



OUR IMPACT THIS YEAR

**2022-2023
Annual Report**

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Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network Limited
(ACCAN)
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For the year ended 30 June 2023

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WHO WE ARE



OUR ORGANISATION

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation representing individuals, small businesses and not-for-profit groups as consumers of communications products and services. ACCAN focuses on goods and services encompassed by the converged areas of telecommunications, broadcasting, the internet and online services, including both current and emerging technologies.

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.

OUR VISION

Communications services that are trusted, inclusive, accessible, and available for all.

OUR MISSION

ACCAN's mission is to:

- Represent consumers and the public interest, with particular attention to the needs of consumers for whom the market is not working;
- Inspire, inform, enable and equip consumers to act in their own interests; and
- Research emerging consumer communications issues to provide evidence-based policy advice.

OUR VALUES

As an organisation we will:

- Act with courage
- Operate openly
- Be inclusive
- Build relationships
- Value people

CHAIR'S REPORT



Julian Thomas: Chairperson, ACCAN Board

On behalf of the ACCAN Board, I am delighted to present this report on our work for the 2022-23 year. The year was another very challenging one in the communications sector, with new cost of living pressures adding to the ongoing impact on consumers of recent natural disasters and emergencies.

I was privileged to be appointed ACCAN Chairperson in November 2022, following our outgoing Chairperson, Deirdre O'Donnell PSM. I would like to express our deep appreciation for Deirdre's extraordinary contribution to ACCAN, and to communications consumers more broadly, over many years. We wish her every success for the future. She remains a member of the ACCAN family.

The Board has seen other significant changes over the last year. We farewelled two long-standing members, Sarah Wilson and Nadia Moffatt OAM, at the September AGM. Both made exceptional contributions over two three-year terms as Board members. Dr Gareth Downing resigned from the Board in September 2022 following his appointment as ACCAN's new Deputy CEO.

We have been delighted to welcome former ACMA Executive Vince Humphries, and Dr Scott Winch to the Board. Following Deirdre and Gareth's departures, former ACCC Deputy Chairperson Delia Rickard PSM and Dr Scott Hollier joined the Board as co-opted Directors.


I would also like to express my thanks to the Hon. Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, and her department for their ongoing engagement and their support for ACCAN. We continue to work closely with industry and regulatory bodies across the sector, and wish to thank those organisations as well. Andrew and I were fortunate to have a number of meetings with sector leaders as part of my transition into the position, and I look forward to developing these important links in the years ahead.

The ongoing support of government and industry through

the year to keep our Accessible Telecoms program running has been very important, while its longer-term sustainability was addressed. In March 2023 a very welcome grant from the Commonwealth was announced, which will enable us to expand this valuable service and continue its important assistance to people with disability and those wanting information on accessible communications technologies.

For the second consecutive year, ACCAN's conference was held online, and attracted over 200 virtual delegates. The easing of pandemic restrictions allowed us to conduct some of the presentations and discussions in-person from our improvised studio at ACCAN's offices.

Our AGM was again held virtually this year and is likely to be conducted as a 'hybrid' event in the years to come in order to allow as many members to participate as



possible. We were delighted to recognise Mr Andrew Stewart's outstanding contribution to consumer advocacy, and his life-long championship for people with disabilities, by awarding him life membership of ACCAN.

It was also pleasing to see many more external events and engagements return to face-to-face formats, particularly in the second half of the year. For the first time since the pandemic began, ACCAN staff have taken the opportunity to attend a number of interstate events, and meet with stakeholders in person.

I would like to thank all ACCAN members for your ongoing support to our organisation. We are your voice on communications policy and advocacy issues, and without your input we would not be able to influence change.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to the ACCAN team for their outstanding contributions and dedication throughout the year.

Prof. Julian Thomas

CEO OVERVIEW



Andrew Williams: Chief Executive Officer

It gives me great pleasure to present ACCAN's 2022-23 Annual Report. It seems like we say this every year, but looking back it's clear this was an extremely busy time for all of us at ACCAN and we have achieved some great outcomes for consumers. As the year progressed, it was great to put the effects of the pandemic behind us and slowly return to a more normal way of working, with more face-to-face interactions replacing the ubiquitous Zoom and Teams meetings.

ACCAN made a substantial contribution to policy discussions through the year, completing over 60 submissions and representing consumers on more than 30 committees. We raised consumer awareness with the publication of several policy positions, including on the establishment of a retail registration scheme and recommending the development of an independent plan comparison tool.

Our other policy work has also achieved some good outcomes throughout the year. While these are too many to mention here, highlights include a number of our recommendations to the Regional Telecommunications

Review being implemented, revisions to the NBN Special Access Undertaking reflecting ACCAN's input, our involvement in the Government's First Nations digital inclusion initiatives, and our ongoing work in the consumer protection space.


The timing of our new funding deed meant that we were unable to award new Grant projects during the year. Rather, our Independent Grants Program focused on the finalisation of all outstanding projects while we prepared for the next round to commence in mid-2023. As always, the completed projects provided some excellent results and will help inform our policy work in the years ahead.

