**Australian Government**

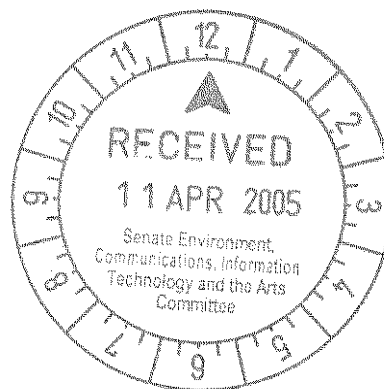**Australian Communications Authority**

Senator John Cherry
Chair
Senate Environment, Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA   ACT   2600

Dear Senator Cherry

**Inquiry into the performance of the Australian telecommunications regulatory regime**

On 16 March the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee invited public submissions to the above inquiry.

Under existing legislation the provision of telecommunications services is governed by extensive and specific provisions to safeguard consumers, including:

- explicit statutory protections for basic services such as: price caps and untimed local calls; Universal Service Obligation; Digital Data Service Obligation; Customer Service Guarantee; and the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman;

- more detailed requirements, often applied to Telstra as the universal service provider through licence conditions, such as: Priority Assistance; Internet Assistance Program and the Network Reliability Framework; and

- industry-developed codes, registered and enforced by the ACA, which establish operational and behavioural requirements for service providers in dealing with their customers in areas such as advertising, billing, credit management and complaints handling.

The telecommunications-specific safeguards complement general consumer protection under the Commonwealth *Trade Practices Act 1974* and State and Territory fair trading laws.

The ACA, ACCC and TIO each have defined roles in dealing with various aspects of the safeguards framework and they operate individually and in concert to pursue

outcomes consistent with the legislative objective of securing outcomes in the long term interests of end-users.

An independent and easily accessible overview of the consumer safeguards framework for telecommunications can be found in Chapter 7 of <u>The Australian Communications Law Centre Guide " Australian Telecommunications Legislation"</u> 3ed (2004) ISBN 0 86840 774 7.
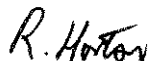
For the convenience of the Committee I have attached copies of ACA fact sheets on elements of the framework which may be of interest and for which the ACA has particular responsibility. These are:

1. Universal Service Obligation

2. Digital Data Service Obligation

3. Customer Service Guarantee

4. Priority Assistance

5. Network Reliability Framework

6. Internet Assistance Program

In addition the ACA website (http://internet.aca.gov.au) contains a range of information on aspects of the regulatory framework and the ACA role.

If the Committee requires further information in relation to the above please contact John Neil, Executive Manager, Telecommunications Analysis Group, ph (03) 99636939 email: john.neil@aca.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

*R. Horton*

Dr Bob Horton
Acting Chairman

4 April 2005

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [                    ] GO

## Consumer fact sheet

# Your rights to a telephone service – the universal service obligation

You are entitled to have reasonable and equitable access to a standard telephone service and payphones, regardless of where you live or carry on business. The legislated obligation to provide this guaranteed access to service is known as the universal service obligation (USO).

The USO exists even where telephone companies other than Telstra offer local call services. You can choose whichever telephone company you prefer. However, Telstra, as the primary universal service provider, is currently the only company obliged to provide you with a standard telephone service wherever you live or work.

All universal service providers are required to have an approved policy statement and marketing plan (or plans), which explain how they will ensure reasonable access to the standard telephone service and payphones for all Australians. The ACA monitors Telstra's compliance with its policy statement and standard marketing plan.

### What does the standard telephone service include?

For most people, the standard telephone service means the basic fixed telephone used to speak with people in other locations. Telephone companies are required to provide certain features with a standard telephone service. These features include access to:

- local, national and international calls;
- 24 hour access to the emergency call service number;
- operator assisted services;
- directory assistance; and
- itemised billing, including itemised local calls on request.

Only the supply of one standard telephone service to a customer's location is required under the USO. Your rights under the USO do not extend to mobile services, the Internet, or other enhanced telecommunications services.

### Access to the standard telephone service for people with a disability

The USO also ensures access to the standard telephone service for people who cannot communicate using voice telephony because they are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. The obligation requires that an equivalent means of communication be provided, including appropriate customer equipment to enable equivalent access. For example, communicating by text using a teletypewriter (TTY) or modem is a form of communication considered to be equivalent to voice telephony.

To enable text and voice telephony users to communicate with each other, the National Relay Service (NRS) was established to assist text-to-voice and voice-to-text translation. The NRS enables access to the telephone network through the relay of modem, TTY or one-way voice communications.

