



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications

Funding of telecommunications consumer representation grants

Annual Report 2020-21

November 2021



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Purpose of Section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997

Section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997 (Telco Act) provides for the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts (Minister) to make grants of financial assistance to:

- consumer bodies for purposes in connection with the representation of the interests of consumers in relation to telecommunications issues; and
- persons or bodies for purposes in connection with research into social, economic, environmental or technological implications of developments relating to telecommunications.

Funding provided 2020-21

In 2020–21, funding under section 593 of the Telco Act was provided only to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). This funding was provided under contract between ACCAN and the then-Department of Communications and the Arts (the Funding Agreement). ACCAN was provided with \$2,358,000 (GST-exclusive) for the 2020–21 financial year. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications administers the section 593 grants.

Each quarterly payment to ACCAN under the Funding Agreement is subject to quarterly assessment of the six Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and related activities, set out in the Funding Agreement.

The funding provided to ACCAN under section 593 of the Telco Act is recovered from the annual carrier licence charge imposed on eligible carrier licences under the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997.

Assessment of ACCAN's general performance

Quarterly progress reports provided to the Department in 2020–21 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement milestones. ACCAN published its 2020–21 Annual Report on its website on 6 December 2021. The report showed that over the financial year ACCAN:

- represented consumer interests on 34 government, industry and regulatory committees;
- made 62 submissions to government, regulatory and other inquiries, most of which are available at www.accan.org.au/submissions;
- raised consumer awareness, with regular blogs, and updated consumer resources, achieving 918 media mentions, and attracting 127,266 website visits;
- saw its social media audience grow to 5,030 followers across Twitter and Facebook;
- launched ACCANect an online series which provides a platform for telecommunications consumers to hear from leading voices in the telco sector about the key communications issues that are impacting consumers today and into the future;
- published five research reports covering the cost of wait times for consumers when resolving issues with telecommunications companies, a remote Indigenous communications review, young people's experiences with telecommunications services, understanding

telecommunications affordability for low income consumers and a survey of small business' experiences with their telecommunications during the pandemic.

- issued 9 media releases on telecommunications consumer issues including nbn pricing, the Australian Human Rights Commission's support for a concessional broadband rate for low-income households, the renewal of the telco COVID-19 principles, reliability of broadband services, and ACCAN's research into the communications concerns of remote Indigenous communities.

ACCAN reported a decrease in membership to 108 organisational and 92 individual members in 2020–21, compared to 109 organisational and 96 individual members in 2019–20. Organisational membership comprised of groups from disability advocacy, remote and rural consumers, indigenous organisations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, and others from across Australia.

ACCAN held all of its four advisory forums virtually during the 2020–21 period, which included the Indigenous Advisory Forum, the Members Advisory Forum, the Small Business Advisory Forum and the Disability Advisory Forum.

Financial accounts

There were no significant changes in the nature of ACCAN's activities during the financial year. The independent auditor of ACCAN's financial accounts found that the accounts were prepared in accordance with the Corporations Act 2001 and:

- gave a true and fair view of ACCAN's financial position at 30 June 2021 and its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- complied with Australian Accounting Standards—Reduced Disclosure Requirements, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, and Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013, and the Corporations Regulations 2001.

Independent Grants Program

ACCAN administers a competitive Independent Grants Program (IGP) in accordance with its Funding Agreement.

2019 grants round

Five projects funded under the 2019 grant rounds required extra time to complete their project after 30 June 2019 as a result of delays due to the impacts of COVID-19 and, as a result, the final milestone payments were paid in the 2020–21 financial year.

The Westjustice grant contract was mutually terminated at the end of June 2021 as COVID-19 impacts resulted in an inability to complete the project. Unspent funds (\$30,000) were rolled over to the 2021 grant program.

Table 1: 2019 grants round projects funded in 2020-21

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2020-21
Monash University—‘Unregulated and segmented dark ads on social media: consumer education and regulatory options’	\$49,579	\$7,979
WESNET—‘Staying Safe: empowering women to navigate privacy, safety and security mobile apps in the Australian marketplace’	\$49,807	\$12,451
First Nations Media Australia—‘Indigenous communities’ experiences and perspectives of digital inclusion’	\$49,670	\$31,670
Deakin University—‘Regulating the Internet of Things to Protect Consumer Privacy’	\$76,195	\$38,097
SACOSS—‘Telecommunications and the Working Poor’	\$99,112	\$24,778
Westjustice—‘Newly-arrived consumers telecommunications advocacy project’	\$50,000 (revised to \$20,000)	\$0

2020 grants round

In 2020–21, ACCAN provided funding to eight recipients who were successful in the 2020 IGP application process (run during the 2019–20 financial year). Activity on these projects commenced in 2020–21.

The projects relate to the Internet of Things, digital inclusion for older adults, the accessibility of carrier websites, children’s privacy, accessibility of streaming services for those with disabilities, regional and rural consumers understanding of smart technologies, improving regional broadband, and e-change and remote work.

Table 2: 2020 grants round projects funded in 2020-21

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2020-21
UTS - Regulating to Protect Security and Privacy in the Consumer Internet of Things (IoT)	\$65,091	\$17,091
RMIT - Co-designing participatory strategies with older adults to reduce perceived risk and promote digital inclusion	\$98,637	\$41,637
Centre for Accessibility - Telcos for all: addressing key accessibility issues faced by consumers on telecommunications carrier websites	\$69,794	\$54,794
ACCM - Apps can trap: tips for protecting children’s privacy	\$48,000	\$38,000
Curtain University - Access On Demand: An Analysis of the Accessibility options on streaming television	\$46,635	\$36,000
Charles Sturt University - Consumer understandings of smart technologies and their applications in North West NSW regional and rural communities	\$16,606	\$10,606
Wamboin Communications Action Group Inc - Achieve better broadband for regional communities	\$50,000	\$25,000
RMIT – E-Change and Remote Work in Australia	\$45,754	\$25,754

Total	\$440,517	\$248,882
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Upcoming 2021 grants round

During the 2020–21 financial year, ACCAN shortlisted five projects for the upcoming 2021 IGP round, to be delivered and funded during the 2021–22 financial year. These projects must be completed by May 2022.