As a result of the ongoing uncertainty around the pandemic during the planning stages, we made the decision early in the year to again hold our conference

– *ACCANect: Better Basics* – online. Leveraging the lessons learned from the previous year, we were able to stage an excellent event, with over 200 delegates attending.

We also made significant progress in updating some of our systems and processes throughout the year. Specifically, we successfully implemented the Microsoft Dynamics CRM system. This will help us more effectively manage our member and stakeholder interactions, as well as transition to a more streamlined online membership renewal process.

The support provided to ACCAN by the Australian Government has been very much appreciated throughout the year, and we have held a number of productive meetings with the Minister and her staff, as well as the Shadow Minister, on a wide range of issues. A highlight was ACCAN's participation in a delegation to



Parliament to raise awareness on communications issues for regional, rural and remote consumers.

Our Accessible Telecoms program has gained renewed strength. Towards the end of the year we were especially pleased and appreciative for the Government's support in providing funding continuity to enable us to expand the program and continue to provide valuable information on telecommunications products and services to people looking for devices to suit their needs, especially senior Australians and people with disability.

One of the privileges of being ACCAN's CEO is the opportunity it affords to engage closely with our members and stakeholders. As the year progressed it was great for myself and our staff to recommence our outreach and engagement in-person, after three years of mainly

online interactions. We've also expanded our geographic footprint throughout the year and we now have staff members in Townsville, Brisbane and Hobart, as well as NSW. This has already proved invaluable in allowing us to expand our outreach activities. Thanks to all of our stakeholders for your support and input to our work; it is always greatly appreciated.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the ACCAN staff. As the pandemic restrictions eased we have farewelled some old friends and welcomed some new and exciting talent to our team. What hasn't changed is the unwavering professionalism and commitment to delivering great outcomes for all consumers in Australia.

Andrew Williams

WINS FOR CONSUMERS

ACCAN's advocacy has contributed to several consumer wins during the 2022-23 financial year.

- After ACCAN published its retail registration policy position in March, calling for the establishment of a registration scheme for retail service providers, we received broad support from stakeholders, including Communications Alliance.
- ACCAN participated in the March 2023 Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) delegation to Canberra, where the coalition met with over 45 politicians across two days.
- ACCAN's advocacy in partnership with the RRRCC saw NBN Co offer the first metropolitan equivalent ultra-fast satellite service (up to 100mbps, unlimited data) for regional, rural and remote consumers.
- The Australian Government committed to ongoing investment in regional, rural and remote Australia through the 2022-23 Budget, including extending the Mobile Black Spot and Regional Connectivity programs and providing further funding for the Regional Tech Hub, reflecting ongoing advocacy by ACCAN and the RRRCC.
- The Australian Government committed to targeted funding for First Nations communities as part of the Regional Connectivity program, reflecting a longstanding ACCAN recommendation for targeted, place-based funding for First Nations communities.
- The Australian Government committed to audit mobile coverage, a significant step forward in progressing ACCAN and the RRRCC's objective of improving consumer visibility on mobile network coverage.
- Through the Special Access Undertaking process, NBN Co committed to materially reducing wholesale prices for voice-only services in the fixed line footprint from \$22.50 to \$12.29 after several years of ACCAN advocacy.
- ACCAN's recommendations to revise the Handling of Life Threatening and Unwelcome Communications Code saw reductions in the time retail service providers are required to wait before they can act to address threatening conduct.
- The Minister for Communications adopted ACCAN's recommendation to extend the Customer Service Guarantee, critical to protecting the reliability of legacy regional, rural and remote services, while longer-term reforms are considered.

ACCAN IN THE MEDIA

ACCAN continues to grow in stature as a go-to source of information and commentary for media on issues of concern to communications consumers.

ACCAN contributed to 80 media pieces in 2022-23, spanning radio, TV, print and online news media. Presence in communications industry publications has been consistent, and it has been pleasing to see mainstream outlets, including the ABC, SBS, channels 9, 7 and 10, the Sydney Morning Herald and the Guardian increasingly seek ACCAN's view on relevant stories. ACCAN spokespeople provided live or pre-recorded interviews on many topics, including fines for non-compliant telcos, Starlink and satellite mobile services, scam text messages, telco data breaches and the 3G shutdown, and contributed comments for other pieces.

ACCAN issued 19 media releases covering a wide range of consumer topics, including financial hardship matters such as regulation of financial hardship provisions and rising costs of internet services, the importance of a telecommunications comparison tool, the introduction of a retail registration scheme, and the ongoing campaign to combat scams.

ACCAN has been an active participant in the implementation of the National Anti-Scam Centre (NASC) throughout the year and was pleased to accept

the Government's invitation to become an inaugural member of the NASC Advisory Board. A coordinated national approach is exactly what's needed to combat the scammers.

