



Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications

Funding of telecommunications consumer representation grants

Annual Report 2021–22

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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 2021–22

In 2021–22, 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 Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (the Funding Agreement). ACCAN was provided with \$2,381,000 (GST-exclusive) for the 2021–22 financial year. The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts 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 2021–22 demonstrated that ACCAN satisfactorily met each of its KPIs and Funding Agreement milestones. ACCAN’s 2021–22 Annual Report showed that over the financial year ACCAN:

- represented consumer interests on 33 government, industry and regulatory committees;
- made 62 submissions to government, regulatory and other inquiries, most of which are available at www.accan.org.au/submissions;
- raised consumer awareness, with regular blogs, and updated consumer resources, achieving 516 media mentions, and attracting 159,328 website visits;
- saw its social media audience grow to over 6,000 followers across Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram;
- commissioned research covering telecommunications affordability, consumer experience with digital platforms and automated decision making.
- issued 15 media releases on telecommunications consumer issues including the Regional Telecommunications Review, research findings about digital platforms complaints handling, the need to close the digital divide in First Nations communities and the extension of NBN Co. financial assistance packages.

ACCAN reported 107 organisational members in 2021–2022. Organisational membership is comprised of groups from disability advocacy, remote and rural consumers, indigenous organisations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, and others from across Australia.

ACCAN’s advisory forums were once again held virtually, expanding ACCAN’s accessibility and engagement with advisory forum participants. The four advisory forums include the Members’ Advisory Forum, Disability Advisory Forum, Small Business Advisory Forum, and Indigenous Advisory Forum. In 2021–22 it was decided that the Indigenous Advisory Forum would become the Indigenous Steering Committee and will meet quarterly rather than annually.

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 at 30 June 2022 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.

Independent Grants Program

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

2020 grants round

One project funding recipient under the 2020 grants round required extra time to complete their project after 30 June 2022. The final milestone payment was paid in the 2022–23 financial year.

The Wamboin Communications Action Group Inc. grant contract was acquitted and the unspent funds (\$35,095) were returned.

Table 1: 2020 grants round projects funded in 2021–22

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2021–22
UTS – Regulation of Internet of Things Devices to Protect Consumers	\$65,091	\$48,000
RMIT – Codesigning participatory strategies with older adults to reduce perceived risk and promote digital inclusion	\$98,637	\$38,000
Centre for Accessibility Australia – Telcos for all: addressing key accessibility issues faced by consumers on telecommunication carrier websites	\$69,794	\$15,000
Australian Council on Children and the Media – Apps can trap: tips for protecting children’s privacy	\$48,000	\$10,000
Curtin University – Access on Demand: An Analysis of the Accessibility options on streaming television	\$46,635	\$10,635

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2021–22
Charles Sturt University – Consumer understandings of smart technologies and their applications in North West NSW regional and rural communities	\$16,606	\$6,000
Wamboin Communications Action Group Inc. – Achieve better broadband for regional communities	\$50,000 (revised to \$14,905)	\$0
RMIT – E-Change and Remote Work in Australia	\$45,754	\$20,000

2021 grants round

In 2021–22, ACCAN provided funding to five recipients who were successful in the 2021 IGP application process (run during the 2020–21 financial year). Activity on these projects commenced in 2021–22.

The projects relate to digital platforms, digital adaptability, telecommunications surveillance, digital inequality and chatbots.

Table 2: 2021 grants round projects funded in 2021–22

Recipient	Grant amount (ex GST)	Payments made in 2021–22
UTS – Options for a complaint-handling framework for digital platforms	\$8,454	\$8,454
RMIT – Enhancing digital adaptability of Australian small retail businesses	\$27,308	\$27,308
Charles Sturt University – A review of the information available on Family Plans that may be harmful for consumers	\$8,611	\$8,611
University of Melbourne – Understanding digital inequality	\$11,609	\$11,609
University of Melbourne – Questioning the chatbot	\$54,003	\$54,003
Total	\$109,985	\$109,985