
Policy Priorities 2022-23

ACCAN's purpose, as outlined in our [Strategic Plan](#), is to work for "communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all."

In 2022-23 ACCAN will focus on the following priority areas, informed by the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and natural disasters 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 communications 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.

Affordable telecommunications for all

Everyone in Australia should have access to affordable phone and internet goods and services that meet their needs. However, 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 cost of living pressures. 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.

To address these affordability concerns, ACCAN will continue working to ensure that programs delivering 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 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 will provide information to consumers about affordable mobile services on offer. We will continue advocating for the delivery of an affordable, concessional, home broadband service for households on limited incomes, as part of our [No Australian Left Offline](#) home broadband priority, so that all households that can benefit from connection to a fast NBN broadband service are able to do so. By focusing our affordability policy work on these areas, ACCAN believes that phone and internet goods and services will be made more affordable for many Australian households.

A fairer telco market

Everyone deserves to be treated fairly, including when interacting with different markets. Despite this, poor customer service, irresponsible selling practices, unresponsive or uncontactable telcos, unfair treatment of vulnerable consumers, and information asymmetry persists in the telecommunications

market, continuing to cause harm to communications consumers. While COVID-19 lockdowns and natural disasters have contributed to poor customer service and consumer detriment in the past few years, these are ongoing and pervasive issues. Access to suitable financial hardship arrangements, supports and complaints mechanisms for consumers experiencing vulnerability remains problematic, and consumers still have difficulties getting their authorised advocates recognised by the industry.

To make the market fairer for consumers, ACCAN 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 telecommunications market that delivers for all consumers and small businesses. Guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, we will support fairer communications outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers. We will provide a strong evidence base to support measures to improve telco performance, increase transparency and accountability, and rectify systemic issues. We will advocate for reforms to support positive consumer outcomes, and fair treatment of customers by telco providers – especially for those experiencing vulnerability or at risk of falling into hardship. We will call for an independent information service to address information asymmetry in the telecommunications market, and will advocate for products and payment options best suited to consumer needs. Taking these steps will result in a fairer telecommunications market for consumers.

Better infrastructure

No matter where we live in Australia, communications services should be available to keep us connected. While the completion of the NBN build means a broadband infrastructure upgrade for most Australians, there remain many that are underserved. Some are still waiting for NBN to become available, others are awaiting upgrades, and in many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities last mile infrastructure is badly needed. Mobile network coverage issues persist in regional, rural and remote areas, as well as in 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 plan for service transition if ADSL is withdrawn. Although 5G networks are rolling out, consumers are concerned about the impact the withdrawal of 3G may have on access to their services. Consumers are also concerned about the impact that spectrum changes will have on their use of technology, including telecommunications services and television delivery platforms.

To ensure better communications infrastructure across Australia, ACCAN 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 in their delivery of 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We will keep track of 5G rollouts and monitor plans to withdraw 3G, advocating for full transparency about the costs, limitations and implications of these network changes. We will ensure that consumer interests are considered in spectrum reforms, including those with implications on broadcasting and Wi-Fi services. These focus areas will help ACCAN ensure that communications infrastructure across Australia meets the needs of consumers.

Growing consumer confidence

Everyone has the right to feel safe and confident when using phone and internet goods and services. 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 cyber security breaches, scam activity and ransomware attacks, 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 there is uncertainty about consumers' rights on digital platforms and streaming services.

ACCAN will work to ensure everyone can engage safely and confidently with communications services and digital platforms. We will advocate for improved privacy protections for Australian consumers that are comparable to international best practice, and for measures to tighten protections for consumers experiencing vulnerability and abuse, including technology-facilitated abuse. We will also 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. Through taking these steps, ACCAN will help establish an environment in which consumers can use communications goods, services and platforms with more confidence.

Improved accessibility

Everyone in Australia should have access to phone and internet goods and services that meet their needs. This must include people with disability, many of whom continue to be excluded from our increasingly digital society and face barriers to accessing communications goods and services. National Relay Service (NRS) offerings 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 commercial 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. Interacting with telco providers, in person, on the phone or online, can be difficult for people with disability, as can accessing online government services.

To improve the inclusivity and accessibility of communications for people with disability, ACCAN will continue to work closely with our members, industry and government stakeholders across all areas where 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.

Increased reliability

Telecommunications is an essential service in today's day and age. 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, and natural disasters across Australia highlighting the need for more reliable and resilient forms of connectivity.

Stronger foundations are necessary to support the delivery of essential communications 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 before, during and after emergency situations and natural disasters. 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. Focusing on these areas will help ensure that communications services across Australia can reliably meet the needs of all consumers.

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.