The ACCAN website continues to be an important point of contact for our members, telco consumers and the sector, accruing nearly 160,000 visits in 2022-23. Feedback suggests that ACCAN's most popular online resources remain those which inform and educate our members, providing them with practical takeaways. We continued to build a repository of such information through 7 Hot Issues blog posts, informing the public about the importance of the TCP Code, equipping them for the upcoming shutdown of 3G services and encouraging consumers to shop around and find better telco deals.

As part of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), ACCAN continued to raise awareness of regional, rural, and remote telecommunications issues through the year. Undoubtedly the stand-out highlight was ACCAN's participation in the RRRCC delegation to Parliament which met with over

45 politicians from all sides to continue to raise awareness of communications issues affecting consumers in regional Australia and suggest practical solutions to addressing the patchwork quilt of connectivity. Other significant issues for regional Australia include the emergence of new satellite technologies and the impact of the impending 3G mobile network closures across the country.

Throughout the year ACCAN engaged with over 6,000 members and consumers via social media, sharing important news, media releases and blog posts on a regular basis across branded Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram accounts.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



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MEDIA RELEASES



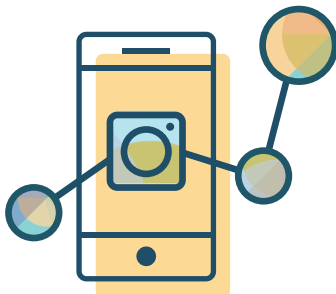
7
BLOG POSTS



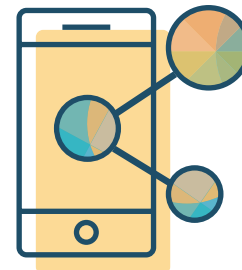
159,962
WEBPAGE VIEWS



141,000
FACEBOOK REACH



60,500
INSTAGRAM REACH



OVER **6,000**
FOLLOWERS ACROSS
TWITTER, FACEBOOK,
LINKEDIN AND INSTAGRAM

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

ACCAN's engagement and outreach for 2022-23 was conducted both virtually and face-to-face as stakeholders and supporters welcomed a return to business-as-usual post pandemic.

ACCAN met with members and consumer groups and attended relevant events on over 35 occasions in 2022-23. Some highlights include:

ACCANECT 2022 BETTER BASICS

In September ACCAN held its flagship event, ACCANect 2022 Better Basics. The event featured a range of presentations about key topics including the power of consumer advocacy, access to reliable communications and consumer rights relating to digital platforms. The one-day event was well attended with over 200 registered attendees.

AUSTRALIAN SENIORS COMPUTER CLUBS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

In November 2022, ACCAN participated in the Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association online conference – 'Making Digital Life Safe and Fun'. ACCAN was a sponsor of the event.

FIRST NATIONS MEDIA AUSTRALIA INDIGENOUS DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FORUM

ACCAN attended the Digital Leadership Forum in Alice Springs in November 2022. The Forum was hosted by First Nations Media Australia's inDigi-MOB team and focused on remote telecommunications and digital connectivity.

2023 REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNICATIONS COALITION DELEGATION

In March 2023, ACCAN participated as part of a delegation of 21 community groups, advocacy and industry organisations to politicians in Canberra. The delegation's goal was to continue to raise awareness and improve the connectivity outcomes and opportunities for non-metropolitan Australians.

COSBOA 2023 NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS SUMMIT

ACCAN attended the Council of Small Business of Australia (COSBOA) 2023 National Summit in April, a face-to-face event held in Melbourne. The conference

provided an opportunity to raise awareness of ACCAN's role for consumers and small business and to network with key stakeholders, senior politicians, and representatives from small businesses nationwide.

WACOSS CONFERENCE

In May 2023 ACCAN attended the WACOSS Conference in Perth. The 2-day conference themed 'Resilient, Strong and Brave' provided an opportunity to reestablish contact with a large and diverse network of key Western Australian stakeholders. ACCAN was a sponsor of the Conference.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE

ACCAN attended the national Financial Counselling Australia conference in Canberra in May 2023. The conference provided the opportunity for ACCAN to be part of the discussion regarding the issue of financial stress for communications consumers.

ACCESSIBLE TELECOMS



ACCAN's continued delivery of the Accessible Telecoms service has been secured through to FY 2025 under a 2-year Commonwealth grant awarded in May 2023.

ACCAN has been delivering the Accessible Telecoms service for six years, providing independent and up-to-date information about the accessibility features of all phone handsets and tablets available in the Australian market. Additionally, the service provides information about device accessories, device training

opportunities, the National Relay Service, user scenarios and a library of relevant accessible telecommunications articles useful for seniors and people with disability.

The service is freely available via website, national freecall phone, webchat, SMS, and email. The service receives more than 10,000 combined contacts per month.

The guarantee of funding for the next 2 years will enable the service to grow its reach and continue to provide an easy to use, consumer-focused

information resource that benefits telecommunications consumers and telecommunications providers more broadly.



