



Telecommunications
Industry
Ombudsman

Left behind: Experiences of telco consumers living in regional, rural and remote Australia

Systemic Insights Report

August 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and recognises their enduring connection to land, water, culture and community.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and the hopes of First Nations People.

Sovereignty has never been ceded. This always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACCAN	Australian Communications Consumer Action Network
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
CAN Radio	Customer Access Network Radio
SIP	Statutory Infrastructure Provider
TIO	Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman
UHF Radio	Ultra High Frequency Radio
UOMO	Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation



Introduction from the Ombudsman

Everybody should be able to contact help in an emergency, stay connected to loved ones and participate in modern life.

Yet every year, the TIO receives thousands of complaints from people living in regional, rural and remote Australia who are being left behind due to barriers accessing essential phone and internet services.

To better understand the experiences of these consumers, we analysed the 27,882 complaints we received from regional, rural and remote areas over the last two financial years and closely reviewed a sample of over 2,000 of these complaints.

We spoke to those with the opportunity to drive meaningful change, including government, telcos and consumer groups. This report reflects what we continue to hear: how hard it can be to stay connected, and how much is at stake when telecommunications services fail.

The recent nation-wide Telstra outage was a stark reminder of this. For many people in regional, rural and remote communities, outages are more than an inconvenience. They can affect access to Triple Zero, health and support services, work, payments, transport, and the ability to check on family and community members.

With greater distance from neighbours and services and fewer connectivity alternatives, disruptions can be harder to resolve and the impacts can be prolonged in remote areas.

Telcos face challenges too. Delivering services to sparse locations involves economic decisions and practical difficulties building, maintaining and restoring infrastructure.

While there is no single solution, there is broad agreement that things can improve. Doing so will require place-based approaches that recognise the diversity of regional, rural and remote consumers.

This means ensuring access to services that reflect where people live and how they use them, as well as providing meaningful choice in technology, telcos, plan inclusions and price, and reliable backup options when their primary service fails.

Stronger protections are needed to support access to quality services and to ensure consumers can stay connected when things go wrong.

Addressing these challenges will not be easy, but it is critical.

Through coordination and cooperation across telcos, consumer groups and government, we can rebuild trust, strengthen resilience in communities, and create a fairer and safer Australia.

Cynthia Gebert
Telecommunications Industry
Ombudsman

“ We spoke to those with the opportunity to drive meaningful change: government, telcos and consumer groups. This report reflects what we continue to hear: how hard it can be to stay connected, and how much is at stake when telecommunications services fail.



Key findings and recommendations

Key recommendation: Conduct a root-and-branch review of the telecommunications regulatory framework

It is time for an overhaul of how telecommunications services are regulated. The Australian Government should undertake a comprehensive review of the telecommunications regulatory framework so that it is fit for purpose in an increasingly digital and mobile-first communications environment. A focus of the review should be on ensuring consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia are not left behind.

While the telecommunications sector has evolved significantly in response to technological innovation and changing market dynamics, the industry's regulations have developed piece by piece, and its regulatory framework has not been subject to a root-and-branch review for some time.

A review should aim to reduce complexity for the sector while ensuring equitable access to essential telecommunication services, and avoid the current approach of developing separate regulations for each individual service type.¹

It should explore topics including the reliability of mobile services, the access to and ownership of network infrastructure, and related issues of sovereignty. The review should also consider the long-term interests of regional, rural and remote consumers, including encouraging investment in infrastructure to support emerging technologies.

Timely to this report, the ACCC has announced a new inquiry examining regional mobile coverage and whether it should declare one or more wholesale mobile services, including domestic roaming, under a telecommunications access regime. Reforms such as mandatory domestic roaming (as supported by the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee's recommendation and ACCAN), may address some of the concerns raised in our report. However, a broader review is still required.

While a root-and-branch review of the telecommunications framework would benefit all consumers, there are particular benefits for regional, rural and remote consumers, who are among the most vulnerable to telco changes and who have the fewest options when services go down or their telco equipment is made redundant.

¹ Such as the Statutory Infrastructure Provider regime, Customer Service Guarantee, and the Universal Service Obligation.

Key finding 1:

Remoteness can make everyday telco issues harder to resolve

Consumers living in regional, rural and remote areas often face the same technical or account issues as consumers living in major cities. However, their remoteness and the unavailability of backup services or nearby stores create barriers to finding resolutions.

Recommendations

1. Ensure timely access to technicians in regional, rural and remote areas, and pause charges when consumers are waiting for a technician to install or repair a service (where appropriate)
2. Review telco authentication obligations to support flexibility and improve accessibility
3. Modernise prepaid identification requirements

Key finding 2:

Mobile connectivity can be unreliable and fall short of what consumers need

Poor mobile coverage and low service reliability in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia continue to be common issues in our complaints. Consumers have limited alternative options available to them and few ways to improve their services, yet UOMO presents an opportunity for this to improve.

Recommendation

4. Introduce individual remedies for significant delays in accessing mobile services

Key finding 3:

Limited choice and low awareness of telco technologies can leave consumers without alternative options

Even when services are working correctly, consumers in more remote parts of Australia have limited options when it comes to choosing a technology type and telco plan that suits their budget and needs. Access to a reliable power supply is a limiting factor in these areas, and satellite services may not be a perfect answer to consumers' problems. Consumers also lack access to reliable, tailored sources of advice and may not be aware of the services and technologies available to them.

Recommendations

5. Invest in tailored digital and connectivity literacy programs
6. Develop an independent database where consumers can check what services are available to them
7. Improve affordability of connectivity in regional, rural and remote Australia
8. Review troubleshooting and customer service processes to ensure they can accommodate consumers who live in regional, rural or remote areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

Key finding 4:

Outages and unreliable services create significant safety risks and disruptions for businesses

Access to reliable telco services is critical for safety and business operations in regional, rural and remote Australia. Planned or unplanned outages can leave entire townships stranded for weeks at a time, and consumers are concerned about the effects of outages on their ability to run businesses, call emergency services and contact each other in times of need.

Recommendations

9. Strengthen community education on Triple Zero and emergency communications
10. Prepare communities for scheduled outages associated with maintenance or upgrades
11. Establish SIP service standards, with remedies available to consumers when standards are not met



Recent developments in the telco industry and regulatory landscape

August 2024

The Government makes Directions to the ACMA in response to the post-incident review of the Optus network outage of November 2023.

