#### ABOUT ACCAN

**Our organisation**

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia’s peak body for consumer representation and advocacy in communications. We represent residential consumers and small business including not-for profit organisations in so far as they are consumers. ACCAN focuses on goods and services encompassed by the converging areas of telecommunications, the internet and broadcasting, 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 mission**

ACCAN’s mission is to:

* Campaign for consumers and the public interest, with particular emphasis on the needs of consumers for whom the market is not working.
* Inspire, inform, enable and equip consumers to act in their own interests.
* Research emerging consumer and technology issues.

**Our values**

As an organisation we will:

* Act with courage, integrity and honesty.
* Operate efficiently, effectively and ethically.
* Value diversity and demonstrate best practice in inclusion and accessibility in our work.
* Value volunteers, staff and members for their crucial role in our work.
* Recognise that building constructive relationships with members, our community, industry, regulators, and government is critical to achieving our mission.

#### CHAIR REPORT

I am proud to say that in the past year ACCAN has continued to establish itself firmly as an integral and constructive part of the communications industry landscape. ACCAN ends its third year with confidence having successfully negotiated a new agreement with the Commonwealth which provides for funding until 2017.

Under the funding agreement, ACCAN will continue to receive $2 million per annum from the Commonwealth under Section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* – a sum which is recouped from telecommunications carriers under the *Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997*.

Considering the financial cutbacks experienced by many organisations in recent months, this is a remarkable achievement which recognises the valuable role which ACCAN plays for consumers. ACCAN’s funding model, institutional structure and the professionalism of its operations could even be seen as a model for community and consumer organisations in other fields. It also places a responsibility on ACCAN to be an example to others in the community and consumer sector.

ACCAN’s Annual General Meeting in November 2011 saw two new additions to the Board. Veteran industry expert Holly Raiche along with Carmen Daniels, co-founder of the Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd (ICAN), joined seven returned or ongoing Directors. I sincerely thank Ross Kelso and Kate Obermeyer for their excellent service as Directors on the previous years’ Board.

One of the important decisions taken by the Board early in 2012 was the adoption of a robust corporate partnership policy to ensure that collaborations between ACCAN and industry properly serve the interests of consumers and do not compromise our reputation for fearless and independent advocacy. Another important step has been the completion by the Board of a Review of ACCAN’s Strategic Plan which has seen a useful tightening of our focus on the best ways and means to serve consumers.

I thank the ACCAN staff for their continued professionalism and dedication and in particular acknowledge the leadership of our Chief Executive Officer Teresa Corbin.

I commend the Annual Report to all members and stakeholders – it reminds us all of the significant gains for consumers that ACCAN has achieved in the short period of its existence.

Professor Michael Fraser AM
Chair, ACCAN Board

HIGHLIGHTS ACCAN achieved some significant outcomes for Australian telecommunications consumers in 2011-12. Here are some of the achievements we’re most proud of.

* The findings from the government-led Mid-term Review into ACCAN’s first two years of operations highlighted our effectiveness as a peak body representing Australian telecommunications consumers.
* ACCAN had two representatives on the Steering Committee overseeing the revision of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code, who negotiated with industry to deliver stronger consumer protections in the final version of the TCP Code.
* As a result of our Fair Calls For All campaign, the ACMA has committed to making calls from mobile phones to 1800 numbers free and 13 numbers a low fixed charge from 1st January 2015.
* Our submission regarding the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) was influential in a number of recommendations in the final DBCDE report, including a move to a unitary governance structure that includes equal consumer and industry representation.
* ACCAN’s policy, campaigns and communications team presented at a number of national and international conferences, including the OECD’s Committee on Consumer Policy in France by ACCAN Director of Policy & Campaigns Elissa Freeman.
* Based on ACCAN recommendations, NBN Co has introduced a formal, regular consumer group consultation process to ensure consumer needs are represented as the National Broadband Network is rolled out.
* The lobbying of ACCAN and its members led to the amendment of the Broadcasting Services Act to include increased television captioning requirements and improved captioning quality standards.
* We were honoured to receive the 2011 Organisation of the Year Award at the Australian Sign Language Interpreters’ Association (ASLIA) NSW and Deaf Australia (NSW) Awards ceremony.
* Research and how-to guides funded through the ACCAN Grants Scheme and produced by Media Access Australia helped to make Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media tools more accessible for people with disability.
* The *Mobile Matters* report by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, funded by the ACCAN Grants Scheme. This project involved over 100 students from Melbourne who conducted peer research into youth use of mobile phones and created student advocacy projects, culminating in a presentation day at Melbourne Town Hall to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, industry, peers and community members.