### Equipment to access the standard telephone service

Your right to a standard telephone service under the USO includes the provision of a standard telephone handset if requested, but additional costs apply. If you have an impairment associated with hearing, speech, vision, dexterity or mobility, the obligation extends to the provision of equivalent forms of telephone equipment, such as volume control or hands-free phones and TTYs.

### How to obtain a standard telephone service

To obtain a standard telephone service under the USO, you should contact your local Telstra office. Other telephone companies may also offer local call services in your area.

**Charges for connecting a standard telephone service**

There is a standard connection fee of $209 (less for customers entitled to a concession) for new connections.

In some cases, additional charges may apply. For example, where there is no readily accessible telephone network infrastructure, it may be necessary for Telstra to extend its network so that you can be connected to the network. The network extension charge is capped at $1,540.

There may also be trenching costs. This is where it is necessary for a trench to be dug to house the underground cable that connects your premises to the telephone network. You are responsible for organising and paying for this trenching. This work can be carried out by any registered or licensed cabler and it is advisable to seek quotes.

**Timeframes for connecting and repairing the standard telephone service**

Telstra's **standard marketing plan** includes timeframes for connecting and repairing standard telephone services.

Maximum connection times vary from two working days to up to six months, depending on the existence of a previous connection, the population of the specific area and the availability of infrastructure (such as local telephone exchanges, main cables and radio distribution systems). From 1 January 2003, Telstra has undertaken to connect telephone services in any location within 20 working days.

If you are experiencing an extended delay in connecting or repairing your telephone service you may also be eligible for an interim service (or Telstra may choose to offer you a choice between an interim or alternative service). Telstra is obliged to offer an interim service under certain circumstances, including where your service cannot be connected within 30 working days of a connection request or cannot be repaired within five working days of lodging a fault rectification request.

The connection and repair timeframes contained in Telstra's standard marketing plan are also covered by the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2000 (No.2)*. This standard provides financial compensation to customers if maximum timeframes are not met. See the ACA **Customer Service Guarantee fact sheet** for more information.

**Having problems with your standard telephone service?**

If you encounter problems getting connected or having repairs made to your telephone service, and your telephone company does not resolve your complaint, you can contact the **Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman** (TIO) on telephone (freephone) 1800 062 058, TTY 1800 675 692 or fax 1800 630 614.

The TIO was established to provide free, independent, just, informal and speedy resolution of complaint. However, it is an office of last resort and you must give your telephone company the opportunity to resolve the complaint before the TIO will become involved.

**Payphones**

Telstra's standard marketing plan also explains how it will meet its obligation to supply, install and maintain payphones. It details how Telstra decides whether to install a payphone, and where a payphone is to be located.

Telstra's main considerations are:

- size of the community and the location of the nearest payphone;
- accessibility of the site;
- availability of appropriate infrastructure;
- risk of damage from vandalism; and

- the environmental impact.

Telstra will consult with the local community, site owner and local government when considering the removal of a payphone.

Tips for using payphones can be found in the ACA's fact sheet *Using Telstra Payphones*.

**More information**

For more information about your rights to a standard telephone service or payphone under the **universal service regime**, see the ACA website or contact the ACA's **Industry Monitoring Team** on telephone (03) 9963 6800.

Telstra's approved **Universal Service Obligation ☐ Standard Marketing Plan and Policy Statement** is also on the **Telstra website**.

More information about the circumstances under which interim and alternative services are provided is in the ACA fact sheet **'***Your rights to an interim or alternative telephone service under the universal service obligation***'**.

**Consumer** and **industry** fact sheets on a range of topics are available from **ACA regional offices**.

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only and is considered correct at the time of printing. For this reason the information contained herein should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.*

⬆ TOP

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [                    ] GO

## Consumer fact sheet

## What is the digital data service obligation?

### What is the digital data service obligation?

Under the current universal service arrangements all people in Australia now have access, on request, to a data service with a 64 kilobit per second (kbit/s) digital data capability. These are higher data rates than those generally available over the ordinary telephone network.

Access to a 64 kbit/s or equivalent data service is covered under the digital data service obligation (DDSO). The DDSO complements the universal service obligation (USO), which ensures that all people in Australia have reasonable access to standard telephone and payphone services on an equitable basis.

### Does the DDSO apply to me?

Yes. Depending on where you live, you will either be eligible for the general digital data service (GDDS) or the special digital data service (SDDS).

At least ninety-six per cent of people in Australia are eligible for the **GDDS**. The following table sets out the eligible areas for this service.

| GDDS area | Type of area |
| --- | --- |
| Metropolitan | Within a four-kilometre radius of an integrated services digital network (ISDN) capable telephone exchange |
| Country | Within a six-kilometre radius of an ISDN capable telephone exchange |

If your connection uses subscriber line conditioning equipment or a pair gain system, you are not considered to be in a GDDS area. However, you are eligible for the SDDS. The **SDDS** is provided on request to the remaining four per cent of people in Australia who are outside a GDDS area.