September 2024

The Environment and Communications References Committee delivers its final report into the Optus network outage of November 2023.

The ACCC approves the TPG Telecom and Optus network-sharing agreement.

October 2024

Telstra and Optus 3G networks are switched off.

New ACMA rules require providers to identify and block mobile phones that are unable to contact Triple Zero.

November 2024

The Triple Zero Custodian Steering Committee delivers its final report to the Minister for Communications.

December 2024

The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee delivers its report, *Connecting communities, reaching every region*.

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group releases its roadmap towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander digital inclusion.

January 2025

The Minister for Communications announces reforms to strengthen the ACMA's compliance and enforcement powers, increase penalties for breaches and establish a Carriage Service Provider Registration scheme.

February 2025

The Minister for Communications announces the UOMO.

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee delivers its final report into the shutdown of the 3G network.

March 2025

Parliament passes the National Broadband Network Companies Amendment (Commitment to Public Ownership) Bill 2024.

June 2025

Stronger consumer protections for consumers impacted by outages commence.

August 2025

The Telecommunications Amendment (Enhancing Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2025 is introduced into the House of Representatives.

September 2025

The Government progresses the UOMO and releases further information about the proposed framework.

Optus experiences a Triple Zero outage, prompting ACMA investigation and renewed focus on emergency call reliability.

October 2025

Parliament passes legislation to establish a Triple Zero Custodian.

The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee inquiry into the Triple Zero service outage commences.

November 2025

The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2025 is introduced.

Optus and the ACMA give evidence to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee on the Triple Zero outage.

December 2025

The Senate Environment and Communications References Committee hold a public hearing into the Triple Zero outage.

January 2026

The ACMA commences consultation on mobile network coverage maps and outage register obligations.



March 2026

The Senate refers the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2025 for inquiry and report.

The ACMA announces it will replace the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code with a mandatory industry standard, and the Government consults on extending the Customer Service Guarantee.

May 2026

The Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee delivers its report into the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2025.

June 2026

Members of the Australian Telecommunications Alliance and the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) approve the merger to the two organisations, commencing 30 June 2026.

The Telecommunications Amendment (Enhancing Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2025 is introduced into the Senate.

Regional Tech Hub services pause after the conclusion of Commonwealth funding.

July 2026

Telstra experiences a nation-wide outage with impacts on Triple Zero calls, prompting an ACMA investigation and calls for reform.

August 2026

The ACCC announces an inquiry examining regional mobile coverage across Australia and whether regulating wholesale access to some mobile services could improve consumer outcomes.



Key finding 1:

Remoteness can make everyday telco issues harder to resolve

Our complaints show that consumers living in regional, rural and remote areas face unique challenges when trying to connect or repair their telco services. While these issues often begin similarly to issues experienced in major cities, distance and limited alternatives can make these complaints harder to resolve.

Remoteness can cause delays

Consumers regularly tell us:

- they had to wait a long time (sometimes weeks or months) before a technician was available to install or repair their service
- their appointment with a technician was rescheduled or cancelled multiple times, sometimes without prior notice
- the restoration of a fault was only a temporary fix, and the fixed issues keep reappearing, or
- they experienced combinations of the above issues (for example, a consumer waiting five months for a connection after 20 technician appointments, most of which were cancelled or failed to complete the connection).

Routine troubleshooting tasks that would be simple to complete in major cities can also take much longer in regional, rural and remote areas. For example, if a consumer has a faulty internet service at a property that also has no mobile coverage, that consumer may need to step away from their faulty equipment and leave their property to make a call to technical support.

While delays in connecting and fixing a service in major cities are disruptive and

frustrating for consumers, the consequences of delays can be much more serious in regional, rural and remote areas, where consumers are often left without any alternative working service.

Eloise and Andrea struggled to troubleshoot a mobile service in remote Australia

Eloise is an astronomer who conducts research at very remote observation sites around Australia. Reliable mobile connectivity is essential for both her work and safety. Eloise's mobile service initially worked well, but recently, she has been unable to make reliable contact with colleagues and complete key aspects of her fieldwork.

Eloise sought support from her friend Andrea, who lived in the city. After several failed attempts to troubleshoot the service remotely, Andrea drove 800 kilometres to Eloise's remote location to carry out further testing in person, using instructions provided by the telco.

Despite these efforts, the service issues continued. The provider offered no further solutions, leaving Eloise without access to a reliable mobile service.

Names of all parties have been changed.

Remoteness can make in-store support hard to access

Some telco issues require consumers to visit the provider's store to resolve the issue, such as when a consumer wants to:

- prove their identity
- fix a faulty mobile handset, or
- resolve contractual or billing issues that involve physical paperwork.

While these visits may be inconvenient for consumers living in major cities, our complaint review found that they can become impractical or inaccessible for consumers living in more remote areas.

Brody made multiple fruitless journeys to replace a handset

Brody lives in a remote location, which is several hours' drive from the nearest town. His existing mobile was getting old, and he decided to replace it with a new model.

To organise a new device, Brody made a 350 kilometre round trip to his telco's nearest store. Due to limited stock, he was asked to return in two weeks to collect his new device. Brody travelled to the store twice more after being told his device was ready for collection, yet neither time this was true.

Despite travelling hundreds of kilometres, Brody was left without a phone and frustrated by his provider's poor communication and conflicting information.

Names of all parties have been changed.

Consumers told us their closest telco store may be a 6+ hour drive or a plane flight away, making the visit impractical for resolving their issues. Sometimes their issues required multiple visits to stores to fix, or the consumer made the trip only to discover the issue could not be fixed in a store at all, or that their appointment had been cancelled.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers can face additional challenges

Connectivity challenges increase with remoteness, exposing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers in regional, rural and remote areas to greater, and in some cases additional, barriers to accessing phone and internet services.²

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers rely on pre-paid mobile services.³ We are pleased to hear that the availability of pre-paid services has improved as mobile coverage expands across Australia. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers are missing out on the benefits of this expanded coverage. For example, community groups in Nhulunbuy told us that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are unable to activate prepaid services that they have paid for, as they do not hold, or cannot obtain, the identification documents required by law for activation.⁴

² Noting the more remote an area, the higher the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. See: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Profile of First Nations people - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#), accessed 9 July 2026.