2 022-23 has been a significant year for the ACCAN policy team, which has submitted to a broad range of consultations across our six major policy priority areas: affordable telecommunications for all, a fairer telco market, better infrastructure, growing consumer confidence, improved accessibility, and increased reliability.

AFFORDABLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR ALL

ACCAN has continued to engage with government and industry on delivering affordable telecommunications throughout the year.

The rollout of the School Student Broadband Initiative (SSBI) is a welcome first step to addressing the affordability challenges families face. The SSBI provides up to 30,000 households without internet at home with free access to an NBN connection for up to 12 months.

A key focus for ACCAN throughout the 2022-23 financial year has been the NBN Special Access Undertaking (SAU), which sets out the framework for NBN expenditure, pricing, service standards and access. Engagement on the SAU framework has seen NBN Co put forward material reductions in the price of voice services and commit to a low-income and digital inclusion forum that commenced this year.

In March 2023, we published our policy position on an Independent Plan Comparison Tool (IPCT). An IPCT would provide consumers with independent and complete information about voice, data and broadband services and promote more affordable and competitive communications offerings.

A FAIRER TELCO MARKET

Our work under this policy priority has focused on delivering improved consumer safeguards through advocating for more direct regulation of communications consumer protections.

Throughout the year, ACCAN has engaged extensively with stakeholders on implementing direct regulation leading up to the commencement of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code Review 2024, with further engagement expected in the new financial year.

In March, we published our policy position on the telecommunications registration scheme for carriage service providers. A registration scheme would provide significant benefits for consumers by

creating minimum market entry requirements and streamlining enforcement of consumer protections.

GROWING CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Throughout the year, ACCAN has engaged extensively with a broad range of consultations aimed at improving online safety and privacy protections to ensure consumers can be confident online. ACCAN has been actively engaged with government and industry to reduce scam calls and texts and welcomed the establishment of the National Anti-Scam Centre, which commences operation on 1 July 2023.

ACCAN remains focused on working closely with members and stakeholders to grow consumer confidence by supporting digital ability initiatives and improving consumer awareness of scams and cyber-safety.

IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

It has been a busy year for our Improved Accessibility policy priority. We undertook widespread community engagement on several key issues related to greater access to digital communications for people with disability and seniors. We progressed with work outlined in the Ideal Accessible Communications Roadmap, undertook extensive consultation with the deaf and hard of hearing communities on the National Relay Service and the ACMA Captioning Quality Standard, and we engaged with the disability sector more broadly on the development of a disability-focused digital inclusion strategy. In support of this work, we have partnered with researchers from the University of Sydney to undertake a qualitative research project to identify the digital inclusion barriers faced by people with disability.

BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE

Over the year, ACCAN has engaged extensively with consultations on delivering better infrastructure for regional, rural and remote Australia. We have warmly welcomed the Australian Government's commitment to further investment in these communities.

Further, the Government has adopted ACCAN's recommendations to target funding for infrastructure in First

Nations communities, many of which remain underserved. ACCAN also welcomed the establishment of the First Nations Digital Advisory Group, which will bring First Nations voices to the fore in advising government on the connectivity needs of First Nations consumers.

ACCAN has advocated for improvements to grant guidelines for infrastructure programs to improve their transparency and provide clarity to communities concerning funding allocation. ACCAN continues to engage with the Government on this to ensure that value for money and public benefit remains the key focus in the allocation of funding.

INCREASED RELIABILITY

Reliability of internet and phones has been a continued focus throughout the period, with ACCAN advocating for the strengthening of reliability standards.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the

Arts (DITRDCA) consulted in early 2023 on the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG). The CSG provides critical reliability requirements and consumer protections for regional, rural and remote consumers using voice services over legacy communications infrastructure. The DITRDCA adopted ACCAN's recommendation to extend the CSG, while a further review of the CSG and broader reliability arrangements is undertaken.

ACCAN has actively participated in the Telecommunications Sector Risk and Resilience Profile, a research project being undertaken by the Australian National University focused on developing a holistic view of risks in the telecommunications sector. ACCAN expects our engagement with the project, which will provide a risk baseline for the sector, to continue into the next financial year.

SUBMISSIONS

ACCAN engaged in an extensive range of consultations with industry, government, regulatory and other bodies in 2022-2023. The following submissions can be found on our website.

accan.org.au/submissions

JULY 2022

- Misinformation and Disinformation 2022 Review
- Proposed Variation to the NBN Co Special Access Undertaking

AUGUST 2022

- Regional Mobile Infrastructure Inquiry 2022-23
- New National Cultural Policy Consultation

SEPTEMBER 2022

- RMID1064 - SAU Variation Discussion Paper - August 2022
- DITRDCA proposal to remake The Broadcasting Services Determination
- ACCC Report on Social Media Services Issues Paper
- Proposed Telecommunications Mobile Equipment Air Interface Standard
- A nationally consistent scheme for access to digital records upon death or loss of decision-making capacity
- Exposure Draft – Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Statutory Infrastructure Providers and Other Measures) Bill 2022

