



Policy Priorities 2021-22

ACCAN's purpose is to work for "communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all." Our Strategic Plan can be viewed at accan.org.au/about-us/reporting/strategic-plan

In 2021-22 ACCAN will be focused on the following priority areas, informed by the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on consumers' use of communications services and the need for accessible and easy-to-understand consumer education and information about communications issues. At the same time, we will be responsive to emerging issues, and engage with government and industry consultations in areas of significance for telecommunications consumers, including the converging areas of media, broadcasting and digital platforms.

Our policy priorities are developed in close consultation with ACCAN members, and are informed by our knowledge and analysis of the communications market.

Increased reliability

Stronger foundations are necessary to support the delivery of essential communications services. Our communities and small businesses are more reliant on telecommunications than ever before, and yet arrangements to support increased reliability have not changed substantially in 20 years. This is despite COVID-19 lockdowns accelerating our reliance on broadband services, with consumers needing to be online for work, education, and to provide and receive health and other government services.

ACCAN will advocate for the introduction of arrangements for fast connection times, prompt fault repair, punctual appointment keeping and adequate compensation for consumers and small businesses if timeframes are not met. We will work to ensure services are fit for purpose during emergency situations and ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns. We will seek network reliability measures for all networks to minimise disruptive outages, and robust, strengthened arrangements for priority assistance customers, to assist those with serious health conditions and disabilities stay connected while at home.

Affordable telecommunications for all

The affordability of communications services and devices remains a problem for people on low incomes and contributes to financial hardship and debt issues. Mobile and home broadband services have become increasingly expensive and are out of reach for many households facing tight budgets and competing financial demands. Furthermore, there is a lack of information and promotion of more affordable devices and services, and at the same time a confusing array of complex offers which results in consumers entering contracts for products not suited to their needs.

ACCAN will work to ensure that programs to deliver direct relief to low income individuals are available across a choice of providers, and that consumers have the information they need about services suited to their budget where choice is available. We will advocate for affordable access to services and

[Australian Communications Consumer Action Network \(ACCAN\)](#)

Australia's peak body representing communications consumers

PO Box A1158 Sydney South, NSW 1235

Tel: (02) 9288 4000 | Contact us through the [National Relay Service](#)

www.accan.org.au | info@accan.org.au | [twitter: @ACCAN_AU](https://twitter.com/ACCAN_AU) | www.facebook.com/accanau

devices, and for greater availability and choice of services suited to the needs of small businesses. We will continue calling for more affordable voice services and assess the need for a low-income product for mobile-only users. ACCAN's home broadband priority is that No Australian is Left Offline – that all households that can benefit from connection to a fast NBN broadband service are able to do so. We will continue to advocate for the delivery of an affordable, concessional, home broadband service for households on limited incomes. Cost savings for government service delivery are significant, and the social and economic benefits of NBN will be maximised with greater take-up of services.

A fairer telco market

Poor customer service, irresponsible selling practices, unresponsive or uncontactable telcos, unfair treatment of vulnerable consumers, and information asymmetry in the telecommunications market is causing considerable harm to communications consumers. While COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbate poor customer service and consumer detriment, this is an ongoing and pervasive issue. Access to suitable financial hardship arrangements and support for consumers experiencing vulnerability remains problematic, and consumers still have difficulties getting their authorised advocates recognised by the industry.

We will continue to advocate for significant improvements in telco customer service and complaints handling. We will work for reforms to deliver stronger consumer protections to underpin a fair and competitive communications market that delivers for all consumers and small businesses. We will provide a strong evidence base to support measures to lift performance, increase transparency and accountability, and rectify systemic issues. We will prioritise our advocacy for underlying reforms to support positive consumer outcomes, and fair treatment of customers by telco providers – especially for those most at risk of falling into hardship. We will call for an unbiased and independent information service to address information asymmetry in the telecommunications market. We will review and inform consumers about new plans and offers in the market, and advocate for products best suited to consumer needs. Guided by First Nations representatives, we will support fairer communications outcomes for First Nations consumers, including consultation on the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan.