³ First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, [Initial Report | First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group](#), October 2023.

⁴ Telecommunications (Service Provider – Identity Checks for Prepaid Mobile Carriage Services) Determination 2017.

With no telco representatives in the area, and no other way offered to them to identify themselves remotely, consumers are left without a service, or they must borrow services from a family member, friend or support worker.

In recent submissions to the ACMA, consumer groups, providers and the TIO called for changes to the rules around ID checks to support consumers without conventional identity documents. We support a review of these requirements to enable flexibility and to bring telcos in line with other sectors such as banking and finance. A flexible approach would help any consumer without access to conventional identity documents verify their identity, while also preventing fraud.

Recommendation 1

Ensure timely access to technicians in regional, rural and remote areas, and pause charges when consumers are waiting for a technician to install or repair a service (where appropriate)

Telcos should ensure they have sufficient technicians available in regional, rural and remote areas to provide a timely service to consumers and ensure they are not left without a service for extended periods. Consumers should not be charged for services they cannot use while waiting for installation or repair appointments, where the repair is due to a service fault.

Recommendation 2

Review telco authentication obligations to support flexibility and improve accessibility

Inflexible authentication practices can lead to consumers in regional, rural and remote areas having to travel great distances to physical stores for assistance. This is not accessible for all consumers. The ACMA should review the Telecommunications Service Provider (Customer Identity Authentication) Determination 2022 with the aim of maintaining protections against fraud while ensuring more flexible multi-factor authentication processes are available to consumers.

Recommendation 3

Modernise prepaid identification requirements

The ACMA should review the Telecommunications (Service Provider — Identity Checks for Prepaid Mobile Carriage Services) Determination 2017 to ensure identification requirements are flexible and accessible for consumers who do not hold standard forms of identity documentation. Reforms should maintain security objectives while reducing barriers faced by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers, people experiencing vulnerability and consumers living in remote communities.

Key finding 2:

Mobile connectivity can be unreliable and fall short of what consumers need

In the last two financial years, more than 2,300 consumers from regional, rural and remote areas told us that their mobile service has unreliable coverage, is unavailable in places they need it, or has become less usable as networks and equipment have changed. These challenges leave consumers feeling frustrated, isolated or without confidence that their service will work when it matters most.

Consumers face unique connectivity challenges

‘Poor mobile coverage’ was consistently one of the top ten complaint issues we saw across all regional, rural and remote complaints in the last two financial years. Coverage complaints also made up a higher proportion of complaints from these areas than they did in complaints from major cities.⁵

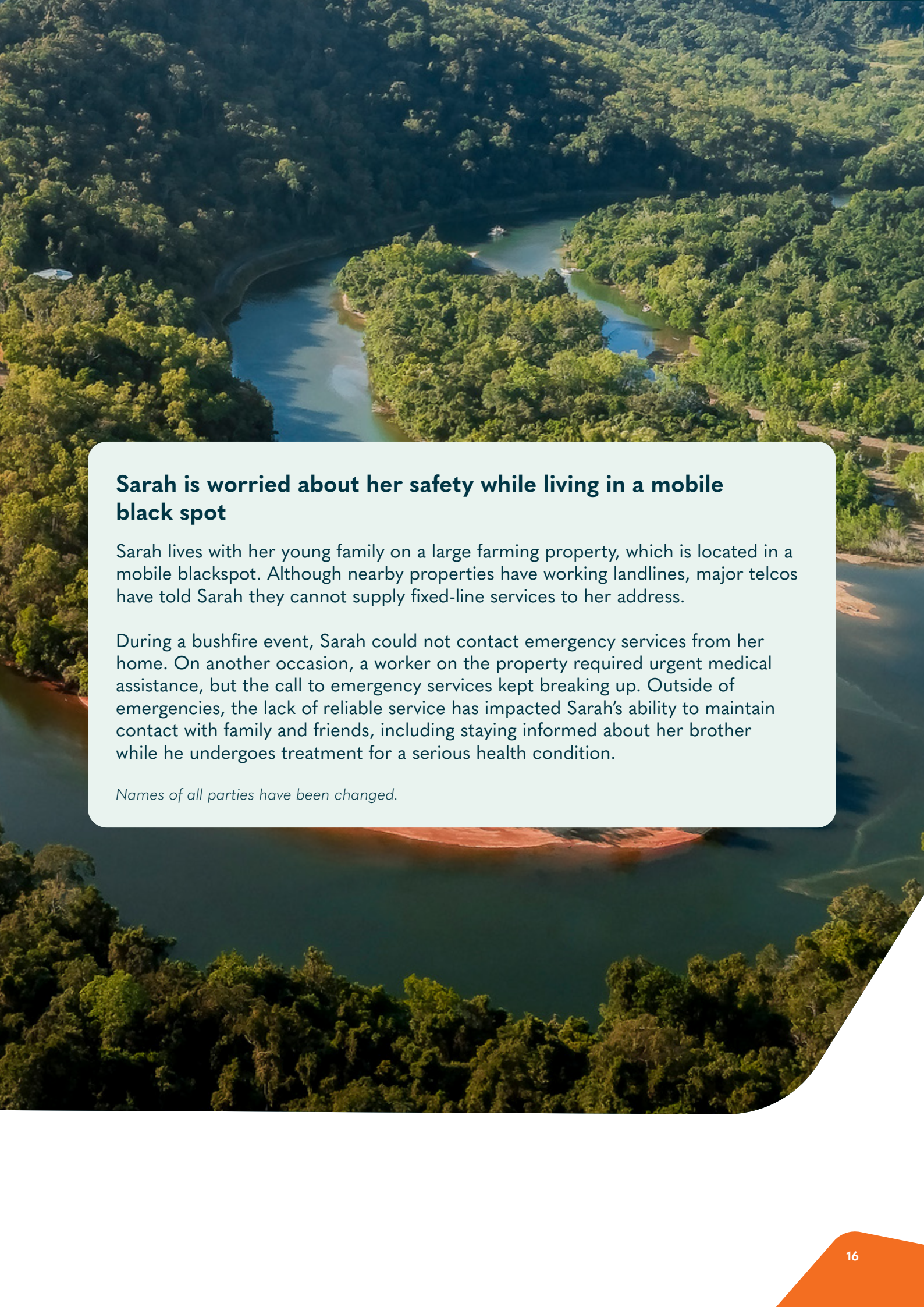
We received complaints about mobile and wireless coverage being absent or unreliable, including from consumers unable to get mobile reception inside their house, elsewhere on their property, or out on the roads between towns. This disrupts their daily lives and poses serious safety risks to consumers, especially when they are working on their property or travelling through remote regions.

