

Friday, 27th March 2020

Community sector organisations call on Government to act on communications affordability issues

A coalition of nearly 30 community sector organisations and advocates has urged the Federal Government to address the affordability of communications services and equipment to support Australians in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a letter to the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety Cyber and the Arts, Paul Fletcher, cross-sector community organisations including Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), CHOICE, The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), and The Smith Family outlined several recommendations that would enable communities to keep connected, work remotely, and access essential services such as education, government services, and telehealth.

“The introduction of the Coronavirus Supplement and households support payments are very important measures, that will be welcomed by many households,” said ACCAN CEO, Teresa Corbin. “However, we need to do more.”

As schools across the country begin to close or recommend at-home education, many families are facing increased financial pressure.

“The reality is that not everyone has access to a home broadband service or equipment like a laptop or tablet. We need to make sure that everyone in our community has the tools they need to succeed, especially in these difficult times,” said Ms Corbin.

In addition to calling on the Federal Government to fast-track ACCAN’s proposal for a wholesale broadband concessional product, community organisations have highlighted the need for a free telephone service that allows people with low digital literacy to receive direct technical and skills support.

“We know that everything from health services to government services are moving online. While this can have many benefits, we want to make sure that all members of the community have the chance to access these services.”

Community organisations also recognised the positive measures that some telecommunications companies had rolled-out to consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We’ve been pleased to see that telcos like Telstra and Optus have announced a pause on disconnecting customers or charging late fees. We’d like to see that extended for the whole telco industry, and for them to pause debt collection activities,” said Ms Corbin.

“Communications services are essential and they need to be treated as such.”

Community groups said that further work is needed from the telecommunications industry to address telecommunications drop-outs in remote and very remote communities.

Signatories:



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The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.