OCTOBER 2022

- Consolidated Industry Codes of Practice for the Online Industry (Class 1A and Class 1B Material)
- 5-year Productivity Inquiry: Australia's data and digital dividend
- Consumer Data Right rules - expansion to the telecommunications sector and other operational enhancements
- Consumer Data Right - Exposure draft legislation to enable action initiation

NOVEMBER 2022

- C555:2020 Integrated Public Number Database (IPND)
- Amending the Telecommunications Numbering Plan 2015
- Privacy Legislation Amendment (Enforcement and Other Measures) Bill
- Inquiry into co-investment in multicarrier regional mobile infrastructure
- Mobile Black Spot Program Improving Mobile Coverage Round Grant Opportunity Guidelines

- Australia's 2021-2031 Disability Strategy Consultation

DECEMBER 2022

- Review of rules about reasonable requests for Universal Standard Obligation standard telephone services
- Superfast broadband access service – access determination inquiry
- Draft Telecommunications (Infringement Notice Penalties) Determination 2022
- Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Information Disclosure, National Interest and Other Measures) Bill 2022
- Regulating Buy Now, Pay Later in Australia

JANUARY 2023

- DR C647:2022 NBN Access Transfer Code
- Pre-Budget Submission 2023-2024
- Disability Services Act Consultation

FEBRUARY 2023

- Regional Connectivity Program Round 3 Grant Guidelines

- Record Keeping Rule – NBN Service Performance Consultation Paper
- Digital Platforms: Government consultation on ACCC’s regulatory reform recommendations Consultation Paper
- NBN Co SAU Variation (November 2022)
- Future of Broadcasting: Connected Television Prominence Framework February 2023
- Influence of International Digital Platforms

MARCH 2023

- Inquiry into the Treasury Laws Amendment (Consumer Data Right) Bill 2022
- Scheduled review of Customer Authorisation Industry Guideline (G651:2017)
- Select Committee on the Cost of Living
- Local Number Portability Code Review 2023
- Consolidated Industry Codes of Practice for the Online Industry (Class 1A and Class 1B Material)
- ACMA’s Compliance Priorities 2023-24

- Thematic review of the Customer Service Guarantee
- Privacy Act Review Issues Paper

APRIL 2023

- National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality consultation
- Superfast Broadband Access Service Final Access Determination Draft Instrument
- ACCC Digital platform services inquiry September 2023 interim report on the expanding ecosystems of digital platform service providers Issues Paper
- 2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy Discussion Paper
- Australian Bureau of Statistics 2026 Census topic consultation

MAY 2023

- Inbound Number Portability Consultation 2023
- Mobile Number Portability Consultation 2023
- ACMA Draft Five-year spectrum outlook 2023–28
- Mobile Hardening Network Program

- NBN Special Access Undertaking (SAU) Draft Decision

JUNE 2023

- Proposal to remake the Radio-communications (Labelling) Determination 2013
- Telecommunications Disaster Resilience Innovation program—draft grant opportunity guidelines
- Captioning Target Reduction Order June 2023
- TCP Code discussion paper
- Greenwashing Inquiry
- Response to further materials regarding NBN Special Access Undertaking (SAU) Draft Decision
- Sunsetting of the Television Captioning Standard
- C564:2020 Mobile Phone Base Station Deployment Industry Code
- Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002

INDEPENDENT GRANTS PROGRAM

ACCAN has had another exciting year redeveloping its Independent Grants Program to maximise impact for communications consumers. While the timing of ACCAN's organisational contract extension in May 2022 meant that no new projects commenced this financial year, the opportunity was taken to further strengthen the rules and Guidelines of the program.

In collaboration with the Independent Grants Panel, the Grants Guidelines were improved to better support the participation of community sector organisations in our Program.

As a result, *Research Stream* applications (traditionally university dominated) and *Education & Representation Stream* applications (traditionally community sector dominated) can now both apply for a maximum of \$100,000 for projects up to 2-years duration (previously, *Education & Representation Stream* applications were capped at 1-year maximum duration and were capped at \$50,000). Other improvements to the Guidelines included:

- Greater emphasis on the need for accessible activities and outputs for people with disability, and;
- Greater emphasis on the value of consumer (or their representatives') involvement in projects.



These improvements were implemented for the 2023 Round which opened for applications in January 2023. The 3 members of the Independent Grants Panel (Len Bytheway, Fiona Martin and Robbie Fordyce) are owed a big thank you for again providing a high degree of care and consideration in their assessments. Their collective expertise provided thorough and thoughtful feedback to each applicant, while also noting that the strongest applications to ACCAN's Grants Program (and indeed the strongest projects once

funded) tend to be the ones that are able to demonstrate sincere consumer engagement right from the planning stages of the work.