While some complaints were from consumers who live in mobile black spots, we also received complaints about poor mobile coverage from consumers who say that the coverage map shows sufficient coverage in their area. We note these complaints pre-date the ACMA’s new rules that require telcos to publish standardised coverage maps as of 30 June 2026.⁶ We hope to see these complaints decline over the coming year.

The on-the-ground experience of mobile coverage can also vary across the year. Peak periods can cause networks to become congested by a seasonal influx of users (such as holiday-goers, casual workers at harvest times, or construction workers temporarily working in a regional area), causing the service to become slow or unreliable at points throughout the year.

⁵ This complaint issue appeared in 4.63% of complaints from major cities in this period, and in 8.46% of regional, rural or remote complaints. Please note: our keywords were updated on 1 July 2026, and different terms are now being used.

⁶ Telecommunications (Mobile Network Coverage Maps) Industry Standard 2026.

An aerial photograph showing a river meandering through a lush, dense green forest. The river is a light blue-green color, contrasting with the vibrant green of the surrounding trees. The forest appears thick and continuous, with the river carving a path through it. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day, with some areas of the forest appearing slightly more illuminated than others.

Sarah is worried about her safety while living in a mobile black spot

Sarah lives with her young family on a large farming property, which is located in a mobile blackspot. Although nearby properties have working landlines, major telcos have told Sarah they cannot supply fixed-line services to her address.

During a bushfire event, Sarah could not contact emergency services from her home. On another occasion, a worker on the property required urgent medical assistance, but the call to emergency services kept breaking up. Outside of emergencies, the lack of reliable service has impacted Sarah's ability to maintain contact with family and friends, including staying informed about her brother while he undergoes treatment for a serious health condition.

Names of all parties have been changed.

The impacts of the 3G shutdown are still being felt

We saw complaints from regional, rural and remote consumers who were previously on the edges of 3G mobile coverage (or living outside of that footprint) but found themselves without reliable mobile coverage after the shutdown. Other consumers described how their existing mobile equipment (such as boosters used to enhance the signal strength across a property) became obsolete after the shutdown as they were not compatible with 4G or 5G.

When asking their telco for help, consumers in these situations are typically encouraged to invest in newer or additional technology to improve their mobile coverage, often at their own expense. Not all consumers can afford to do this and it is not always clear whether upgrading their equipment will improve their service, leaving consumers dissatisfied with the need to upgrade.

Other consumers told us they feel their service quality and service options are worse than they have been in years. This is driving some to find creative solutions to these problems. For example, consumers and consumer groups told us about consumers reverting to using UHF Radio communications. While old and less private, these services are still reliable for short range distances.

“ We had the technology 20 years ago, even two years ago with 3G, but we don’t anymore...we’re going back to the 60s buying handheld UHF’s.

“ In the bush we have gone back about 15 years, back to when mobile first came out.

“ People resort to using the Two-Ways [radio]. It’s fine, but everyone in the district can hear what you’re saying, so you just have to juggle what you say.

Some consumers need more support than they can achieve through individual complaints

While some consumers are finding creative solutions, it is also common for people in regional, rural and remote Australia to give up on their complaints and resign themselves to having a poor service.

Consumers and consumer groups tell us that they are tired of making complaints when the common remedies that are available to telco consumers, such as refunds or discounted services, will not improve their underlying connectivity problems.

While the TIO can handle complaints about poor mobile coverage, we cannot compel a provider to improve its infrastructure.

“ Financially my issue was resolved but it’s the frustration at the time taken for it to happen and the lack of understanding of the problem.

“ No doubt because we’re in the middle of nowhere, who gives a st about us right?**

Looking ahead

A key question for government and industry is whether the UOMO, currently before Parliament, will successfully address the connectivity issues facing consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation) Bill 2025 establishes a new framework that will require mobile network operators to provide a baseline level of outdoor mobile coverage on an equitable basis across Australia.

To help improve outcomes for regional, rural and remote consumers, telcos told us that they would like to see more collaboration between the government, regulators and industry.

Telcos said that given the current logistical challenges they face in providing telco services in rural and very remote parts of Australia, there is a need for long-term and place-based collaboration on policy, regulation and co-investment, with input from affected communities.

One telco also told us that they support future policy outcomes that focus on delivering technology-neutral services.

However it is implemented, we consider the UOMO would be more beneficial for consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia if it is coupled with reasonable mandatory service levels and service quality standards for mobile services. For example, the development of service standards supporting the UOMO could require faulty mobile towers to be restored within a set timeframe, while giving consumers the ability to claim compensation from the carrier if those timeframes are not met.

Recommendation 4

Introduce individual remedies for significant delays in accessing mobile services

Once the UOMO is in place and mobile services become guaranteed Australia-wide, the government should strengthen consumer protections by introducing accessible and direct remedies for consumers who experience unreasonable delays in connecting, repairing or restoring all types of telecommunications services.

A compensation framework would create stronger incentives for providers to resolve faults or outages promptly and provide consumers with a clear avenue for redress directly from their service providers.

Key finding 3:

Limited choice and low awareness of telco technologies can leave consumers without alternative options

Consumers in regional, rural and remote areas tell us that their connectivity options are often constrained by the availability and affordability of services, putting some consumers at risk of not having an alternative service if their primary service fails. We have also heard that it can be difficult for consumers to understand the options available to them and make informed decisions about which services best meet their needs.

Limited choice can leave consumers without backup options

For many Australians, the ongoing expansion of mobile networks and the increased availability of satellite-based services in recent years has meant that telco services are available in more areas and there is a wider variety of telcos available in those spaces.

Depending on their location however, consumers in regional, rural and remote areas may still only have access to one practical way to stay connected or a limited range of telco providers, and these options may not suit what they prefer or can afford. This lack of choice and limited availability of backup options can leave consumers completely disconnected when their primary service is unavailable.

