

Australian law requires that a standard telephone service:

- be readily available everywhere;
- is subject to price controls;
- meets set standards of reliability;
- be connected and repaired within reasonable timeframes; and
- caters for those with special needs and who need access to emergency services.

Telephone price controls

Government price controls on Telstra mean the availability of standard untimed local calls (other than from a payphone) is protected by legislation and the price is capped at 22 cents.

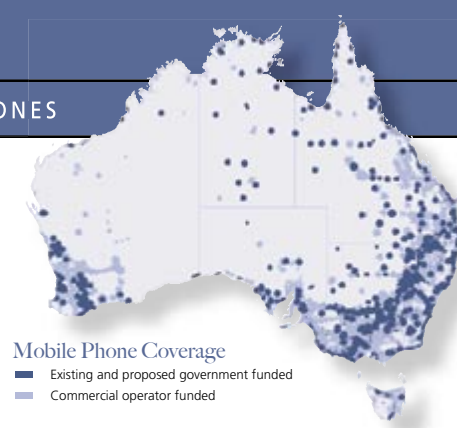
Highlights

Average annual decrease in call prices since 1997:

- National long distance calls—8.4 per cent each year
- Local calls—8.27 per cent each year
- International calls—21 per cent each year

Consumer protection and service quality

- Under the Customer Service Guarantee, customers can claim compensation if carriers fail to meet set timeframes for the connection or repair of telephone services.
- Customers can receive a temporary service if their phone cannot be installed within 30 working days, or a fault fixed within five working days; or if their standard telephone service has been inoperative three times or more for a total of 14 or more days over a 12 month period.
- Telstra is required to connect and repair priority services for customers with a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition within very tight timeframes (24 hours, or 48 hours in remote areas) or provide an interim service.
- The Government has legislated for a range of telecommunications consumer safeguards including the Universal Service Obligation and the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Scheme, while the Network Reliability Framework will commence in December 2002.



Australia's terrestrial mobile phone networks (GSM and CDMA) will soon reach almost 98 per cent of the population and cover almost 18 per cent of the Australian landmass.

One hundred per cent mobile coverage of Australia is provided through satellite mobile phone systems (a subsidy of up to \$1100 is available for the purchase of a satellite mobile phone handset for people who live or work in areas not covered by terrestrial mobile services).

Highlights

- Approximately 60 per cent of our population or 12 million Australians now have a mobile phone;
- Between 1997 and 2001, the cost of mobile phone services fell by an estimated 27.4 per cent;
- Commonwealth funding to improve mobile coverage includes:
 - \$40.5 million for 109 mobile phone projects under the Networking the Nation program—providing around 280 mobile base stations and antennae;
 - \$25 million to provide near continuous mobile coverage along almost 10 000 kms of Australia's national highways;
 - \$23.9 million to provide full mobile phone coverage to 132 towns with populations over 500 and \$40 million to provide coverage to 55 towns with populations less than 500 and spot coverage on 34 regional highways.

Almost 8.4 million Australians use the Internet to gather information, communicate with others and undertake transactions for business, community and recreational purposes.

Highlight:

All Australians can now dial-up to at least one Internet Service Provider (ISP) at untimed local call rates.

Broadband services

Broadband is provided over a variety of technology platforms in Australia, including cable, satellite (available to all Australians), wireless systems, and the copper wire based telephone network.

Commonwealth Government initiatives to improve Internet access for all Australians include:

- Over 1600 public Internet access facilities in regional Australia, including community Internet cafes, public libraries and schools, under the Networking the Nation program.
- The Internet Assistance Program (IAP) which provides support for residential and small business users to set up their Internet equipment to achieve a minimum speed equivalent to 19.2 kbps.
- The Digital Data Service Obligation which guarantees all Australians access to data speeds of at least 64 kbps through Telstra's ISDN service or via a one-way satellite service, known as the Special Digital Data Service Obligation (SDDSO). The SDDSO provides a rebate of 50 per cent of the price, capped at \$765, to eligible customers.

The Commonwealth Government recognises that all Australians, no matter where they live, need high quality telecommunications services to fully participate in both business and community life.

A Users' Guide to Australian Telecommunications 2002 describes how the Government has encouraged and supported the growth of telecommunications services in Australia, and how these services have improved over recent years.

Highlights:

- In 1997 the Australian telecommunications market was opened to full competition, resulting in new services, lower prices and greater choice for consumers.
- Consumer protection measures have been improved to protect customers against delays in connecting or repairing fixed line telephone services.
- The Government has committed more than \$1 billion in targeted funding to support improvements in communications and IT infrastructure and service delivery, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Further information on Government telecommunications initiatives is available at www.dcita.gov.au or www.newconnections.gov.au

RESOURCE	CONTACTS
<p>New Connections</p> <p><i>Regional communications information, including consumer rights, government programs and commercial service offerings.</i></p>	<p>Tel: Freecall™ 1800 883 488*</p> <p>Fax: 02 6271 1886</p> <p>Email: new.connections@dcita.gov.au</p> <p>Mail: New Connections GPO Box 2154 Canberra ACT 2601</p> <p>Web: www.newconnections.gov.au</p>
<p>Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA)</p>	<p>Tel: Freecall™ 1800 883 488*</p> <p>Fax: 02 6271 1901</p> <p>Email: dcita.mail@dcita.gov.au</p> <p>Mail: GPO Box 2154 Canberra ACT 2601</p> <p>Web: www.dcita.gov.au</p>
<p>Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO)</p> <p><i>Independent dispute resolution forum for telecommunications complaints.</i></p>	<p>Tel: Freecall™ 1800 062 058*</p> <p>TTY: 1800 675 692</p> <p>Fax: 1800 630 614</p> <p>Email: tio@tio.com.au</p> <p>Mail: PO Box 276 Collins Street West Melbourne VIC 8007</p> <p>Web: www.tio.com.au</p>
<p>Australian Communications Authority (ACA)</p> <p><i>Independent telecommunications industry regulator.</i></p>	<p>Tel: (03) 9963 6800 (switchboard)</p> <p>Contact details for regional offices are available on the ACA website</p> <p>Web: www.aca.gov.au</p>

*Calls from mobile telephones charged at applicable mobile telephone rates.

A Users' Guide to Australian Telecommunications

2002

