

**FUNDING OF CONSUMER REPRESENTATION
GRANTS PROGRAM IN RELATION TO
TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015

December 2015

A GRANTS PROGRAM ADMINISTERED IN 2014-2015

BY

THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

VIA A CONTRACT WITH

**THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNICATIONS CONSUMER ACTION
NETWORK**

PURPOSE

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

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

FUNDING

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) was established in 2009 to function as the peak body for consumer representation and advocacy in communications through a multi-year Funding Agreement established between ACCAN and the former Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. The initial funding of \$2 million per annum (indexed) has been extended to June 2017 following the mid-term review of ACCAN's operations in 2011–12. Each quarterly payment to ACCAN is subject to assessment of the six Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) specified in the Funding Agreement. All of the Government's funding to ACCAN is recovered from the annual charges placed on the larger telecommunications carriers through section 15 of the *Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997*.

INDEPENDENT GRANTS PROGRAM

Each year, ACCAN administers a competitive Independent Grants Program (IGP) in accordance with its Funding Agreement. The total funding available under the IGP for 2014–2015 was up to \$274,753.53 (ex GST), including funds reserved for overheads such as grants system software licensing, with a maximum of \$60,000 per recipient. Seven institutions were awarded funding in the 2015 round, out of the 58 eligible applications received (see Table 1 below). The projects range from research into affordable access to technology; information resources about consumer rights concerning mobile phones in five key indigenous languages; rights and responsibilities of consumers regarding sharing of 3D printing; a study to gain insight on disabled consumer experiences of subscription video-on-demand (VOD) services; enablers and barriers faced by proxy internet consumers; and improving the communication of privacy information to Consumers.

TABLE 1

Recipient	Amount (\$)
Media Access Australia - <i>Affordable Access</i>	\$55,706
QLD Remote Aboriginal Media - <i>Our Phones, Our Rights: Translated and community-appropriate telecommunications resources for remote indigenous communities</i>	\$49,600
Indigenous Remote Communications Association - <i>Connections and Disconnections: ICT access, usage and preferences in very remote Indigenous communities</i> *	\$25,182
University of Melbourne - <i>Can I download a car?": Emerging consumer issues for online access, communication and sharing of 3D printer files</i>	\$49,267
Curtin University - <i>Accessing Video on Demand: A study of disability and streaming television</i>	\$26,200
Monash University - <i>Going Online on Behalf of Others - an investigation of 'proxy' internet consumers</i>	\$14,572
University of Technology Sydney, CLC - <i>Improving the Communication of Privacy Information to Consumers</i>	\$30,522
TOTAL	\$251,049

* The contract was terminated in October 2015 by mutual agreement and funds returned

Six grant projects were also completed in 2014–15 (see Table 2 below). These included projects which explored a range of issues from enabling secure access to services by Deafblind consumers and developing best practice standards for Auslan translations, to assisting Aboriginal young people to develop a smartphone app to record and explore cultural knowledge.

TABLE 2

IGP Project
Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE – ‘ <i>What standards? The need for evidence-based Auslan translation standards and production guidelines</i> ’
University of Melbourne – ‘ <i>What's ya Story: The making of a digital storytelling app with Aboriginal young people</i> ’
Able Australia – ‘ <i>Assisted Access: Developing a model for fair and secure access to telecommunications customer service for Deafblind Australians</i> ’
Southern Cross University – ‘ <i>Digital Stories: Empowering Low SES Communities to Use the Internet for Services, Education and Empowerment</i> ’
Vision Australia – ‘ <i>Document Accessibility Toolbar (DAT)</i> ’
Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media – ‘ <i>Yarning and Learning: Communication use and issues in remote Indigenous communities</i> ’

ACCAN

Quarterly progress reports for 2014–15 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement Milestones. During its sixth year of operation, ACCAN further consolidated its position as the peak telecommunications consumer representative and advocacy body in Australia. A significant outcome of this year was the launch of the Hardship portal, a set of resources to assist people experiencing financial hardship.

ACCAN publishes the [Annual Report](#) on its website, including an accessible version.

During 2014–15 Marcus Wigan departed from the ACCAN Board after several years of service and Victoria Runbensohn was elected as a new member. ACCAN membership remained at 109, with member organisations representing remote and rural consumers, indigenous organisations, small businesses, farmers, disability groups, financial counsellors and community legal centres from across Australia.

With respect to its consumer advocacy and representation activities during 2014–15, ACCAN:

- Represented consumers interests in over 20 government, industry and regulatory committees;
- Made 41 submissions to government, regulatory and other inquiries all of which are available at <www.accan.org.au/submissions>;
- Continued to engage with Indigenous peoples and communities, including an active presence at the Yabun Festival, Australia’s biggest annual event showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and arts;
- Held an information stall at the multicultural Festival of Eid to interact with the community about their experience with telecommunications services;
- Teamed up with MOSAIC, a pro bono legal service, to run a ‘Bring your bills day’ giving free legal advice to newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who need help with their bills; and
- Consolidated its engagement with industry through quarterly meetings with Communications Alliance, bi-annual meetings with the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, and through regular briefings and issues-specific dialogue with the major providers.

To maintain its position as the pre-eminent consumer organisation for reliable information on communications issues, ACCAN continued to find new channels and ways of reaching different audiences by:

- Launching the small business training website, ‘Digital Ready’ and increasing ACCAN’s interaction with small businesses with a Facebook page and through LinkedIn and YouTube;
- Continuing the ‘Apps for all’ challenge, sponsored by Telstra, to promote the development of accessible mobile apps, and raise awareness of the issues faced by people with disability and older Australians previously excluded from the mobile applications market;

- Participating in workshops held at the National Remote Indigenous Media Festival focused on the importance of remote media organisations to give voice to consumers who otherwise would not have one;
- Relaunching the My Phone Rights app with updated consumer information and Auslan translation of the video guides;
- Sending out 30 media releases and posting 21 ‘hot issues’ articles on its website;
- Expanding social media engagement to include Facebook and LinkedIn; and
- Engaging with nearly 2,300 Twitter followers.

These efforts enhanced ACCAN’s media profile, resulting in 897 media mentions for the year. Issues which ACCAN commented on included the Copyright Notice Scheme Industry Code, website blocking, TIO complaints, data usage alerts, unused data rollover, mobile phone plans and SMS and mobile phone call terminating charges.

FINANCIAL REPORT

There were no significant changes in the nature of ACCAN’s activities during the financial year. The independent auditor of ACCAN’s financial report found that it was in accordance with the *Corporations Act 2001*, including:

- Giving a true and fair view of the Company’s financial position as at 30 June 2015 and its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- Complying with Australian Accounting Standards – Reduced Disclosure Requirements and the *Corporations Regulations 2001*.