Limited provider choice also means that the more remote a consumer lives, the less ability they have to shop around in the same way as consumers in metropolitan areas.

If prices rise or the service quality falls short of their needs, the consumer may not have the option to switch to a more suitable service. This is particularly concerning for consumers on limited incomes, who may already be paying more for additional equipment or backup services.

Evan was left without affordable satellite options

Evan moved house from one part of very remote Australia to another and wanted to transfer his existing ADSL internet service to his new address. Despite neighbouring properties having active ADSL connections, Evan's telco advised it could not supply the service.

Instead, Evan was directed to connect to a satellite service, requiring an upfront equipment cost of approximately \$700 and ongoing monthly fees of \$120. Evan found this option significantly more expensive than his previous ADSL service.

With satellite presented as the only available option and no repayment option available for the equipment costs, Evan was left without a home internet connection. This affected his ability to work and limited everyday activities such as streaming and online access, forcing him to rely on a mobile hotspot.

Names of all parties have been changed.

Access to reliable power supply limits connectivity

We heard from telcos and have seen in complaints from consumers that a significant barrier to providing and receiving a reliable telco service is the relative scarcity of reliable power sources in regional, rural and remote Australia.

As the industry moves away from service types that have minimal power needs (for example copper landlines) towards relying on technologies that require an external power supply (for example NBN or satellite services), consumers are growing concerned that the power available at their property will not meet their connectivity needs. Power supply is also a concern for consumers using mobile services in remote areas, as we sometimes see complaints from consumers who need power to maintain their mobile boosters or similar equipment. While power supply is typically not an issue in major cities, consumers particularly in rural or remote areas may not have reliable access to mains power and often rely on alternative sources of power, such as solar or generators, to power these services. These power solutions can be expensive to set up, with consumer groups describing costs in the thousands. At the same time, generators can be expensive to run and require challenging maintenance work.

Telcos told us that more collaboration with power companies would greatly help reduce barriers to the connection and restoration of telco infrastructure in areas where there is power instability.

One telco told us they are already working with energy companies to better understand when and how they restore power so that they can explore ways of strengthening backup power to improve resilience and minimise service disruptions.

Telcos have also suggested that permanent solutions for connecting infrastructure to mains power networks could be beneficial for long term resilience.

Satellite brings great opportunities, but can be complex and unaffordable

Satellite technology has improved significantly in recent years, and offers a vital lifeline in areas that are not serviced by other technology types. We have heard consumers and consumer groups describe the introduction of satellite services as a “game changer”, and that satellite services are rapidly becoming the default option for consumers in rural or remote Australia. However, despite the critical role satellites play in delivering voice and data services to regional, rural and remote areas, satellite-based services have some limitations that mean they may not always be a suitable replacement for mobile or fixed line services.

On a technical level, satellite services are dependent on weather conditions and the topography of the landscape. Consumer groups told us that satellite connectivity can be affected by heavy rains and storms, smoke, and dense cloud cover. When weather events affect satellite, this results in slow speeds, drop-outs, and other connectivity issues.

These services can be expensive to set up and maintain, with one consumer describing the cost as “prohibitive”. Costs can be incurred both through the initial purchase of equipment to connect the service and through related fees such as demand surcharges that can apply in regional, rural or remote locations. We have also heard consumers who said their telco began billing them for their satellite service a week after their equipment was delivered, regardless of whether or not a technician was available to visit the property that month to install the equipment.

While some of the consumer groups we spoke to noted the benefits of satellite technology, they highlighted the following concerns:

- moving consumers to satellite may result in less investment in terrestrial-based technology, which is still needed
- some consumers are being pushed into signing up for satellite service when fixed-wired options are available
- some consumers do not actually want to move to satellite but feel they have no choice as some legacy telco services are no longer being offered to them (for example, copper-based fixed-line services or CAN Radio).

Satellite services also generate complaints to our office. Just over 2,000 complaints in the last two financial years discussed satellite services or satellite service providers, and around 70% of those complaints were from consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia. Complaints about faults and other technical issues make up the majority of these complaints, however we also regularly receive complaints from consumers who say they are unable to speak with their telco about their satellite service. This can leave consumers continuing to incur monthly charges even when they are not receiving a service.

The First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group has suggested that satellite providers should adopt a prepaid service for satellites, which will address some of the issues of unexpectedly high costs, enable flexibility if consumers' financial circumstances change, or if there is a problem with their service.⁷

Consumers need clear guidance and support

Even when consumers have multiple options available to them, the rapidly changing telco landscape can make it difficult for consumers in regional, rural and remote Australia to understand what options are suitable for their needs, and what technology types are safe to invest in.

Our complaints and discussions with consumer groups indicate varying levels of digital and connectivity literacy amongst regional, rural and remote consumers.

Consistent with this, telcos and consumer groups told us that some consumers are not always aware of the connectivity options available to them. This can result in consumers purchasing products and services that do not suit their needs. This may be particularly difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers who, in 2025, recorded a digital ability score of 68.6, compared to 73.8 for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers.^{8, 9}

We have also been told by consumer groups that some programs intended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not “place-based”, meaning there is not enough knowledge of local towns, income, or the needs of people. This is critical, as research shows that access, affordability and digital ability vary widely across communities and locations.¹⁰

⁷ First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, [Submission to the Satellite Systems and Australia's Telecommunications Regulatory Framework discussion paper](#), accessed on 9 July 2026.

⁸ ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, [Counting on connectivity: regional and remote towns research](#), May 2026.

⁹ First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, [First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap - 2026 and beyond](#), December 2024.

¹⁰ ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, [Counting on connectivity: regional and remote towns research](#), May 2026.

Consumer groups also reported that consumers seeking support from their telco are sometimes connected to staff who do not understand the realities of living in a regional, rural or remote area.

While some consumers are across technological trends and can find creative solutions to meet their needs, many others will rely on external sources for advice.

Telcos acknowledge this need for external advice, and the ones we spoke with highlighted the support and education they offer consumers to assist with any technology transitions. Telcos also acknowledged the importance of tailored support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and outlined initiatives aimed at improving this. However, with trust in telcos being low,¹¹ consumers told us they do not have many reliable sources to turn to – especially after the vital and trusted Regional Tech Hub lost funding earlier this year.¹²

More work needs to be done to provide consumers with reliable, tailored support and boost their digital and connectivity literacy.

