



On behalf of Broome Circle, we welcome the opportunity to respond to the Department's Discussion Paper on the better delivery of universal services.

Reliable telephone, payphone and broadband connectivity is critical, particularly for people living and working in regional and remote Australia.

The USO should continue to support the deployment and operation of payphones in regional and remote communities. They are an important part of the telecommunication services delivered to Australian people, including those living in vulnerable and isolated communities.

We applaud the initiatives of Telstra to make these payphones free to all Australians and their plans to expand free Wi-Fi as a service for vulnerable customers.

Additionally, we believe and support the fundamental principles of what a universal service obligation provides. The future of the universal service obligation must continue to effectively safeguard our remote community's access to fixed phone, payphone, and broadband services.

We have experienced many examples where the USO is critical in life saving situations where remote communities do not have access to mobile and 000 networks. Payphones can often be the last line of defense as a lifeline to report and seek assistance for issues including life threatening situations, elder abuse, loss of mobile handsets and loss of connectivity.

I have seen firsthand the importance of the USO in the provision of a basic landline service and whilst I encourage and implore progress to improve these standards, we simply cannot lose sight of the importance of basic telephone communications.

We understand that reforms will involve moving away from legacy technologies such as copper lines. These technologies are no longer the best option to meet our needs and continuing to use them risks holding our communities back.

We support changes to the USO that allows Telstra to deliver fixed and broadband services through the best available technologies. To that end the regulation should be neutral on technology and not specify how it is delivered, while ensuring certain safeguards are maintained.

Remote communities are resilient by nature but do require mechanisms such as the USO to protect and preserve our basic rights and we are very passionate about our rights to connect, be heard, and have access to modern day connectivity.

My personal experience as a financial counsellor having travelled to remote communities across Northern Territory and Western Australia is that it is absolutely critical that there is access to reliable telephone, payphone and broadband connectivity and this could potentially save someone's life, and it is with great sadness that a First Nation person's his life was lost simply because there was no connectivity, land line or a free payphone in a very remote community in the NT.



The preventable death of anyone person should never have happened, and we are pleased that the very community now has access to a telephone, and we are all hopeful that continuity of a reliable phone service such as a free payphone is of utmost importance, we are not averse to progress with technology but let's make the communities safe.

In the communities where we work in WA there are always barriers to communication, if for instance First Nation person has a phone, they may not have credit, if they do have credit they may not have reception, if there is reception and credit the phone may be broken so it is critical for remote communities to have a continuation of safe and available service at the very least a free and working payphone as the remoteness of the communities must not be underestimated, there are vulnerable people that in some cases having access to a reliable phone can make the difference between life and death situation.

Looking forward to a continuous service of free pay phones for the most vulnerable communities where we work, it is an essential service that must not be underestimated, we support technological progress but the ability to call 000 can save lives and the continuity of fixed phone services is of paramount importance.

Kind regards

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