#### CEO OVERVIEW

This year, ACCAN has delivered on the goal of providing a stronger, more co-ordinated consumer voice to balance industry perspectives in the communications sector. In the three years since being incorporated we have built an evidence base for consumer advocacy, established a well regarded grants scheme and developed policy positions which are backed by co-ordinated consultation. We have also made over 100 submissions to government and regulatory inquiries.

In 2011-12 ACCAN underwent a Mid-term Review conducted by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. More than 25 submissions were made by a range of our stakeholders including industry, our members, regulatory authorities and other consumer organisations. The Review found that ACCAN has established itself as a well-regarded and effective organisation representing the interests of consumers in the telecommunications sector. Importantly, all submissions to the Review supported the ongoing operation of ACCAN.

ACCAN’s greatest success is that as a peak body we have united and amplified consumer voices to improve access to communications in Australia. For this reason many of ACCAN’s successes cannot be attributed to ACCAN’s efforts alone but to a suite of people and organisations that make each achievement possible.

2012 saw the completion of two years working with industry body Communications Alliance to deliver a much stronger Telecommunications Consumer Protections (TCP) Code. The Code contains significant improvements that will better help customers choose the right product for them through clearer advertising, the introduction of usage notification requirements, and better complaint handling processes.

While it is important for every organisation to take time to celebrate its successes, as a consumer organisation we are always looking to the next issue affecting consumers, the next campaign – the areas in which we see consumers are suffering the most detriment.

We’re currently working on issues as broad as cloud computing, copyright and comparative pricing of IT products in Australia and overseas. We are conducting research into the needs of small business, investigating perennial problem products such as international calling cards, silent-line charging, improvements that will result in quality captions for television broadcasts and mobile coverage issues for regional consumers.

All of ACCAN’s achievements over the past year that are outlined in this annual report have been built on the advice, interests and experience of ACCAN members who are at the core of what we do. We thank you for supporting our work and for your valuable contribution.

Finally I must thank both my staff team and the Board for their support and tireless efforts over the past year. It is an enormous privilege to work with so many committed people to achieve better outcomes for all communications consumers.

Teresa Corbin
Chief Executive Officer, ACCAN

#### POLICY & CAMPAIGNS

The 2011-12 period has been an extraordinarily demanding one. We have made the consumer voice heard on topics as diverse as payphone removal policies and Telstra retail price controls, to big picture issues like the Convergence Review and the reform of the Universal Service Obligation (USO).

The cascade of regulatory reforms that came about as a result of the NBN, including the establishment of the new Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency (TUSMA), are now behind us and along the way ACCAN made many submissions that helped to put consumers at the forefront of government thinking.

At the same time we contributed to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s consultations on the change-over from the Telstra copper network to NBN Co’s fibre network. The “migration plan” and Telstra’s “structural separation undertaking” represent a big change that will ultimately affect all Australians and ACCAN has been there every step of the way ensuring that the public isn’t forgotten amidst the deal making.

We are actively involved in NBN rollout issues that are of concern to consumers such as the provision of backup batteries and the accessibility and design of the NBN box that will soon be going into millions of homes.

The marathon review of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code and the finalisation of a new Code proved what ACCAN advocacy can achieve. The last year saw ACCAN holding regulators to their promises of improved protection from industry on the issues of advertising clarity, pre-sale information, complaint handling and expenditure management and scoring wins in the new Code that are there in black and white for everyone to see.

Meanwhile, we continued our active and dynamic advocacy to improve accessibility to communications services for people with disability. We consulted effectively and widely on the Federal Government’s Review of Access to Telecommunications by People with Disability, Older Australians and People Experiencing Illness, resulting in a powerful submission that will guide policy into the future. Our liaison with key stakeholders led to a united position statement on mobile access to emergency services for people with disability, while our work with the National Relay Service Consultative Committee resulted in the prioritisation of 000 emergency calls, improvements to the internet relay service and connection to local services for NRS users calling 1800 and 1300 numbers.

