Logo: Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA).

# General comments

ASCCA applauds ACCAN for the manner in which the interests and concerns of consumers have been considered and addressed. ACCAN has represented consumers on a wide range of Government, Industry and Consumer committees and events. One of ACCAN’s strengths is the diverse interests it represents. The Grants program has provided the opportunity for topics meeting the needs of consumers to be researched and for the outcome of those research projects to be shared publically for the benefit of many.

# Response

## Has ACCAN effectively performed the role of representing the interests of consumers in relation to telecommunications?

Yes, it has. Consumers needed to have a voice to speak on their behalf when they had concerns about the telecommunication services they should be receiving or wished to receive.

## 2. Does ACCAN effectively engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including industry, government agencies and other consumer groups?

The significant amount of consumer representation work undertaken by ACCAN reflects the broad range of stakeholders that ACCAN has effectively engaged with.

ACCAN have delivered training at both ASCCA meetings and conferences, and that has been very useful for seniors. This enables seniors to raise their issues with ACCAN and further ACCAN’s understanding of the issues faced by this group of consumers.

ACCAN’s expertise covers the full range of consumers to a depth that is necessary in the complex world of telecommunications and telecommunications regulation. Other specialist groups find this hard to cover to the depth required when there are so many competing issues.

## 3. Considering the consumer representation role performed by ACCAN, has ACCAN adopted an appropriate balance between representation of general consumers and representation of those with particular needs?

ACCAN has demonstrated an appropriate balance when representing general consumers which included those with particular needs! This balance is further enhanced by the selection of staff where deemed appropriate to meet specific needs.

## 4. Is a telecommunications specific consumer representative body funded by Government required or:

### a) Should Government fund representation only for a body or bodies representing consumers with particular needs?

### b) Could a telecommunications representation function be carried out by a general consumer body?

### c) Could Government more directly measure consumer views by undertaking its own consumer research?

ACCAN is the appropriate body to represent all consumers. Consumers feel confident with ACCAN an organisation they trust. It has demonstrated an excellent track record and understands the big picture – consumers do not want to be put into neat boxes they need to be considered as a whole. Accessibility that suits a person with a special need will often serve other consumers. A person from a CALD community needs to understand a contract just as much as a person with vision impairment or an older person or a young first time consumer. Segmentation could well lead to some consumers failing to fit specific criteria and therefore being disadvantaged.

Further commentary on the research done by ACCAN, eg Affordability <http://accan.org.au/our-work/research/1257-connectivity-costs> studies which highlight issues faced by those on limited incomes or pensions is helpful.

Without ACCAN doing the applied research into consumer matters there is very real concern that the evidence will be overlooked.

Under the current grant scheme the diversity of interests are addressed – don’t want to become too focused or will miss those projects that no-one expected. Research is also outcomes focused, so practical materials are produced.

## 5. Have you seen any examples of how research funded through the Independent Grants Program (IGP) has influenced Government policy or the behaviour of industry? Could changes be made to the IGP to make the funded research projects more influential?

Research into *Disability Products Mystery Shopping* confirmed anecdotal experience that there was inadequate information provided at point of sale by the three major network providers about telecommunications products suited to people with disability. As a result, ACCAN staff met with the industry to discuss the research outcomes and they committed to staff training improvements, improved websites and in store information to better inform people with disability.

## 6. Do you believe research funded through the IGP is useful to consumers? Could changes be made to the IGP to make the funded research projects more useful to consumers?

Research funded through IGP is definitely useful to consumers. The research project *Telecommunications & Health Info for Multicultural Australia* identified that there was an overall low use of Telecommunications in a health context among CALD Communities. This was mainly due to a lack of access to telecommunications, inadequate amount of health information on the internet in their preferred languages and a lack of technical awareness especially among elderly CALD people.

ASCCA received funding for a project, *Efficient Seniors’ Training using Broadband Technologies* which has led to a considerable improvement in the manner in which older Australians can receive training material via the internet.

## 7. Is it appropriate for the Government to continue to provide grants to a consumer representative group (or any other non-government body) to undertake research into telecommunications issues?

ASCCA considers that it is appropriate for funding to be continued to enable consumer groups to do meaningful research into issues of concern or need. Having been a recipient of a grant through the process established by ACCAN I am well aware that each recipient is required to complete the research to an expected high level – and maintain the set schedule of achievement by the specified dates.

## 8. If this is appropriate, what changes (if any) would you recommend to how the funding is provided and who it is provided to?

ASCCA considers that consumer education should be included as optional criteria within the present grant process.

## 9. Should any other activities, other than consumer representation and research, be considered for funding under section 593 of the Telco Act? If so, what should these be and what would be the rationale for funding such activities be?

ACCAN has a demonstrated track record in delivering training that ASCCA has benefitted from. This are could benefit from further funding and support.