National register of telecommunications outages

Policy Position

Executive Summary

Following the Optus Triple Zero outages and subsequent calls from parliamentarians and the public for greater transparency,[1] ACCAN recommends the Australian Communications and Media Authority (**ACMA**) amend the *Telecommunications (Customer Communications for Outages) Industry Standard 2024* (Cth) (**CCO Standard**) to establish a national public register of telecommunications outages.[2]

A national register of telecommunications outages will consolidate all mandated public communications in the CCO Standard into a single, real-time system that is publicly accessible. A national register of telecommunication outages would complement and streamline the requirements in the CCO Standard on carriers and CSPs to notify the public and relevant stakeholders of telecommunication outages.[3] This approach will not impose new regulatory burdens on carriers and CSPs but will enhance existing obligations under the CCO Standard and facilitate public safety, accountability, and transparency regarding telecommunications outages.

Background

The CCO Standard establishes critical obligations for carriers and CSPs to effectively communicate outage information to the public and relevant stakeholders. As part of the CCO Standard, as soon as practicable after a carrier or CSP detects or receives a notification about a major outage or significant local outage, they must communicate information about the outage to the public, relevant stakeholders, and other carriers and CSP.[4]

Even with these provisions, communication about telecommunications outages, especially impacts to the Triple Zero network, remains fragmented across carrier and CSP websites, social media platforms, and various media channels.

On 18 September 2025, an upgrade to the Optus network caused a widespread Triple Zero outage that impacted 600 calls and may have contributed to four deaths.[5]

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[1] ACCAN, *Urgent reform needed after repeat Triple Zero failures* (media release, 29 September 2025); Communications Day, *Government pushes through Triple Zero custodian bill, rejects opposition amendments* (media release, issue 7221, 9 October 2025).

[2] See also, ACCAN, *DR c536:2020 Emergency call service requirements incorporating variation no.1/2025 industry code* (Submission, 13 May 2025) 6.

[3] Section 5 of the CCO Standard defines 'relevant stakeholders' to include the emergency call person for 000 and 112 and the emergency call person for 106, the ACMA, the Department administered by the Minister administering the Act, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, and the National Emergency Management Agency.

[4] See Sections 4(b)-(c), 9, 9A, and 10 of the CCO Standard.

[5] 'Optus Network Failure Impacted Triple-0 Calls in Several States Where Patients Died after "totally Unacceptable" Lapse', *ABC News* (online, 19 September 2025) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-19/optus-network-failure-three-people-dead-triple-zero/105796226>.

In Senate Estimates, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts (**DITRDCSA**) revealed Optus' outage notification was delivered to an incorrect email address, resulting in officials not being made aware of the fatal outage until the following day.[6] Following this incident, stakeholders raised concerns that the emergency reporting obligations are not fit-for-purpose due to their reliance on email communications.

A centralised public register of telecommunications outages

The current legislative framework for outage reporting already incorporates transparency and public accountability as essential principles. However, the absence of a unified system for presenting and aggregating information limits public and relevant stakeholders' visibility of these outage notifications. Given the essentiality of telecommunications services, it is critical consumers have a centralised register to provide clarity around outages.

A centralised national register of telecommunications outages should function as the mechanism by which carriers make outage notifications to relevant stakeholders as required by the CCO Standard. For example, a carrier experiencing an outage could report via the register, which could automatically notify CSPs and relevant stakeholders, therefore fulfilling their obligations under the CCO Standard.

Establishing a centralised national outage register would:

- Coordinate outage notification reports through one centralised channel.
- Provide a single source of information for the public and relevant stakeholders regarding telecommunication outages and facilitate transparency.
- Support public safety and coordination of emergency responses.
- Enable data-driven oversight of network performance and carrier/CSP responsiveness.
- Ensure equitable access for individuals in regional, rural, and remote Australia, along with people with disabilities through clear and accessible formats.
- Enhance consumer confidence and trust in the restoration of telecommunications outages.
- Enable government agencies to benchmark, audit and regularly review network performance.

A national register would incur minimal additional compliance costs, as it would utilise existing obligations established in the CCO Standard such as the structure and content of outage information, updates and restoration reporting, and transparency through written procedures.

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[6] Nick Newling, 'Deaths, Failed Calls and Email Stuff Ups: The Burning Questions That Remain in the Optus Saga', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (online, 9 October 2025) <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/the-eight-burning-questions-that-remain-unanswered-in-the-optus-saga-20251009-p5n18d.html>.

Structure and content of outage information

The national register of telecommunications outages will support Section 13 of the CCO Standard, which prescribes the minimum information to be communicated, including:

- The scale or suspected scale of the outage, including the number of relevant carriage services impacted.
- The cause or likely cause of the outage.
- The geographic areas impacted or likely to be impacted by the outage.
- The estimated timeframes for updates in relation to the outage.
- The estimated timeframe for restoration of the relevant carriage services affected by the outage.
- The types of relevant carriage services impacted or likely to be impacted by the outage.

This provision establishes a clearly defined data schema for a national outage register. Each data point will create a field within a standardised reporting system. A national register would aggregate this existing data from all carriers affected by the outage, ensuring it is presented in an accessible, consistent, and interpretable format for the public.

Regular updates and restoration reporting

As part of Section 14 and 15 of the CCO Standard, carriers and CSPs are required to provide regular updates about the outage and notify the public once all services have been restored.

A national register would facilitate regular updates and notifications regarding the restoration of all services on a centralised platform. This system would allow updates to be time-stamped and archived. It would enable real-time monitoring and support regulatory oversight, while also providing the public with the most current verified information during outages.

Transparency and accountability

A national register of telecommunication outages would build an evidence base of systemic issues of network reliability and performance and highlight under-serviced areas. To ensure the effectiveness of the register, the ACMA should undertake regular audits of carriers and CSPs' submissions to ensure accuracy and compliance.

The ACMA should produce an annual public report that summarises outage trends, identify persistent issues, and highlight service improvements. Reporting should inform emergency service coordination and infrastructure investment programs to ensure adequate response and recovery.

Conclusion

The CCO Standard aims to enhance public transparency in the reporting of telecommunications outages in Australia. However, the current system, where notifications are spread across various provider websites, social media and other media channels, falls short.

A national public register of telecommunications outages would ensure all Australians have timely access to outage information, especially concerning the Triple Zero network. This centralised database would strengthen the resilience of Australia's communications systems, build consumer trust, and enhance public safety during outages.

Managed by the ACMA, this register would provide safer and more reliable communications services for everyone, ensuring access to essential information, especially during emergencies. It would promote transparency, accountability, and informed policy decisions in Australia's communications landscape.

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