



Australian Government

Department of Communications and the Arts

Funding of telecommunications consumer representation grants—Annual report 2017–18

November 2018



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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 (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 2017–18

Funding under section 593 of the Telco Act for 2017–18 was provided only to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). This funding was provided under contract between ACCAN and the Department of Communications and the Arts. ACCAN was provided with funding of \$2,261,000 (GST-exclusive) for the 2017–18 financial year.

Each quarterly payment to ACCAN under these Funding Agreements is subject to quarterly assessment of the six Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and related 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 provided in 2017–18 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement milestones.

ACCAN has published its 2017–18 [Annual Report](#) on its website. This showed that in 2017–18 ACCAN:

- represented consumer interests in 37 government, industry and regulatory committees
- made over 49 submissions to government, regulatory and other consultations and inquiries, all of which are available at www.accan.org.au/submissions
- raised consumer awareness, including publishing several new telecommunications consumer guides, achieving 746 media mentions and attracting 189,964 website visits
- hosted its annual conference, *ACCANect: Your Place in the Connected World*, which was attended by more than 200 delegates
- participated in Google's Consumer Policy Summit in San Francisco
- conducted annual meetings with its four advisory forums—the Member's Advisory Forum, Disability Advisory Forum, Indigenous Advisory Forum and Small Business Advisory Forum
- attended meetings at the International Standards Organisations headquarters in Geneva
- engaged with the communications industry on the review of the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code, and
- issued 20 media releases covering important consumer issues including regional communications, accessibility, broadband availability, affordability and the Universal Service Obligation.



ACCAN organisational membership decreased slightly from 118 to 113 in 2017–18. Member organisations represent remote and rural consumers, indigenous organisations, small businesses, farmers, disability groups, financial counsellors and community legal centres from across Australia.

ACCAN's board also saw changes in 2017–18 with Johanna Plante concluding her term as ACCAN Chair and Deirdre O'Donnell commencing as the new ACCAN Chair. Holly Raiche and Heron Loban were appointed to the board, and Nigel Waters and Sandra Milligan also concluded their terms.

Independent Grants Program

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

In 2017, ACCAN combined the 2017 and 2018 annual IGP rounds, allowing projects to be delivered between January 2018 and June 2019. As a consequence of this arrangement, milestone payments for projects funded in this IGP cycle fall across both the 2017–18 and 2018–19 financial years. ACCAN's total expenditure for the IGP in 2017–18 (including overheads) was \$142,067.

Nine projects were awarded funding, out of the 42 eligible applications received (see Table 1 below). The projects relate to digital inclusion, regional telecommunications issues, the consumer spyware industry, communications industry regulation, accessibility for consumers with disability, assistance for consumers living with complexity, technology in domestic violence situations, and consumer rights to personal data.

One IGP project, by Hutt St Centre, was commenced and completed in the 2017–18 financial year. All remaining IGP projects in this round are due to be completed during the 2018–19 financial year.

Table 1: IGP projects commencing in 2017–18

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2017–18
Hutt St Centre—'Assisting people living with complexity to use smart phones to connect with their community'	\$5,000	\$2,500
Queensland University of Technology School of Justice (Faculty of Law)—'Domestic violence and communication technology: Victim experiences of intrusion, surveillance and identity theft'	\$53,247	\$10,649
B4BA Ltd—'Analysis of B4BA Survey, case studies and case study analysis into assessing the availability, quality, reliability and affordability of internet and telecommunications services in Australia—an evidence based approach'	\$51,005	\$15,302
University of Technology Sydney (Faculty of Law)—'Designing Responsive Regulation: Consumer and public participation in converged communications industry rule-making'	\$50,603	\$10,121
James Cook University (Cairns Institute)—'Connectivity and digital inclusion in Far North Queensland agricultural communities'	\$36,000	\$7,200
University of Technology Sydney (School of Communication)—'Consumer rights to personal data'	\$55,302	\$11,060



Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2017–18
University of Melbourne (Melbourne Social Equity Institute)— <i>'Thanks a bundle: Making telecommunications services more accessible for people with decision-making impairments'</i>	\$69,428	\$34,714
Deakin University (Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation)— <i>'Risks, Impacts, and Accountability in the Consumer Spyware Industry'</i>	\$60,728	\$12,146
Curtin University (Department of Internet Studies)— <i>'Audio Description in Australia: An Online Resource'</i>	\$32,000	\$16,000
Total	\$413,313	\$119,692

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 2018 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.