

**For immediate release 1 September, 2015**



# ACCAN’s 2015 National Conference explores affordability issues

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network ([ACCAN](http://www.accan.org.au/)) has today kicked off its 2015 National Conference, [*Dollars and Bytes – Communications affordability now and tomorrow*](http://www.accan.org.au/accanevents/1053-conference-2015)*.* The Conference, held in Sydney from 1-2 September, will explore the wide-ranging issue of affordability. Affordability of telecommunications services, along with accessibility and availability, are key focus areas for ACCAN.

Affordability is becoming increasingly important as access to telecommunications services is essential for full economic, social and cultural participation. The main method of communicating with many Government agencies is now through online channels. With the implementation of the Federal Government’s Digital First Strategy, this is set to become even more widespread. The strategy will require all Government services and public interactions to be available online by 2017. The formation of the Digital Transformation Office (DTO) will help the Government implement this strategy. The inaugural DTO CEO, Paul Shetler, will deliver a presentation at the Conference.

“Technology allows us to complete many tasks from the comfort of our homes, but questions regarding the affordability, accessibility and availability of communications services need to be addressed so there is equitable access to essential Government services and those from other organisations,” said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. “Affordability, along with a range of other issues, is often cited as a main barrier to getting connected to the internet and may present issues for some consumers to access services.”

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [published findings](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8A12E6E0D07D36A0CA257C89000E3FB7?opendocument) in 2014 that show 98 per cent of households with a household income of $120,000 or more had internet access, compared to only 57 per cent of households with a household income of less than $40,000. A [2013 study](http://www.accan.org.au/our-work/research/711-affordability-for-low-income-consumers) conducted by Anglicare Victoria found that 50 per cent of those on low incomes cannot afford internet access.

“For low-income earners, seniors and other groups, affordability is a barrier to accessing essential online services like Centrelink and Medicare. At our National Conference we’ll be exploring these issues and starting conversations around what we can do to achieve equitable access for all Australians and close the ‘affordability divide.’”

This year the keynote speaker is Claire Milne, MBE, Visiting Senior Fellow, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics. Claire has had an illustrious career in the UK telecoms sector holding management roles with BT and as a consultant, first with Ovum and then in her own company, Antelope Consulting. Claire was previously the Chair of the Consumer Forum for Communications at Ofcom from 2008-2014.

This year’s ACCAN Conference will feature over 50 speakers and panellists representing the telecommunications industry, Government, regulators and consumer groups. The opening address will be delivered by The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, Minister for Communications. Other presenters include: ACCC Chairman, Rod Sims, The Hon. Michelle Rowland MP and Deena Shiff, Chair of the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee. Sessions at the Conference cover a range of topics including affordability research, the real experience for consumers, pricing and digital inclusion.

Visit the [event website](https://www.regonline.com.au/builder/site/default.aspx?EventID=1726494) for more information on the Conference. Follow ACCAN on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ACCAN_AU) or [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/accanau?_rdr=p) for the latest updates. You can also join the affordability conversation in our [Ideas Garden](http://www.accan.org.au/accanevents/ideas-garden).

**Media contact:** Luke Sutton on 0409 966 931 or [luke.sutton@accan.org.au](mailto:luke.sutton@accan.org.au)