



Australian Government

Department of Communications and the Arts

Funding of telecommunications consumer representation grants

Annual Report 2015-16

December 2016

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PURPOSE OF SECTION 593 OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT 1997

Section 593 of the *Telecommunications Act 1997* (Telco Act) provides for the Minister for Communications (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 FOR 2015–16

Funding under section 593 of the Telco Act for 2015–16 was provided only to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). This funding was provided under a multi-year Funding Agreement between ACCAN and the Department of Communications and the Arts. This Funding Agreement continues until 30 May 2017, with funding of \$2 million per annum (indexed) being provided to ACCAN. Each quarterly payment to ACCAN under this Funding Agreement is subject to assessment of the six Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the milestones for completing a report on each stage of the activities, as 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 under the *Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997*.

ASSESSMENT OF ACCAN'S GENERAL PERFORMANCE

Quarterly progress reports for 2015–16 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement milestones.

ACCAN has published its 2015–16 [Annual Report](#) on its website. This showed that in 2015–16 ACCAN:

- represented consumers interests in over 27 Government, industry and regulatory committees;
- made 30 submissions to Government, regulatory and other inquiries all of which are available at www.accan.org.au/submissions;
- together with the Indigenous Remote Communications Association, hosted an Indigenous Focus Day held in conjunction with the Broadband for the Bush Forum;
- attended the Council of Small Business Australia (COSBOA) Conference;
- held an information stall at the biennial Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) Conference, the Yabun Festival, the CLICK Digital Expo, the Australian Seniors Computer Club Association conference and the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce Small Biz Expo; and
- continued its engagement with industry through quarterly meetings with Communications Alliance and participation in Communications Alliance working groups, bi-annual meetings with the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association and through regular briefings and issues-specific dialogue with the major retail telecommunications service providers.

During 2015–16 ACCAN also:

- issued media releases covering topics such as affordability, accessibility, the National Broadband Network (NBN), Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) complaints, mobile coverage and broadband monitoring;

- posted a range of 'Hot issues' articles featuring information, tips and news on topics like regional telecommunications, mobile data and plans, global roaming, telecommunications outages, captioning and audio description;
- launched the information pack 'Top tips for phones and internet'. The pack consists of five brochures and bookmarks that give tips on common communications consumer issues; and
- produced a second edition of the 'Community Consultation Guide' to assist communities in putting together a business case for funding to improve mobile coverage in their area.

The Annual Report also indicates that a significant outcome for ACCAN for 2015–16 was the increase in page views following the launch of ACCAN's new mobile friendly and accessible website.

ACCAN organisational membership increased to 112. Member organisations represent remote and rural consumers, indigenous organisations, small businesses, farmers, disability groups, financial counsellors and community legal centres from across Australia.

During 2015-16 Len Bytheway resigned from the ACCAN board and Chris Dodds was elected as a new member. Two new members joined ACCAN's Independent Grants Panel: Dr Lareen Newman was appointed to the Panel for a three-year term to replace Dr Sarah Dods. Associate Professor Ellie Rennie was recruited to replace Dr Scott Ewing.

INDEPENDENT GRANTS PROGRAM

ACCAN administers a competitive Independent Grants Program (IGP) in accordance with its Funding Agreement. The total funding available for the IGP grants round held in 2015–16 was up to \$301,190* (excluding GST), including funds reserved for overheads, with a maximum of \$60,000 per recipient. Six projects were awarded funding, out of the 39 eligible applications received (see Table 1 below). The successful grants were announced in June 2016 with these projects to commence in 2016-17. The projects relate to ranking telecommunications practices, research into identity theft, mental health applications, security and privacy threats from smart home 'Internet of Things' (IOT) devices, consumer access to digital media content and a telecommunication education project.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH FUNDING GRANTED IN 2015–16

Recipient	Amount (\$) (excluding GST)
Financial and Consumer Rights Council (FCRC) – <i>'Rank the Telco 2017'</i>	\$60,000
Australian National University (Research School of Management) – <i>'Understanding Consumer Identity Theft Risks Across Communications Media'</i>	\$44,966
University of Sydney (Charles Perkins Centre) – <i>'Finding peace of mind: Navigating the marketplace of mental health apps'</i>	\$59,842
University of NSW (School of Electrical Engineering and Telecommunications) – <i>'Increasing Public Awareness in Australia on Security and Privacy Threats for Smart-Home IoT Devices'</i>	\$50,000
Queensland University of Technology (Digital Media Research Centre) – <i>'Australian consumer access to digital media content'</i>	\$59,860
Association of Hazaras in Victoria – <i>'Telecommunications Education Project'</i>	\$7,500
TOTAL	\$282,168

* 2015-16 IGP funds were augmented with \$25,182 returned after a contract was terminated in October 2015

Six research projects awarded by ACCAN in previous grants rounds were completed in 2015–16 (see Table 2 below). These projects explored issues such as improving the communications of privacy information, competition in the mobile phone market, empowering women to end digital abuse, demystifying personal cloud services, enabling older social housing residents to use the internet and helping migrants with outreach services.

TABLE 2: RESEARCH PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2015–16

IGP Project	Commenced	Completed
University of Technology Sydney (Communications Law Centre) – <i>‘Improving the communication of privacy information for consumers’</i>	2014-15	March 2016
Australian National University (School of Accounting and Business Information Systems) – <i>‘Investigating competition in the mobile phone marketplace’</i>	2014-15	January 2016
Women's Legal Services NSW – <i>‘Recharge: women’s technology safety, legal resources, research and training’</i>	2014-15	December 2015
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University – <i>‘Demystifying personal cloud services for Australian consumers’</i>	2014-15	July 2015
Southern Cross University – <i>‘The Digital Age Project Strategies that enable older social housing residents to use the internet’</i>	2013-14	April 2014
Justice Connect – <i>‘Don’t just sign on the dotted line’</i>	2014-15	July 2015

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 as at 30 June 2016 and its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- complied with Australian Accounting Standards – Reduced Disclosure Requirements and the *Corporations Regulations 2001*.