We also celebrated big wins with changes to the *Broadcasting Services Act* (1992) which will mean increases in and improvements to television captioning, while our work with government to ensure blind low-income consumers are not left behind in the switch to digital television has resulted in the provision of talking set-top boxes to this group.

Our focus in regional telecommunications over the year was on three main areas – mobile coverage, the communications needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and other consumer and small business issues. We made a substantial contribution to the work of the Sinclair Review into regional telecommunications; with 15 of the recommendations highlighting key actions to improve the deal regional communities are currently getting from government and the telecommunications industry.

The policy team here at ACCAN has worked hard to achieve these significant gains for consumers over the year, and to ensure we remain a key part of the conversation in our communications future. We look forward to an equally challenging year ahead that builds on our past gains.

Una Lawrence
Director of Policy and Campaigns

#### 13/1800 number reform

From 1 January 2015 Australians will be able to call 13 and 1800 numbers from mobile phones for the same price as they would from a landline service. Currently, “freephone” 1800 calls can cost mobile users over $1 per minute and 13 calls are charged at similar rates.

After ACCAN launched its Fair Calls For All campaign in 2011, we recruited over 70 organisations and 1000 individuals to our cause. Supporters wrote letters, sent emails, contacted telecommunications providers and MPs and even joined us for special events with our campaign superhero, Number Woman.

In April 2012 the Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) made an in-principal decision that from 1 January 2015 calls to 1800/13 numbers from mobile phones will be free or the cost of a local call. This exciting announcement was the result of over 18 months of campaigning by Fair Calls For All supporters.

Watch a video about how Fair Calls For All has helped communications consumers at: [www.accan.org.au/numberwoman](http://www.accan.org.au/numberwoman)

#### COMMITTEES

Members of the ACCAN team represent consumers on a range of government, industry and regulatory committees.

**Committee** **Organising body**

* Consumer Consultative Forum – Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)
* Closed Caption Committee – ACMA
* Emergency Call Services Advisory Committee – ACMA
* Numbering Advisory Committee – ACMA
* National Relay Service Consumer Consultative Committee – ACMA
* Consumer Consultative Committee – Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
* Infrastructure Consultative Committee – ACCC
* Electromagnetic Energy Reference Group – Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
* Executive Committee – Consumers’ Federation of Australia
* Consumer Expert Group – Digital Switchover Taskforce
* NBN Public Information Material - Consumer Stakeholder Group – NBN Co
* National Standing Committee on Cloud Computing – Global Access Partners
* Consumer Liaison Forum – Optus
* IT-038 Distributed Application Platform and Services – Standards Australia
* Joint Technical Committee 1 Standing Advisory Group – Standards Australia
* Telstra Disability Forum – Telstra
* Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Council
* Board & Council Transition Committee – Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

#### STANDING ADVISORY COMMITTEES

ACCAN has two Standing Advisory Committees whose members help inform our policy positions and campaign areas. We’d like to thank the following individuals for their time and expertise over the past year.

**Standing Advisory Committee Consumer Affairs**

* Johanna Plant – Chair (ACCAN Board member)
* Andrew Crouch – Centre for Appropriate Technology
* Karen Ness – Northern Rivers Community Legal Centre
* Ian Butterworth
* Jo Benvenuti – Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre
* John Wood
* Loretta Kreet
* Rachel Milfull – AFCRA
* Victoria Rubensohn

**Standing Advisory Committee Disability Issues**

* Kyle Miers – Chair (ACCAN Board)
* Scott Hollier – Media Access Australia
* Andrew Stewart – Deafness Forum
* Lachlan Hazelton – Physical Disability Council NSW
* Denise Wood – University of South Australia
* Kim Curtis – First Peoples Disability Network
* David Parker – Deaf Australia (resigned October 2011)
* Cathy Clark – Deaf Australia (appointed January 2012)
* Nick Rushworth – Brain Injury Australia (resigned)
* Hank Wyllie

#### CONSUMER AWARENESS

Over the past two years ACCAN has endeavoured to raise its profile as the peak communications advocate for all Australian consumers. Importantly, we are increasingly recognised as a ‘go to’ point for reliable consumer communications information.

We communicate with various audiences in many different ways. We have had an average of 4,437 visitors to our website per month over the past year and numerous hits on our YouTube channel. ACCAN is also actively engaged in communicating via Twitter, with around 1,200 followers.