A consumer's ability to access a reliable telco service that is suitable for their needs should not be solely reliant on their technical and digital and connectivity literacy skills. Nor should it rely on their ability to afford additional connectivity solutions, for example mobile signal boosters.

Zara has no reliable connectivity options

Zara lives with complex health conditions and relies on a landline service because her area is classified as a mobile blackspot.

Zara's landline is frequently affected by faults and outages. To provide an alternative means of communication, her telco supplied an interim phone. However, the device relies on the mobile network and is unusable due to the limited coverage.

Zara's telco suggested installing an antenna to improve mobile reception. This solution required Zara to pay equipment and installation costs, with no guarantee the antenna would provide sufficient coverage. As an alternative, the telco recommended Zara move to a satellite service, but the costs were significant.

This left Zara without a dependable and affordable means of communication.

Names of all parties have been changed.

¹¹ Roy Morgan, [Telecommunications industry is Australia's second most distrusted and Optus is the most distrusted brand](#), December 2025.

¹² [Regional Tech Hub](#), accessed 9 July 2026.

Recommendation 5

Invest in tailored digital and connectivity literacy programs

Government and telcos should provide sustainable funding for place-based digital inclusion programs that help consumers understand telecommunications technologies, compare available services, manage costs and troubleshoot common issues. Programs should be tailored to the needs of different communities, including older Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, small businesses and people living in remote areas.

Recommendation 6

Develop an independent database where consumers can check what services are available to them

In collaboration with consumer groups, government and telcos should consider developing a publicly accessible database that allows consumers to see which telecommunications service types are available at their location. This database could be modelled similarly to the US Federal Communications Commission's National Broadband Map.

Recommendation 7

Improve affordability of connectivity in regional, rural and remote Australia

Government and telcos should explore measures to improve the affordability of essential telecommunications services for consumers who have limited provider or technology choices, including those who rely on satellite services. In line with the recommendation of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, we support prepaid services for satellite.

Recommendation 8

Review troubleshooting and customer service processes to ensure they can accommodate consumers who live in regional, rural or remote areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

Telcos should review their troubleshooting and customer service processes to ensure they provide flexibility that meets the needs of regional, rural and remote consumers, and that staff are equipped to provide effective, tailored and culturally appropriate assistance.

Key finding 4:

Outages and unreliable services create significant safety risks and disruptions for business

Poor connectivity and a lack of alternative backup services in regional, rural and remote areas can cut consumers off from family, community members, emergency services, and other critical support. Businesses can also be cut off from their customers, suppliers and staff. These risks are heightened for consumers in remote areas, where the electricity sources that telco services depend on can be limited and unreliable.

Reliable connectivity is critical for safety

We regularly see complaints from consumers with limited or unreliable connectivity, who say they are concerned about what outages mean for their safety.

These concerns are especially prominent in complaints from regional, rural or remote communities that have experienced network outages affecting the entire township. In some cases, these outages are planned events intended for network maintenance. Other outages are caused by unexpected factors such as adverse weather events or tower malfunctions, which can be challenging for carriers to quickly restore in remote locations. Either kind of outage can leave residents with limited or no service availability for days or weeks at a time.

In some cases, such as in a recent rolling series of outages in Wadeye, NT, significant local outages can be regular occurrences, and seasonal weather conditions prevent replacement parts from being delivered.

While the ACMA's new rules for the communication of outages ensure that outages in regional and remote areas are promptly identified and communicated to telcos and consumers,¹³ mere knowledge of an outage does not help consumers whose on-the-ground experience involves lengthy periods without working telco services.

“ Having someone on the other end of the phone giving medical advice can be the difference between someone living and dying. It's also important for the person who is there being able to feel like they're not helpless, and that they've done everything they could had done.

13 Under the Telecommunications (Customer Communications for Outages) Industry Standard 2024, a 'significant local outage' recognises unplanned outages that affect 1,000 or more services for over 6 hours in regional Australia, or 250 or more services for over 3 hours in remote Australia.

“ In a regional area, I attended a fatal fire and couldn’t ring the fire captain 100 metres away. I couldn’t effectively communicate with Triple Zero either because of patchy reception.

“ We sometimes have accidents or incidents on our farm which don’t require an ambulance but do require urgent assistance. We would not want to burden emergency services with a 000 call but the ability to call or message someone else on the farm, or a neighbour, for help is vital.

Consumers are concerned about emergency access

Concerns have been raised across the industry in the last 12 months around ensuring consumers have reliable access to emergency services via Triple Zero. In regional, rural and remote areas, these concerns are not new. Community members have told us that Triple Zero concerns existed in the bush long before the Optus outage on 18 September 2025.

Consumers from these areas also told us that when emergency services can be such great distances away, it can be just as important for them to be able to contact their neighbours as it is to contact Triple Zero. The ability to get help from (or warn) family and friends means an emergency can be prevented before it happens, and this eases the strain on emergency services. This cannot happen without a reliable telco service.

We occasionally see complaints where an emergency has occurred in a remote area, and the consumer had to leave the scene of

the emergency to find coverage to call Triple Zero. It can also be difficult for consumers in regional, rural and remote areas to determine whether a call to Triple Zero fails due to poor coverage in the area, or because calls to emergency services can take up to a minute to “camp-on” to another network if a consumer’s primary telco network is out of range.¹⁴

This uncertainty is not helped by the misinformation that sometimes circulates surrounding Triple Zero access and the availability of 112 as an alternative service. For example, recent research by ACCAN and insights from other consumer groups indicate that some consumers believe they can access Triple Zero via text.¹⁵ Although new direct-to-device technology has made it possible for consumers with a satellite service to send text messages outdoors where there is otherwise no coverage, this technology does not currently enable text to Triple Zero. The TIO supports telcos and government working together to explore whether this capability can be developed in the future.

¹⁴ Emergency camp-on functionality is a process initiated by an end-user’s mobile phone, where the phone accesses the Emergency Call Service using a mobile network other than the end-user’s usual mobile network. It is used where the end-user’s phone cannot access their usual mobile network for any reason, and is intended to allow a mobile phone to access the Emergency Call Service using any available mobile network that can carry the call.