ACCAN received over \$3 million worth of project requests for the 2023 Round. Ultimately, just over \$500,000 was funded across 7 projects. If you have a project idea, it's never too early to discuss. Contact the Grants Team on grants@accan.org.au or via the NRS if you are thinking of applying in 2024.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

 Our research program provides ACCAN, and the sector, with an easy to use and consumer-focused evidence base on a range of policy issues. See our full range of publicly available resources on the ACCAN website: accan.org.au/research

CONSUMER CHECK-IN: EXPECTATIONS IN 2022

ACCAN commissioned research asking the Australian public about their top concerns when it comes to their communications services. It showed that Australians expect a communications market that is trusted, inclusive, accessible and available for all. The research covered a range of topics explored in the following snapshot reports of the consumer experience in 2022:

AFFORDABILITY SNAPSHOT

Despite the quality and variety of communications services in Australia increasing over time, the affordability of communications continues to be a challenge, with the cost of services often contributing to financial hardship and debt issues for people on low incomes. Given many households are currently facing cost of living pressures, it is more important than ever to make sure communications goods and services are affordable.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS SNAPSHOT

Digital media platforms are fundamental to how Australians communicate and live their daily lives. ACCAN's survey found that consumers:

- find it difficult to change their privacy and safety settings on websites and apps.
- think that digital platforms need to do more to protect users from scams.
- want more interoperability and data portability to give them more choice between the digital platforms they use.

ACCAN found that people who tend to be more digitally excluded, such as older Australians, Australians on lower incomes and rural, regional and remote Australians, were especially likely to be concerned by issues around privacy, safety and choice. This research snapshot illustrated that more needs to be done to make all consumers confident online.

RELIABILITY AND FAIRNESS SNAPSHOT

In the modern digitally-focused world, telecommunications are an essential service, and everyone should have reliable access to the services they need to stay connected. Our communities and small businesses are more reliant on telecommunications than ever before. COVID-19 lockdowns have accelerated our reliance on broadband services and our need to be online for work, education, and to access health and government services. Natural disasters across Australia have also highlighted the need for more reliable and resilient forms of connectivity.

In addition to having reliable services, everyone deserves to be treated fairly when interacting with telecommunications providers. Despite this, poor customer service, unfair treatment of vulnerable consumers and information asymmetry persists in the telecommunications market, causing harm to communications consumers.

ACCAN commissioned a survey to find out what consumers think about the importance and

reliability of telco services, and how easily they are able to find and compare products in the telco market. We found:

1. Consumers expect their phone and internet services to be reliable and work in emergency situations.
2. Mobile phone and home internet connections are deemed to be the most essential connection types.
3. People would like it to be easier to compare information about different phone and internet plans.

TV AND STREAMING SNAPSHOT

ACCAN continues to advocate for consumers as broadcasting converges with telecommunications. While streaming services provide new opportunities for consumers, media policy must continue to recognise the importance of free-to-air broadcast TV to many Australians and especially those that are less digitally included. To better represent the voice of consumers, ACCAN conducted a survey to find out more about how Australians are watching television. We found that:

- Free-to-air TV is still the most popular media channel and remains important to consumers.

- Although video streaming is popular, there are still digital inclusion gaps around who uses streaming services and owns a smart TV.
- Many people use accessibility features like captions and audio description to watch TV, especially young people.

The rise of video streaming places new pressures on the free-to-air broadcasting model, and the Government is reconsidering how broadcast TV is regulated. To access a full range of services, media consumers need to balance multiple accounts, subscriptions and multiple devices including smart phones, tablets and internet connected TV's. Streaming services place new burdens on households' internet bandwidth and data limits. For many reasons, it is important that the interests of consumers are represented in the future of television.

DIRECT DEBIT IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ACCAN worked with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) to explore how consumers experience their billing arrangements, in particular,

Direct Debit, in light of some telcos offering it as the only fee-free option for paying bills. The research showed that some of the payment options offered by telecommunications providers are not suitable for people in vulnerable circumstances, and that some payment options may place unfair financial risk on consumers.

Some of the key findings included:

- One third of consumers have experienced some form of telecommunications payment issue in the past two years.
- 65% of those surveyed had to reduce or go without social activities at some point to afford their utility bills. Of these, more than 50% did so at least once a fortnight.

Our research showed that consumers want options that do not impose additional financial costs on them, and that direct debit can create difficulties without the flexibility to choose when to pay.

PUBLICATIONS



ACCAN (2022) ACCAN Research Snapshot: Affordability, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



ACCAN (2022) ACCAN Research Snapshot: Consumer Expectations – Reliability and Fairness, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



ACCAN (2023) ACCAN Research Snapshot: Direct Debit in Telecommunications, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



ACCAN (2022) ACCAN Research Snapshot: How Australians Watch TV, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



ACCAN (2022) ACCAN Research Snapshot: What Australians Expect from Digital Platforms, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



Sulikowski, D., Brunton, R., & Shin, M. (2022) An assessment of the risks Family Plans present for users vulnerable to domestic and family violence, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.