We have also developed a significant media profile with an average of 60 interviews per month. ACCAN routinely shares its content, including our popular tip sheets, with the mainstream media in order to reach large numbers of consumers. Television interviews with our spokespeople garner the biggest audiences, whereas online news sites generate the most traffic to our website, which offers consumers more detailed information.

In 2011-12 there has been a high level of media and public interest on a range of consumer-related telecommunications issues, including bill shock, high-profile privacy breaches, record complaint numbers to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, the National Broadband Network, and increasingly, issues like global roaming and in-app purchases.

In 2011 we launched our first issue of ACCAN Magazine, a quarterly publication featuring news, consumer tips, interviews with key industry figures, member profiles, and information about our grants and policy work. Each issue of ACCAN Magazine is centred on a different area of telecommunications: *The Numbers Game* (Winter 2011) on 13/1800 numbering arrangements; *Our Broadband Future* (Spring 2011) on various broadband issues; *Bush Telegraph* (Summer 2012) on regional and remote telecommunications; and *Access All Areas* (Autumn 2012) on accessibility issues.

We continue to try to find new channels and new ways of reaching different audiences. It remains our firm belief that there’s no point in consumers having rights if they don’t know about them, and we remain committed to finding ways to ensure that they do.

Elise Davidson
Media & Communications Manager

#### SUBMISSIONS

ACCAN’s policy team made a number of submissions to government, regulatory and other inquiries in 2011-2013. All of our submissions can be found in full online at: accan.org.au/submissions

* DBCDE, Broadcasting Services Amendment (Improved access to television services) Bill 2012, 7 May 2012
* NBN Co, Joint Parliamentary Committee on the NBN, 27 April 2012
* ACCC, NBN Co Special Access Undertaking, 27 April 2012
* ASTRA, Subscription Broadcast Television: Codes of Practice 2012, 27 April 2012
* ACMA, The Future Technical Evolution of Digital Terrestrial Television, 30 March 2012
* Attorney General’s Department, National Human Rights Action Plan, 13 March 2012
* Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Access and Equity Inquiry, 19 February 2012
* ACMA, Telephone Numbering: Future Directions, 29 February 2012
* ACMA, Guidelines for Payphone Removal and Location Decisions, 18 January 2012
* Attorney General’s Department, Inclusive Communication Guidelines for Emergency Matters, 18 January 2012
* Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, Regional Telecommunications Review, 20 December 2011
* DBCDE, Review of the Integrated Public Number Database, 20 December 2011
* Senate Environment and Communications Committee Inquiry, TUSMA Bills, 9 December 2011
* DBCDE, Review of Telstra retail price controls, 9 December 2011
* DBCDE, ACCAN Mid-Term Review, 2 December 2011
* Communications Alliance, Response to Draft TCP Code
* ACMA, Numbering: Calls to freephone and local rate numbers, the way forward, 1 December 2011
* ACMA, Payphone Record-Keeping Rules, 4 November 2011
* DBCDE, Convergence Review, 4 November, 2011
* Communications Alliance, Mobile Premium Services Code Review, 13 October 2011
* ACCC, NBN-Optus HFC Agreement, 10 October 2011
* ACCC, Telstra’s Structural Separation Undertaking, 4 October 2011
* DBCDE, Payphones: Consumer Safeguard Instruments, 3 October 2011
* Attorney General’s Department, Response to the Draft Human Rights Baseline Study
* DBCDE, Review of Access to Telecommunications Services by People with Disability, Older Australians and People Experiencing Illness, 2 September 2011
* DBCDE, Digital hubs draft program guidelines, 30 August 2011
* DBCDE, Discussion Paper on Universal Service Obligation Legislative Reform for Transition to the National Broadband Network, 16 August 2011
* House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Inquiry into the operation of the insurance industry during disaster events, 12 August 2011
* ACCC, Domestic Mobile Terminating Access Service, 27 July 2011
* ACMA, Reconnecting the Customer draft report, July 2011
* ACMA, Numbering consultation paper 4, 6 July 2011

**Position statements**

* Access for People with Disability to Emergency Calls, 4 November 2011
* ICT Procurement, 29 August 2011

