



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

# Funding of telecommunications consumer representation grants

November 2020

Annual report 2019–20

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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 for 2019–20

In 2019–20, 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 \$2,322,000 (GST-exclusive) for the 2019–20 financial year. The Department of Communications and the Arts merged with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development in February 2020, to form the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC), which now 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 2019–20 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement milestones. ACCAN published its 2019–20 Annual Report on its website on 24 September 2020. The report showed that in 2019–20, ACCAN:

- represented consumer interests on 31 government, industry and regulatory committees;
- made 64 submissions to government, regulatory and other inquiries, most of which are available at [www.accan.org.au/submissions](http://www.accan.org.au/submissions);
- raised consumer awareness, including publishing 18 new telecommunication consumer publications, achieving 1,160 media mentions, and attracting 154,182 website visits;
- saw its social media audience grow to 4,947 followers across Twitter and Facebook;
- hosted its annual conference (on 11 and 12 September 2019), ACCANect—Communications Consumers: The Next 10 years, which was attended by 170 delegates;
- launched Talking Telco with over 70 resources of consumer education material in multiple formats, channels and languages to help consumers understand their telecommunications rights;

- commissioned four research projects on improving consumer safeguards and empowering consumer decision making;
- issued 27 media releases on telecommunications consumer issues including the No Australian Left Offline initiative, and the need for broadband affordability and service reliability which has been of particular significance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ACCAN reported a decrease in membership to 109 organisational and 96 individual members in 2019–20, compared to 111 organisational and 102 individual members in 2018–19. 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 2019–20 period, which included the Indigenous Advisory Forum, the Members Advisory Forum, the Small Business Advisory Forum and the Disability Advisory Forum.

Dean Barton-Smith stepped down as Director from ACCAN's board and subsequently Keith Besgrove was appointed Director.

## Independent Grants Program

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

### 2018 grants round

Two projects funded under the 2018 grant rounds required extra time to complete their project after 30 June 2019 and, as a result, the final milestone payments were paid in the 2019–20 financial year.

**Table 1: 2018 grants round projects funded in 2019–2020**

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2019–2020
University of Technology Sydney, Faculty of Law—'Designing Responsive Regulation: Consumer and public participation in converged communications industry rule-making'	\$50,603	\$10,120
Deakin University, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation—'Risks, Impacts and Accountability in the Consumer Spyware Industry'	\$60,728	\$12,146

Note: an amount of \$4,605 was unspent for the Deakin University project and refunded back to ACCAN during the 2019–20 financial year.

## 2019 grants round

In 2019–20, ACCAN provided funding to seven recipients who were successful in the 2019 IGP application process (run during the 2018–19 financial year). Activity on these projects commenced in 2019–20, however due to the impacts of COVID-19, all grant projects have experienced delays in completing their projects. Most recipients have renegotiated agreed milestones to be delivered in the 2020–21 financial year.

One project was completed in the 2019–20 financial year.

**Table 2: 2019 grants round projects funded in 2019–2020**

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2019–2020
Monash University—‘Unregulated and segmented dark ads on social media: consumer education and regulatory options’	\$49,579	\$41,600
WESNET—‘Staying Safe: empowering women to navigate privacy, safety and security mobile apps in the Australian marketplace’	\$49,807	\$37,356
First Nations Media Australia—‘Indigenous communities’ experiences and perspectives of digital inclusion’	\$49,670	\$18,000
Deakin University—‘Regulating the Internet of Things to Protect Consumer Privacy’	\$76,195	\$38,098
SACOSS—‘Telecommunications and the Working Poor’	\$99,112	\$74,334
MoneyMob Talkabout—‘Telecommunications Debt in Rural and Remote Indigenous Central Australian Communities’	\$45,000	\$45,000
WEstjustice—‘Newly-arrived consumers telecommunications advocacy project’	\$50,000	\$20,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$419,363</b>	<b>\$274,388</b>

## Upcoming 2020 grants round

During the 2019–20 financial year, ACCAN shortlisted eight projects for the upcoming 2020 IGP round, to be delivered and funded during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 financial years. The timeline for these projects has been expanded to allow for any further disruptions and restrictions relating to COVID-19. These projects must be completed by May 2022.

## 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 2020 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.