To find out if you are in a GDDS or SDDS area, visit **Telstra's website**, enter your phone number and follow the instructions.

If you don't have Internet access, you can call Telstra on **132 200** to check your eligibility for these services.

### What are the costs?

Services under the DDSO are supplied at commercial prices. There is, however, a rebate available to SDDS customers to help with the cost of acquiring and installing satellite equipment associated with the SDDS-such as the satellite dish and mount. This rebate is industry-funded and is intended to help with the cost of the SDDS for customers who cannot access an ISDN service and require a satellite solution.

> *Did you know...?*
> Under the SDDS, you will receive a rebate of 50 per cent of the cost of purchase and installation of the equipment or $765, whichever is lower.

### How do I get connected?

Telstra is currently the only declared provider of the GDDS. It supplies a basic rate ISDN service, which

consists of a digital transmission circuit provided between a customer's premises and a Telstra ISDN exchange. This is separate to Internet connection. Access to the Internet is provided by the customer's Internet service provider (ISP).

The service is delivered over the ordinary telephone network, but differs from the standard telephone service because it can transmit data at a higher rate.

There are currently two declared SDDS providers for all SDDS areas throughout Australia-Telstra and Hotkey Internet Services.

Telstra is currently providing this service using a satellite downlink service (BigPond® Advance). Hotkey Internet Services provides this service through its JetConnect Satellite Service. These services are one-way satellite Internet services that download data from a satellite and upload data through a dial-up modem using the customer's normal telephone line to an ISP.

The uplink data speed for a one-way satellite service is dependent on a customer's telephone line.

Telstra fulfils the SDDS in the Christmas Islands and Cocos (Keeling) Islands through its DDS Fastway" service. Hotkey will provide the SDDS in these areas through its direct-to-home satellite service.

Contact details for Telstra and Hotkey are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

### How long will it take for me to be connected?

Digital data service providers are required to provide digital data service plans that set out how customers can access digital data services and include commitments to quality of service and connection timeframes.

Telstra's DDS plans include an undertaking to supply your service on the date you want it to be connected. These plans also set out the connection timeframes that apply if Telstra is unable to connect your service on the date you request. These timeframes were reduced from 1 October 2003.

Hotkey Internet Services' DDS plan includes an undertaking to connect your service on the date you request it to be connected. The plan includes a 90-day connection timeframe that applies if Hotkey is unable to connect your service on the date you request.

### Telstra connection timeframes-general digital data services

| Area | Community size (people) | Time to connect prior to 1 October 2003 | Time to connect from 1 October 2003 |
|------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Urban area | More than 10,000 | Within 10 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 10 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Major rural area | Between 2,500 and 10,000 | Within 15 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 10 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Minor rural area | Between 200 and 2,500 | Within 30 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 10 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Remote area | Less than 200 | Within 30 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 15 working days from the date of the customer's request |

**Note**: The connection timeframe is five working days for sites that already have an in-place ISDN connection.
If ISDN repeater equipment is required, an extra five working days will be added to these timeframes.

### Telstra connection timeframes-special digital data services*

| Area | Community size (people) | Time to connect prior to 1 October 2003 | Time to connect from 1 October 2003 |
|------|------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Urban area | More than 10,000 | Within 20 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 20 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Major rural area | Between 2,500 and 10,000 | Within 25 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 20 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Minor rural area | Between 200 and 2,500 | Within 30 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 20 working days from the date of the customer's request |
| Remote area | Less than 200 | Within 40 working days from the date of the customer's request | Within 30 working days from the date of the customer's request |

*Note: These timeframes may vary in certain circumstances, such as adverse weather conditions.

### What about faults?

Telstra's and Hotkey's DDS plans contain timeframes for repairing faults on individual services, as shown in the table below.

Telstra and Hotkey fault repair timeframes-general and special digital data services

| Area | Time for repair |
|------|-----------------|
| Urban area | Within one full working day after being notified of a fault |
| Major rural area | Within two full working days after being notified of a fault |
| Minor rural area | Within two full working days after being notified of a fault |
| Remote area | Within three full working days after being notified of a fault |

Note: Telstra will use reasonable endeavours to repair an unworkable BigPond® satellite service caused by a service outage affecting all BigPond® satellite customers within 12 hours of the fault being reported (during business hours). Hotkey will use reasonable endeavours to repair an unworkable JetConnect satellite service caused by a service outage affecting all JetConnect satellite customers within 12 hours of the fault being reported (during business hours and between 9 am to 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays).