#### PUBLICATIONS

Footscray Community Legal Centre, 2012. *Phones and the Internet: Your Rights in Australia A community education program for refugees and new migrants,* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Tibben, W. J. and Astbrink, G. 2012, *Accessible Communications: Tapping the potential in public ICT procurement policy*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Greenstock, L., Naccarella, L., Woodward Kron, R., Elliott, K., Bingham, A., Kelly, P., Fraser, C., and Wickham, B., Australian Health Workforce Institute and General Practice Victoria, 2012. *Telecommunications and Health Information for Multicultural Australia*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Hillier, S., Media Access Australia 2012. *Sociability: social media for people with a disability*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

ACCAN, 2012. (updated) NBN: A Guide for Consumers, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Fieldgrass, Leo. Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2011, *Mobile Matters:* *The Youth Advocates Project. Developing a youth participatory action research and advocacy program*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Deakin University 2011, *Seeking Straight Answers: Consumer Decision-Making in Telecommunications,* Australian Communications and Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Leung, L. 2011. *Mind the Gap: refugees and communications technology literacy*, Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

Novita Children’s Services 2011, *The Newell Network: Telecommunication solutions for people with complex communication needs,* Australian Communications Consumer Action Network, Sydney.

#### GRANTS

The ACCAN Grants Scheme continues to grow in strength. We are committed to ensuring the continuing high quality of this scheme by conducting regular reviews and working closely with applicants to promote research rigour as well as impact within the advocacy and education spheres.

The 2012 round received 75 applications, of which 58 were eligible for assessment by the Independent Grants Panel. Application and preliminary assessment processes are now completed online, with positive feedback from applicants and Panel members regarding the support provided.

Five grant projects were completed over the year providing direct education and advocacy tools, as well as adding to our research base. Educational materials targeting refugee groups, who are often experiencing telephone contracts for the first time, have been produced and distributed across community legal centres. Cyberbullying workshops were conducted for the first time in remote NSW schools in a culturally appropriate way. Our research base has been enhanced with an investigatory study on the use of telecommunications by low-income migrant communities in accessing health services, as well as a comprehensive benchmarking study on OECD government policies on the acquisition of ICT goods and services that are usable by people with disability. A comparison of popular social media systems was made to determine how suitable they are for people with disability, with many found to be seriously deficient. To counteract this, a series of helpful – and very popular – guides have been produced and distributed (see Sociability, page 13).

**Grants Scheme projects completed in 2011-2012**

* *Sociability: Social Media for People with a Disability* conducted by Media Access Australia
* *Telecommunications and Health Information for Multicultural Australia* conducted by the Australian Health Workforce Institute
* *Phones and the Internet: Your Rights in Australia* produced by the Footscray Community Legal Centre
* *Accessible Communications: Tapping the potential in public ICT procurement policy* by the University of Wollongong and GSA Consultants
* *Think B4 U Click* Cyberbullying project by the Women’s Legal Services NSW

**Sociability: social media for people with a disability**

Social media is what allows anyone with an internet connection to publish their own content and connect with other people. Through it, we receive a wealth of information and interaction.

For people with a hearing, sight or mobility impairment, social media websites and applications can be difficult to use. In late 2011, Media Access Australia undertook research to determine how the accessibility issues found in each of the most popular social media tools can be overcome.

The Sociability: social media for people with a disabilityreview aims to enable all users to have equal access to the inclusion which social media allows.

Australia’s most popular social media tools were tested for their accessibility. Users with disability then contributed their tips and tricks on how to overcome each social network’s inaccessible features.

This project was led by accessibility expert Dr Scott Hollier from Media Access Australia and supported through the ACCAN Grants Scheme.

The Sociability Guides have been distributed to disability organisations around Australia. They’re also available online via [accan.org.au/socialmediaguides](http://www.accan.org.au/socialmediaguides)

**ICAN community linkages program**

In 2012 ACCAN partnered with the Indigenous Consumers Assistance Network (ICAN) to conduct research into telecommunications issues Indigenous consumers are experiencing in Far North Queensland. As part of the project, we have been working closely with ICAN staff; travelling to the areas ICAN provides financial counselling services in order to document what’s happening to consumers in remote parts of the country.

So far, ACCAN Policy and Campaigns Officer Erin Turner has visited ICAN financial counselling services in Cairns, Yarrahbah and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. The report will also include additional personal stories drawn directly from ICAN’s casework and an outline of where further research may be needed. The report will be released later in 2012.