

SENATOR THE HON STEPHEN CONROY
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

THE HON MARK BUTLER MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE
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NO CHARGE FOR MOBILE PHONE CALLS TO LIFELINE FROM ANYWHERE IN AUSTRALIA

Mobile phone calls to Lifeline made from anywhere in Australia will be free of charge from 1 July under an agreement made between the three major phone carriers.

Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler, and the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Stephen Conroy today welcomed the agreement as an important means of helping people who are in crisis.

The Gillard Labor Government is providing \$18.2 million over three years to Lifeline to boost the capacity of the organisation to respond to more calls and to support free calls from mobiles.

"Lifeline is the national provider of telephone-based support for people who are in crisis, offering 24 hour support to people who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts and making it more accessible to anyone in a crisis situation is extremely important," Mr Butler announced today during a visit to Lifeline Adelaide.

"I would like to thank all three major mobile phone carriers - Telstra, Optus and Vodafone Hutchison Australia - for agreeing to abolish call charges from mobile phones to Lifeline's national crisis line (13 11 14). This arrangement will also be passed through to the downstream resellers of the three carriers' mobile services.

"Each year, more than 114,000 calls to Lifeline's national crisis line are made from mobiles and more than 40 calls every day come from people at high risk of suicide.

"The costs associated with what is often a lengthy phone call may have been a disincentive for people who are seeking crisis care.

"This measure will remove cost as a barrier to seeking help and ensure more people can access the support that they need."

Senator Conroy also thanked the three mobile phone carriers for working with Lifeline to achieve this outcome.

"I am pleased that all three mobile carriers have voluntarily agreed to this important measure," Senator Conroy said.

"In particular, I would like to acknowledge the work of John Stanton, the CEO of the peak industry body Communications Alliance, for his efforts in facilitating a consensus approach from industry.

"I would also like to acknowledge the work that each mobile phone carrier has undertaken in making alterations to network systems in order to allow Lifeline calls to be treated in a unique way. These were not easy changes to make but they will make it easier for Australians to call Lifeline when they need to" Senator Conroy said.

Lifeline CEO Dr Maggie Jamieson also welcomed today's announcement.

"We know that the costs associated with calling Lifeline from a mobile has acted as a significant deterrent to help-seekers in the past, so we are very pleased that the Commonwealth is helping us to address this problem," Dr Jamieson said.

"The financial assistance the Commonwealth is providing us will allow people to call Lifeline's crisis line from their mobile handset with the knowledge that they can speak freely about their emotional crisis, without a looming future financial burden."

Today's announcement demonstrates the Gillard Government is delivering on its 2010 election commitment to improve suicide prevention efforts and crisis intervention services under the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide package.

Over the next 5 years, the Gillard Government is redoubling its efforts and investment in suicide prevention.

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