¹⁵ ACCAN, [Experiences and Barriers in Contacting Triple Zero: Full Report](#), July 2026.



While some consumers have invested in backup devices which enable them to call Triple Zero in an emergency, this is not an affordable solution for all consumers. Many consumers also expressed concerns about not being able to receive emergency warnings in the event of flooding, bushfires and cyclones. For example, without a working telco service, they cannot check online for safety warnings. One consumer told us they did not want to waste limited resources (such as fuel) during an emergency to drive to the nearest town to find out if food drops were available or otherwise contact others for help.

We have seen steps over the last year to improve information-sharing across the industry. This includes mandatory information sharing, such as outage reporting for significant local outages,¹⁶ as well as voluntary sharing, such as the information shared to facilitate device blocking under the Emergency Call Services Determination. These steps are positive, and more can be achieved with greater cooperation.

Thelma could not contact help in an emergency

Thelma is 90 years old and lives alone in a remote coastal community in Western Australia. There is no mobile coverage in her area, so she relies entirely on a landline service to stay connected. The landline service also supports her medical alarm.

When Thelma's landline stopped working, she lost her only reliable means of communication. The fault occurred at a particularly critical time, as she experienced a medical emergency and was unable to place a call or use her medical alarm.

Despite contacting her telco multiple times to report the fault, the issue remained unresolved. Thelma was left frustrated and worried about her ability to access help in an emergency, and so she approached the TIO for assistance.

Names of all parties have been changed.

¹⁶ Under the Telecommunications (Customer Communications for Outages) Industry Standard 2024, a 'significant local outage' recognises unplanned outages that affect 1,000 or more services for over 6 hours in regional Australia, or 250 or more services for over 3 hours in remote Australia.

Reliable power supply is essential during outages

Consumers also expressed concerns about unreliable power supply, or limited backup power sources, leading to communities being isolated during natural disasters or otherwise prevented from quickly responding to emergencies. For example, one consumer said they must manually start their power generator before calling Triple Zero because they are not connected to mains power.

Telcos we spoke to acknowledged that the loss of mains power is a common cause of service outages. Telcos also told us that in the event of a natural disaster, infrastructure may not only be affected by power outages, but can also be damaged in ways that cannot be quickly repaired. Service outages can also disrupt the restoration of power outages, demonstrating the interdependency between the two systems.¹⁷

To help prevent outages and restore telco services to consumers at this critical time, carriers have disaster plans in place, which can include deploying temporary generators and portable connectivity solutions (including mobile and satellite-based technologies) to support connectivity when infrastructure has been damaged. While these temporary solutions can help maintain connectivity, telcos acknowledge they may not always provide consumers with the same level of coverage or capacity as permanent infrastructure, particularly in rough or remote terrain.¹⁸

As well as providing temporary solutions when services go down, some carriers have resilience uplift plans in place, which include delivering targeted infrastructure upgrades to improve long-term network resilience for disaster-prone areas. We support greater investment in initiatives of this kind, given the increasing risk of extreme weather events and the vulnerability of remote communities due to telecommunications and power supply limitations.¹⁹

Maryanne's telco offered no solutions to her connectivity and power supply concerns

Maryanne lives on an isolated property in regional Victoria, where her home is powered by generators. She must carefully manage her electricity use to maintain essential household and communications services.

Her telco recently advised that her landline service was transitioning to satellite-based technology. Maryanne was concerned about the implications of this change, particularly that the satellite service may not function reliably given her limited power supply, especially during periods when her generators do not operate.

Maryanne contacted her telco to explore the options to help her stay connected. However, the telco offered no solutions and instead referred her to the local power authority.

Names of all parties have been changed.

¹⁷ Australian Telecommunications Alliance, [Submission to the Australian Energy Retailer on the Network Resilience Guidelines](#), July 2026.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Australian Climate Service, [Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment Report](#), 2025.

Poor connectivity can have serious consequences for businesses

Outages and service disruptions also dramatically affect businesses operating in regional, rural and remote areas. We see complaints where outages mean businesses cannot process EFTPOS transactions, cannot place orders with suppliers, or miss out on key sales of livestock because they cannot receive calls. Outages may also cause businesses to fall short of their workplace health and safety obligations if they cannot reliably contact staff or call Triple Zero.

“ It’s not only the ability to have it [connectivity] for our safety, but also the day to day running and efficiencies on the farm. Sometimes if you can’t get a hold of someone you may need to drive 5-6 kilometres to make that call... I think city people take it for granted that they can communicate and talk to people at their workplace, you know this [the farm] is our workplace too.

In addition to relying on telecommunications for standard business activities such as operating EFTPOS machines or online banking, we heard that poor connectivity on farms is a barrier to farmers making their businesses more efficient and more competitive with farms that have embraced newer technologies. Many new farming techniques are reliant on having a telco service – for example, they can be used for water monitoring systems, remote cattle weighing systems, soil sensors and keeping in

touch with employees who work on the farm. Farmers told us that they do not feel confident investing in new technologies because they fear that technology they invest in now will soon become obsolete as telco service offerings change.

Harris lost time, money and business waiting for his service to be repaired

Harris runs a motel located on a remote stretch of highway in rural Australia. He relies on a landline service to take bookings and arrange essential supply deliveries.

When his landline stopped working, Harris contacted his telco who advised him to purchase new equipment. This meant driving several hours, with the telco’s nearest store located 150 kilometres away.

Unfortunately, the new equipment didn’t fix the problem. Harris began missing potential bookings from new customers and faced challenges communicating with guests who already had reservations.

Despite repeatedly contacting his telco and a technician attending, the service was not restored.

Names of all parties have been changed.

Recommendation 9

Strengthen community education on Triple Zero and emergency communications

Government, telcos and the ACMA should coordinate to deliver targeted public education on how Triple Zero works, the limitations of different technologies when accessing emergency services, and the steps consumers can take to stay connected during outages and prepare for emergencies. Education initiatives should particularly focus on regional, rural and remote communities, where service disruptions and coverage limitations can have significant safety implications.

