

Submission to the Treasury via webform

Re: Submission to the Economic Reform Roundtable

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (**ACCAN**) is pleased to provide this submission to the Treasury on the Economic Reform Roundtable (**the Roundtable**). As Australia's peak body representing communications consumers, we recognise the critical role that communications services play in unlocking Australia's productivity.

Communications services are essential for keeping people connected within an increasingly digital economy. Spurred by technological advances, effective and reliable communications services fundamentally facilitate productivity in all areas of the Australian economy.

For example, the communications sector is a key enabler of economic and social activity, allowing transactions to be completed digitally, healthcare services to be delivered remotely, turning homes into workplaces, supporting distance learning for regional, rural and remote communities and facilitating global collaboration. Telecommunications services are also a critical business input for other essential sectors by, for example, facilitating real-time monitoring and smart metering in energy grids, supporting telemedicine, facilitating retail e-commerce platforms, and online banking. Given the sector's importance to economic performance and social inclusion, it is imperative that policy settings minimise barriers to ubiquitous connectivity and encourage take-up of services. There should be opportunities for all Australians to contribute to broader economic growth and nation-wide productivity.

Achieving this should be a national focus for the Australian government. ACCAN sees a unique opportunity for the government to prioritise reforms to ensure that:

1. Everyone has affordable access to communications services and devices, with no one left behind in the wake of rapidly advancing technology.
2. There is effective competition in the communications market that works in the long-term interests of consumers.
3. There are effective and fit-for-purpose regulations that set strong and clear boundaries within which businesses can compete in line with community expectations to foster consumer trust and reliable participation in the digital economy.

Affordable and reliable access to connectivity is critical to unlocking productivity

Our universal services policy for telecommunications recognises the opportunities that flow from having all Australians connected, but there is a pressing need to [modernise](#) it to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose for a digital age dominated by a preference for mobile and an environment of increasingly frequent natural disaster emergencies. As today's consumers rely heavily on voice and data services, the commitment to universality should be backed by a set of service standards that meet expectations about reliability, resilience, coverage, security, speed and other service quality metrics.

ACCAN [welcomes the government's Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation](#) reform and maintains that access to seamless connectivity and leveraging satellite and other emerging technologies provides a safety net for all consumers regardless of their location.

Affordable connectivity is vital for ensuring that Australians who want or need to stay online can do so, but for many low-income households this is not a reality. The NSW Digital Inclusion Strategy indicates that 25% of [survey respondents](#) living in remote or regional NSW do not have home internet, increasing to 50% for those living in social housing. Additionally, [40% of surveyed First Nations people](#) without broadband in Western Sydney said cost is the main barrier to broadband access.

A concessional broadband product could capture a missing market of consumers unable to afford entry-level broadband by taking advantage of existing infrastructure. Such a product can boost broadband take-up of the already funded NBN rollout. Countries comparable to Australia such as the [USA](#), [Canada](#), [Singapore](#), [the United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) have run or are successfully running affordable broadband programs to improve access to broadband. For example, an affordable broadband program in the USA was estimated to have generated a [1.92 cost benefit ratio](#) and [improved net broadband additions](#) by 4.7%.

Competition in the market must work effectively in the long-term interests of consumers.

The government should prioritise reforms and policies which enhance competition in the telecommunications market. Rapid advances in communications technology in recent years have seen new and emerging technology such as Low Earth Orbit Satellites which can supplement or potentially compete with terrestrial mobile technology in the future. Infrastructure policy should protect opportunities for market entry and innovation, allowing the position of incumbents in the market to be challenged. For example, critical national assets such as spectrum should be [auctioned to ensure efficient allocation](#) that is reflective of the asset's economic value, reduces barriers to entry, and will [drive innovation](#).

Competitive markets work in the long-term interests of consumers when competition generates lower prices, higher quality, consumer choice and innovation, and business incentives to exercise market power are minimised. Informed and engaged consumers are a critical element of a well-functioning market. The government should prioritise reforms that empower consumers to make informed purchasing decisions - [reducing information asymmetries and search costs](#) experienced by consumers.

Competitive markets need effective and appropriate regulation to benefit all participants.

In a competitive market where businesses compete to maximise profits, strong regulations should exist to set boundaries on appropriate business conduct. Competitive markets must be effectively regulated to minimise efficiency and welfare losses from poor business conduct which manifests in poor consumer experiences and [distrust of institutions and telecommunications providers](#). ACCAN [supports](#) the [Telecommunications \(Enhancing Consumer Safeguards\) Bill 2025](#) which strengthens the penalties and enforcement tools of the sector-specific regulator. However, genuine change cannot occur until industry no longer writes [critical consumer protections](#) given the [tensions with maintaining profit](#). The government must commit to overhauling the telecommunications consumer protection regulatory framework to ensure protections are robust, effective, and fit-for-purpose to support a market that is delivering a service essential to all Australians.