Duan, S., Molla, A., Deng, H., and Tay, R. (2022) Enhancing digital adaptability of Australian small retail businesses. Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION

1. ACCC Consumer Consultative Committee
2. ACCC/ AER Infrastructure Consultative Committee
3. ACCC Performance Consultative Committee
4. ACCC National Anti-Scam Centre Advisory Board
5. ACMA Consumer Consultative Forum
6. ACMA Numbering Advisory Committee
7. auDA General Advisory Standing Committee
8. Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance Governance Committee
9. Communications Alliance IPND Code Working Committee
10. Communications Alliance Priority Assistance Code Working Committee
11. Communications Alliance Local Number Portability Code Working Committee
12. Communications Alliance Life Threatening and Unwelcome Communications Code Working Group
13. Communications Alliance Integrated Public Number Database (IPND) Working Committee
14. Communications Compliance Advisory Committee
15. Consumers' Federation of Australia Executive Committee
16. DITRDCA Triple Zero Co-ordination Committee
17. DITRDCA Telecommunications Sector Risk & Resilience Profile Steering Committee
18. Internet of Things Alliance of Australia Executive Council
19. International Telecommunications Users Group Board
20. Office of the Australian Information Commissioner Consumer Privacy Network
21. NBN Product Development Forum
22. SBS & ABC Audio Description Advisory Committee
23. Standards Australia JTC 1 Advisory Committee
24. Standards Australia IT 040 ICT Accessibility
25. Standards Australia COPOLCO Mirror Committee
26. Standards Australia QR 015 Complaint Handling
27. Standards Australia Council
28. Standards Australia CS 311 – Vulnerable Consumers
29. Standards Australia Nominating Organisations Forum
30. Telco Authority NSW
31. Telstra CEO and Consumer Roundtable
32. Telstra Disability Forum
33. TIO Consumer Panel
34. TIO Board Nominations Committee

CONSULTATION

ACCAN's advisory forums were again held virtually this year, offering participants from across Australia an opportunity to join our forums without travel, health concerns or time constraints presenting a barrier to their participation.

MEMBERS' ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Members' Advisory Forum (MAF) is to discuss the most important issues from the perspective of ACCAN's members and the people they represent.

The MAF meeting was held on 21 March 2023. Representatives from ACT Council of Social Service, COTA Australia, Consumer Action Law Centre, Country Women's Association of Australia NSW, Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network, NT Council of Social Service, Regional Development Australia NT, SA Council of Social Service, WESNET and Westjustice attended the meeting.

DISABILITY ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Disability Advisory Forum (DAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the disability sector.

The DAF meeting was held on 10 May 2023. Representatives

from the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Blind Citizens Australia, Communications Rights Australia, Deafblind Australia, Deafness Forum of Australia, Disability Rights Centre, Disability Voices Tasmania, Hearing Connections, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Physical Disability Council of NSW, Spinal Cord Injuries Australia, STAR Victoria and Vision Australia attended the meeting.

SMALL BUSINESS ADVISORY FORUM

The purpose of the Small Business Advisory Forum (SBAF) is to discuss the most important telecommunications consumer issues from the perspective of key representatives in the small business environment.

The SBAF was held on 24 May 2023. Representatives from .au Domain Administration Limited, Australian Digital and Telecommunication Industry, Australian Small Business Family Enterprise Ombudsman's Office, Business Olympian Group, Business NSW, Council of Small

Business Organisations Australia, Hearing Connections, NSW Small Business Commissioner's Office, Small Business Council of Tasmania and Small Biz Matters attended the meeting.

INDIGENOUS STEERING COMMITTEE

Discussions at ACCAN's 2021 Indigenous Advisory Forum in Lismore, NSW, resulted in the decision that an Indigenous Steering Committee would be formed to develop policies that advance the digital inclusion of First Nations communities..

The 2023 Indigenous Steering Committee Co-chairs Talei Elu and Jesse King called the committee together on 30 March 2023 via videoconferencing. The Committee includes representatives from New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, Consumer Action Law Centre, First Nations Media Australia, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Queensland University of Technology, Regional Enterprise Development Institute and RMIT University.

