumers who contacted their service provider in Feb 2019 - Feb 2020††	B	35%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider	C = A * B	6,911,326
Proportion of consumers who contacted their provider by this method††	D	4%
Number of consumers who contacted their service provider via this method	E = C * D	276,453
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Lower amount	F	\$3.04
Average cost to consumer who contacted their service provider via this method - Upper amount	G	\$3.81
Total cost to consumers - Lower amount	H = E * F	\$840,518.66
Total cost to consumers - Upper amount	I = E * G	\$1,051,976.24

†source: ABS June 2019.

†† Source: Colmar Brunton, 2020

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

Different methods of contact present different costs to consumers, due to some methods being, on average, faster ways to resolve issues. The quickest and therefore 'least costly' method of contacting providers is via social media. The reasons for this were not explored in this study but may reflect the type of issues consumers take to social media, or providers responding differently to issues posted by consumers publicly. Using the phone is the costliest as it takes the most amount of time and as consumers contacted their provider more times on average by phone before the issue was resolved compared to other contact methods, this is also the most popular method of contact.

The results of our analysis are shown in Table 19. Between February 2019 and February 2020, it is estimated that 6.9 million Australians spent 7.6 million hours resolving issues with their telco. This is estimated to cost the Australian population \$106 million - \$130.2 million in time forgone. When issues do occur, consumers should not have to spend significant amounts of time waiting on hold, or having to repeatedly call, email or write to providers in order to get them resolved.

Table 19 Total cost to consumers from resolving issues with service providers, Feb 2019- Feb 2020

Method of contact	Average cost to individual consumers	Total cost to all consumers	Total hours
Phone contact	\$15.07 - \$18.58	\$77,053,375.07 - \$95,013,080.02	5,547,399.21
Live chat	\$8.57 - \$10.51	\$14,811,741.47 - \$18,156,866.67	1,066,360.08
In person at a store	\$7.43 - \$8.83	\$5,133,243.73 - \$6,104,808.00	369,563.98
Email	\$4.43 - \$5.46	\$4,285,791.86 - \$5,284,730.03	308,552.33

webform	\$4.20 - \$4.99	\$2,611,154.42 - \$3,105,365.19	187,988.08
Crowd support/ forums	\$3.51 - \$4.38	\$1,214,645.47 - \$1,513,312.24	87,447.48
Social media	\$3.04 - \$3.81	\$840,518.66 - \$1,051,976.24	60,512.50
Total		\$105,950,470.68 - \$130,230,138.38	7,627,823.66

Long customer service wait times and poor reliability are significant issues facing telecommunications customers. The value of this is not reflected in prices, yet poor customer service and reliability impose costs on consumers and the broader economy. The magnitude of these costs is highly relevant to regulatory questions regarding customer service standards, service guarantees and obligations to pay customers compensation for inconvenience or damage when standards are not met.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The Still Waiting survey did not ask respondents if they had to re-explain an issue during any of their contacts with their provider. The *Please Hold* report recommended a penalty apply when a consumer must re-explain their problem to account for the added frustration of doing so. Whilst the penalty was factored into the calculations where consumers contacted their provider multiple times, it was not included where a consumer contacted their provider only once. We are aware from anecdotal evidence however, that a consumer is likely to have to re-explain their issue if they are transferred to different operators on the one call, for example. Future work to better understand how often consumers have to re-explain their issues to their provider would be useful as the current data may underestimate the total cost to consumers.
- Our analysis has calculated time forgone based on an equivalent dollar cost, regardless of contact method used (Table 2). It does not delve into the possibility that there could be different per hour values attached to different contact methods.
- The survey only asked respondents about their most *recent* issue from the past year. It is possible that some respondents contacted their provider about more than one issue in that time. This was not captured in the survey and therefore has not been factored into the calculations. Again, this may lead to a conservative estimate of the total cost to Australians to resolve telecommunications issues.
- To safeguard against problems with reliability and recall, the survey only asked respondents to consider their last interaction with their telco. As ACCAN does not have data on the average length of the initial interactions and subsequent interactions, we have treated the duration of an interaction the same regardless of whether it is an initial interaction or a subsequent contact. Without the additional data, we believe the use of averages in this way provides a reasonable estimate of the cost to consumers.
- The survey only asked consumers over the age of 18 of their recent experience. However we know that 86% of Australians aged 16-17 own a mobile phone.⁶ As a result, the estimate of the total time spent resolving issues by the entire population is likely to be larger than the figures presented in this report as those 18 and younger are not included.

⁶ ACCAN, 2020, *Youth Check In* <http://accan.org.au/our-work/research/1813-accan-youth-check-in-research-report>