Growing consumer confidence

Consumers want to engage online, but many have deep concerns about the security of their personal information, manipulative practices, and fraud. Others feel disempowered by the lack of transparency surrounding how their personal information is gathered, stored and shared by third parties. Small businesses are concerned about scam activity, ransomware attacks and other cyber security breaches, and the impact these may have on their lives and livelihoods. Many consumers, young and old, lack the opportunity and confidence to use the internet and are challenged by technology that could improve their lives. Consumers are concerned about the rising spread of misinformation online and the security and safety of digital platforms and are unsure of their rights on digital platforms and streaming services.

In relation to communications and digital platforms, we will work for improved privacy protections for Australian consumers that are comparable to international best practice, and for measures to tighten protections for consumers at times of vulnerability and abuse. We will advocate for a framework to build trust in the Internet of Things, and support initiatives to assist consumers to get online, particularly for remote communities that could benefit the most. We will support the introduction of

the Consumer Data Right in telecommunications, and online digital identity systems, but only if consumer privacy is not compromised and consumer information is protected from exploitation. We will engage with government and industry to reduce barriers for consumers to confidently and safely use the internet and digital platforms, including older people and small businesses. We will ensure consumers have appropriate consumer protections when using digital platforms.

Better infrastructure

The completion of the NBN build means a broadband infrastructure upgrade for most Australians, but there remain many that are underserved. Some are still waiting for NBN to become available and others for upgrades, while in many remote Indigenous communities last mile infrastructure is badly needed. There is strong demand for increased mobile network coverage in regional, rural and remote areas, as well as on transport corridors and high-risk emergency areas. Technology used to deliver fixed voice services in remote and rural areas is aging and unreliable, and many premises are still connected to ADSL outside NBN's fixed footprint with no adequate future plan for service transition if ADSL is withdrawn. 5G networks are rolling out but availability is limited, and consumers are concerned about the impact the withdrawal of 3G may have on access to services. Consumers are concerned about the impact that spectrum changes will have on their use of technology, including telecommunications services and television delivery platforms.

We will advocate for place-based solutions to better match infrastructure to the needs of consumers, whether over NBN, smaller fixed line networks, local fixed wireless, mobile, or last mile connectivity. We will engage with Federal, state and territory governments to deliver ongoing funding for infrastructure improvement programs. We will work with industry to ensure co-funded programs meet consumer needs. We will focus on future service delivery arrangements that support the best outcomes for regional and remote consumers, small businesses, and poorly served remote Indigenous communities. We will keep a watch on 5G rollouts and monitor plans to withdraw 3G, advocating for full transparency about the costs, limitations and implications of these services and network changes. We will ensure that consumer interests are considered in spectrum reforms, including those proposed in the Media Reform Green Paper.

Improved accessibility

Many Australians with disability continue to be excluded from our increasingly digital society, and there are many barriers to access that must be overcome. National Relay Services (NRS) have limited availability and real-time access to emergency services for consumers who are Deaf, Deafblind or have hearing or speech impairment is still not possible. Australian free to air and subscription television is inaccessible for people who are blind or have vision impairment, and a significant amount of television content is inaccessible for people who rely on captioning. Access to online government services also remains difficult for some people with disability.

We will continue to work closely with our members, industry and government stakeholders to improve communications access and inclusion across all areas in which barriers exist. We will work to make sure that all National Relay Services are available 24/7. We will work with our members to advocate for increased captioning and audio description services across free-to-air and subscription television. We will promote up-to-date, independent and appropriate information about digital communication equipment and services in accessible formats. We will continue to call for the adoption of a whole-of-

government procurement policy for accessible information and communications technology. We will work with our members and the disability sector to realise the goals set out in our [Ideal Accessible Communications Roadmap](#), including the accessibility of telecommunications services and devices, online environments, and audio-visual content; the affordability of communications technologies; and the safety and reliability of communications technologies for people with disability in Australia.