



**Telecommunications
Industry
Ombudsman**

28 February 2020

Regional Deployment Branch
Department of Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601

regionalconnectivity@communications.gov.au

Consultation on the proposed Digital Tech Hub

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Digital Tech Hub.

I support measures to improve the experience of rural, regional and remote consumers of telecommunications services. The Digital Tech Hub could assist these consumers to better understand and make use of the telecommunications technology, products and service options available to them.

The top complaint issues reported by rural, regional and remote customers

My office handles complaints from residential consumers and small businesses (**consumers**), including those based in rural, regional and remote areas.¹ Complaints from consumers living in rural, regional and remote areas made up approximately 23% of all complaints received by my office in FY2019.

We find the issues raised by consumers from rural, regional and remote areas are similar across all telecommunications service types (internet, mobile and landline).² The top ten complaint issues for rural, regional and remote consumers were:

- Providers not responding to consumers quickly or at all
- Service and equipment fees
- No phone or internet service
- Delay establishing a service
- Intermittent service and dropouts
- Providers agreeing to a resolution but not implementing it
- Slow data speed
- Misleading conduct
- Contract termination fees
- Missed appointments.

¹ We have categorised consumer locations using the Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure definitions of inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote Australia. For more information, see the Australian Bureau of Statistics' [Remoteness Structure](#)

² The TIO's [Submission to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review](#) (August 2018) noted faults resulting in no service, establishing a new connection and no response or a poor response from providers were issues affecting rural, regional and remote consumers in particular.

Rural, regional and remote customers should be given a clear pathway for further assistance

The consultation paper says the Digital Tech Hub will also “help resolve users’ telecommunications issues by referring them to appropriate third party information and contacts, and performing basic troubleshooting”.

It is important for the Digital Tech Hub to provide clarity about how it will distinguish and respond to different consumer needs. For example, when would the Digital Tech Hub provide troubleshooting advice and when would it suggest consumers should contact their provider or my office about a complaint?

To ensure the Digital Tech Hub as an additional resource does not confuse consumers about where to go when they have a telecommunications problem, it is important to ensure the Digital Tech Hub gives consumers:

- A clear pathway to their provider about unresolved issues with their telecommunications product or service, so their provider can work with the consumer through internal dispute resolution to resolve the issue
- Where internal dispute resolution has not resolved the issue, a clear pathway to my office so we can work with the consumer and provider to reach a resolution.

Facilitating access to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

The Digital Tech Hub website could facilitate access to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman by providing consumers with my office’s contact details and website.

It would also be helpful to explore a no-wrong-door approach for consumers contacting the Digital Tech Hub’s phone support line. This could include the option to “warm transfer” consumers to my office.

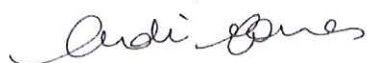
The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman provides consumers with a range of resources to assist them to resolve telecommunications complaints. The Digital Tech Hub website could link consumers to these resources, which include:

- *Tips for addressing problems we see across industry:* Where we see industry practices leading to consumer harm, we may publish reports on these issues that include advice for consumers. For example, our latest systemic spotlight report on misleading telemarketing of NBN services contains tips to help consumers manage these calls.³
- *Factsheets about topics consumers frequently ask us about:* We publish factsheets addressing common questions received by my office, for example, about what consumers can do when a wholesaler’s actions result in services being suspended or disconnected.⁴

I am pleased to see the Digital Tech Hub intends to make use of existing content. For example, the Australian Communication and Consumer Action Network develops tip sheets which are a useful self-help resource for consumers.⁵

I am interested in continuing the conversation as the Digital Tech Hub concept develops and is implemented.

Yours sincerely



Judi Jones

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

³ TIO, [Systemic Spotlight: Misleading telemarketing of NBN services](#) (1 August 2019)

⁴ TIO, [Consumer guide to retail services suspended or disconnection by a wholesaler](#)

⁵ ACCAN, [Tip sheets](#)