ORGANISATIONAL MEMBERS

AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

- 2508+Disconnected
- Able Australia
- Acceleon Pty Ltd
- AccessPlus WA Deaf
- Achieve Australia
- ACT Council of Social Service Inc
- Adult Learning Australia
- Association of Independent Retirees
- auDA - .au Domain Administration
- Australian Council of Social Service
- Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
- Australian Privacy Foundation
- Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association
- Benevolent Society (The)
- Better Internet for Rural, Regional & Remote Australia
- Blind Citizens Australia
- CARE Inc.
- Central Land Council
- Centre for Accessibility Australia
- Centre for Appropriate Technology
- Centre for Inclusive Design
- CHOICE
- Combined Pensioners & Superannuants Association of NSW Inc.
- Communication Rights Australia
- Community Broadcasting Association of Australia
- Community Legal Centres NSW
- Consumer Action Law Centre
- Consumer Credit Legal Service WA
- Consumer Policy Research Centre
- Consumers' Association of South Australia
- Consumers' Federation of Australia
- Cotton Australia
- Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia
- Council on the Ageing (WA) Inc.
- Council on the Ageing Australia
- Deaf Australia
- Deafblind Australia
- Deafness Forum of Australia
- Desert Knowledge Australia
- Differently Abled People Association Inc.
- Digital Gap Initiative Ltd
- Digital Literacy Foundation (formerly Leep NGO Inc.)
- Digital Tasmania
- Electronic Frontiers Australia
- Ethnic Communities Council of WA
- Expression Australia
- Family Drug Support
- Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia
- Financial Counselling Australia
- Financial Counselling Victoria Inc
- Financial Counsellors Association of Queensland
- Financial Counsellors Association of Western Australia
- Financial Rights Legal Centre
- HK Training & Consultancy Pty Ltd
- IDEAS NSW
- Illawarra Legal Centre Inc
- Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd
- Indigenous Remote Communications Association
- Infoxchange
- Inner Sydney Regional Council for Social Development
- Internet Australia
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association NSW
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association Queensland
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association South Australia
- Isolated Children's Parents' Association WA
- itControl
- Macdonald Valley Association
- MoneyMob Talkabout Limited
- National Association of Community Legal Centres
- National Children's and Youth Law Centre
- National Council of Women of Australia
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- National Farmers' Federation
- North Melbourne Language and Learning
- NSW Council of Social Service
- NSW Farmers Association
- People with Disabilities WA
- People with Disability Australia
- Physical Disability Australia
- Physical Disability Council of NSW
- Public Interest Advocacy Centre
- Queensland Consumers Association
- Queensland Council of Social Service
- Redfern Legal Centre
- Regional Development Australia Northern Territory Inc
- Scope (Aust) Ltd
- Soundfair (formerly Better Hearing Australia)
- South Australian Financial Counsellors Association
- Tenants Queensland Inc.
- Think+DO Tank Foundation Limited
- Uniting Care Wesley Bowden
- Vision Australia
- Wamboin Communications Action Group
- Westjustice
- Women with Disabilities Australia
- Women's Legal Service NSW
- Women's Legal Services Australia
- Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

ACCAN LIFE MEMBERS

Mr Andrew Stewart was awarded ACCAN Life Membership at the 2022 AGM.

Andrew has been a life-long champion for people with disabilities, particularly the deaf and hard of hearing.

He has brought that commitment to consumers through his early involvement with ACCAN's predecessor organisation CTN, and his support over the years to ACCAN.

He has been an exceptional contributor to ACCAN campaigns and policy work and an outstanding advocate for people with disabilities in a number of CTN and ACCAN fora, and a strong advocate on the many committees and panels he has participated in.

He brings to ACCAN a wealth of knowledge and experience that includes:

- His involvement in drafting the first disability standard on acoustic coupling;
- His involvement with Print-a-Call and later, establishment of Hearing Connections in the provision of both assistive devices and advice on their use
- His championing the issues of the compatibility of hearing aids with mobile phones and, later, the compatibility of teletypewriters with the NBN
- His involvement with ACCAN's Accessible Telecoms Project

ACCAN, its members and so many of the consumers we serve owe a huge debt of gratitude to Andrew for his knowledge, his expertise and his commitment to people with disabilities.

Andrew joins the following ACCAN Life Members:

- Gunela Astbrink
- Ian Binnie
- Nan Bosler AM
- Gerard Goggin
- Johanna Plante
- Sue Salthouse AM (deceased)
- Nigel Waters
- Robin Wilkinson

ACCAN BOARD



Keith Besgrove
Elected: 2019
Term Ends: 2025



Chris Dodds
Re-elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



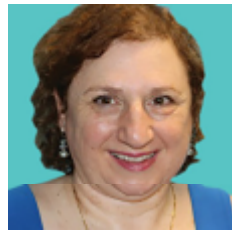
Gareth Downing
Elected: 2020
Resigned: 2022



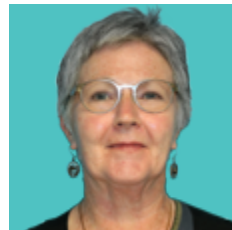
Scott Hollier
Co-opted 2022



Vince Humphries
Elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



Nadia Moffatt OAM
Elected: 2016
Term Ended: 2022



Deirdre O'Donnell PSM
Elected: 2017
Resigned: 2022



Holly Raiche
Elected: 2017
Term Ends: 2023



Delia Rickard PSM
Co-opted 2022



Victoria Rubensohn
Re-elected: 2021
Term Ends: 2024



Julian Thomas
Elected: 2018
Term Ends: 2024



Sarah Wilson
Elected: 2016
Term Ended: 2022



Scott Winch
Elected: 2022
Term Ends: 2025



Address: PO Box A1158
Sydney South, NSW 1235

Email: info@accan.org.au

Phone: (02) 9288 4000

You can contact
ACCAN through the
National Relay Service:
www.relayservice.gov.au



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**Australian Communications
Consumer Action Network**