Recommendation 11

Establish SIP service standards, with remedies available to consumers when standards are not met

The government should develop minimum service standards for SIP broadband services, including connection, fault repair and appointment timeframes. These service and quality standards should be supported by remedies that are accessible to and practical for consumers. Any compensation payable for breaches of these standards should be paid directly to consumers.

Recommendation 10

Prepare communities for scheduled outages associated with maintenance or upgrades

Telcos should prepare communities for scheduled outages associated with maintenance or upgrades (for both network infrastructure and associated IT systems), including providing timely notification and access to alternative networks or services.

Appendix:

Our regional, rural and remote data

We received **27,882** complaints from consumers in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia across FY25 and FY26

Region	Complaints	Percentage of overall TIO complaints	Percentage of Australian population in each area (ABS data)
Major Cities	82,191	74.7%	73%
Regional, Rural, Remote	27,882	25.3%	27%
Breakdown by remoteness			
Inner Regional	19,130	17.4%	18%
Outer Regional	7,591	6.9%	8%
Remote	808	0.7%	1.1%
Very Remote	353	0.3%	0.7%

Methodology

We identified whether a consumer is in rural, regional or remote Australia by matching the consumer's service or contact address with the 2021 to 2026 edition of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Accessibility and Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA+) remoteness classification. The ARIA+ index classes locations into major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas. This index categorises Hobart as Inner Regional and Darwin as Outer Regional. Further categories of the complaints (such as the service type and the key complaint issues) are as captured at first contact between the consumer making the complaint and the TIO officer processing their complaint.

Complaints about mobile and internet services were the most common complaint types in each region, and mobile complaints were more prominent (as a proportion of complaints) in more remote areas

Service type	Major cities	Regional or remote				
		Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote	Total regional / remote
Mobile	37,511 46%	8,193 43%	3,432 45%	394 49%	195 55%	12,214 44%
Internet	34,233 42%	7,288 38%	2,701 36%	247 31%	88 25%	10,324 37%
Landline	4,406 5%	1,729 9%	714 9%	78 10%	35 10%	2,556 9%
Multiple	5,141 6%	1,657 9%	667 9%	75 9%	34 10%	2,433 9%
Property	900 1%	263 1%	77 1%	14 2%	1 0%	355 1%

Complaints by state/territory

State / Territory	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote	Total
NSW	6,947 37%	1,262 17%	92 11%	13 4%	8,314
VIC	5,211 28%	1015 14%	31 4%	0 0%	6,257
QLD	3,905 20%	2,647 34.9%	179 22%	91 26%	6,822
WA	917 5%	610 8%	223 28%	103 29%	1,853
SA	802 4%	764 10%	145 18%	46 13%	1,757
TAS	1,098 5.7%	710 9.4%	31 4%	12 3%	1,851
ACT	3 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	3
NT	1 0%	454 6%	89 11%	73 21%	617

Inner Regional Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	11,678 61%
Disputed charges	6,516 34%
No service	2,776 15%
Inadequate fault testing	2,479 13%
Intermittent service or dropouts	2,371 12%
Delay	1,621 9%
Poor mobile coverage	1,523 8%
Slow data speed	1,519 8%
Service not cancelled on consumer request	1,421 7%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	1,248 7%

Outer Regional Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	4,650 61%
Disputed charges	2,455 32%
No service	1,199 16%
Inadequate fault testing	1,056 14%
Intermittent service or dropouts	984 13%
Poor mobile coverage	699 9%
Delay	577 8%
Slow data speed	564 7%
Service not cancelled on consumer request	517 7%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	461 6%

Remote Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	484 60%
Disputed charges	246 30%
No service	139 17%
Poor mobile coverage	96 12%
Intermittent service or dropouts	92 11%
Inadequate fault testing	87 11%
Service not cancelled on consumer request	63 8%
Delay	59 7%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	52 6%
Slow data speed	52 6%

Very Remote Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	220 62%
Disputed charges	107 30%
No service	59 17%
Inadequate fault testing	42 12%
Poor mobile coverage	41 12%
Intermittent service or dropouts	38 11%
Delay	28 8%
Service not cancelled on consumer request	27 8%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	25 7%
Service partly faulty	19 5%

Focus: Complaints from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers²⁰

Consumers who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	Major cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote	Total
	2,173	896	456	73	36	3,634

Top ten complaint issues from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers across regional, rural and remote areas

Inner Regional Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	551 62%
Disputed charges	354 40%
Intermittent service or dropouts	108 12%
No service	107 12%
Inadequate fault testing	86 10%
Poor mobile coverage	72 8%
Delay	72 8%
Slow data speed	69 8%
Financial hardship / repayment arrangement	69 8%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	66 7%

Outer Regional Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	296 65%
Disputed charges	173 38%
Intermittent service or dropouts	52 11%
No service	51 11%
Financial hardship / repayment arrangement	46 10%
Inadequate fault testing	46 10%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	43 9%
Poor mobile coverage	35 8%
Delay	33 7%
Slow data speed	31 7%

²⁰ This demographic data is gathered from consumers who identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander when approaching our office.

Remote Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	48 66%
Disputed charges	25 34%
No service	16 22%
Delay	7 10%
Inadequate fault testing	7 10%
Advantage taken of vulnerable consumer	6 8%
Equipment fault	6 8%
Slow data speed	6 8%
Credit default report	5 7%
Intermittent service or dropouts	5 7%

Very Remote Australia

Complaint issue	Total Complaints
No or delayed action	25 69%
Disputed charges	12 33%
Compensation for experience or inconvenience	4 11%
No service	4 11%
Bill unclear / not received	3 8%
Fraud	3 8%
Poor mobile coverage	3 8%
Restricted or disconnected service due to debt	3 8%
Service not cancelled on consumer request	3 8%
Slow data speed	3 8%

Contact us

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is a free and independent dispute resolution service for people and small businesses who have an unresolved complaint with their phone or internet service.

You can complain through our website at:

www.tio.com.au or by calling **1800 062 058**.

You can post a letter to:

PO Box 276, Collins Street West, VIC 8007 or fax it to **1800 630 614**.

If you need to use a language other than English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service on **134 450** and they will help you speak with us. They are a free service.

Calls to the above numbers on mobile phones may incur charges.

Getting someone to help you

You can also ask someone else to complain for you or your business, such as a friend, family member, or financial counsellor. Ask for our authorisation forms over the phone or find them on our website