You can obtain a copy of **Telstra's DDS plans** on the Telstra website or by calling Telstra on 131 191. It is also on the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) website.

You can obtain a copy of **Hotkey's DDS plan** on the Hotkey website or by calling 1300 655 366.

### How is my DDS provider performing?

The ACA monitors digital data service providers' DDSO performance and publishes this information in its annual Telecommunications Performance Report. The report is available on the ACA website.

### How do I register a complaint?

If you have a query or complaint about your digital data service, you should first raise the matter with your service provider. If you are not satisfied with the way your service provider has dealt with your complaint, you can contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO).

The TIO is a dispute resolution scheme for residential and small business customers of telephone and Internet service providers. The scheme has been established to provide free, independent, just, informal and speedy resolution of complaints. However, it is an office of last resort and you must give the service provider the opportunity to resolve the complaint before the TIO will become involved.

Complaints to the TIO can be lodged by email, phone, fax or mail.

Telephone: (03) 8600 8700
Freephone: 1800 062 058
TTY (freephone): 1800 675 692

Facsimile: (03) 8600 8797
Facsimile (freephone): 1800 630 614

Email: **tio@tio.com.au**
Website: **www.tio.com.au**

Address: PO Box 276
Collins Street West
Melbourne Vic 8007

### Are there other data services available?

There are other data services available to you, depending on your location and digital data requirements.

One initiative intended to improve telecommunications services to customers is a two-way satellite Internet service which Telstra is contracted by the government to provide, under special circumstances, to all customers living in the extended zones. The extended zones cover nearly 80 per cent of Australia's land area but are located in the most sparsely populated and remote areas. For more information about this project see the ACA fact sheet *Untimed calls at local call rates and ungraded services for remote Australia*, on the ACA website.

The Internet Assistance Program (IAP) is a service provided by Telstra to assist Internet users across Australia achieve dial-up Internet access with a minimum equivalent throughput of 19.2 kbit/s.

The program is open to customers of Internet and phone companies that use Telstra's fixed telephone network. Telstra's obligation to supply the IAP is prescribed by a carrier licence condition that commenced operation on 8 October 2003.

Other commercial services such as asymmetric digital subscriber line (ADSL) and broadband cable provide data rates well above those required under the DDSO. To find out more about these services, and whether they are available in your area, visit the government's **New Connections website** and browse under 'broadband services'.

### More information

For more information about the DDSO, contact the ACA's **Industry MonitoringTeam** on telephone (03) 9963 6800

More information about the DDSO and general information about digital data services is also available on the **New Connections website**.

Information about Telstra's ISDN service is on the **Telstra website** and information about **Telstra's one-way satellite service** is also available.

More information about Hotkey's JetConnect Satellite service is on the **Hotkey website**, or call 1300 655 366.

The ACA has **consumer** and **industry** fact sheets on various topics are available from ACA regional offices.

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason the information contained herein should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.*

TOP

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [                    ] GO

## Consumer Fact Sheet

## Customer Service Guarantee 2000 (No.2)

This fact sheet outlines key features of the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) Standard and the safeguards it provides for telephone service customers. The CSG performance requirements (as amended) apply to carriage service provider performance from 18 February 2004.

### The Customer Service Guarantee

The object of the CSG Standard is to encourage improvements in service and guard against poor service. It requires telephone companies to meet minimum performance requirements and to provide customers with financial compensation when these are not met.

### Services covered by the CSG

The CSG Standard covers the supply of standard fixed line telephone services, including voice grade services and services used to access the Internet or for facsimile machines.

Certain special call-handling features, when activated by a telephone company, are also covered by the CSG, including call waiting, call forwarding, call barring, calling number display and calling number display blocking.

> If a telephone company offers these services in an area, then that company must meet maximum timeframes applying to that area for standard telephone services in:
>
> - connecting a service;
> - repairing a fault or service difficulty; and
> - attending appointments with customers.

The CSG Standard does not apply to customers who have more than five lines or customer equipment with more than five telephone lines. Mobile phone services are not covered by the CSG.

### Maximum timeframes for connecting services readily available to cabling

The maximum timeframe under the CSG for connecting a new service depends on whether the service is 'in-place' or not. Maximum timeframes also depend on whether the premises are close to existing telecommunications cabling and the size of the population of the community where the service is located. Table 1 outlines the maximum timeframes for connections at premises that are readily accessible to cabling.

**Table 1**

| Connection type | Community location | Community Size (no. of people) | Connection time (after receipt of customer's application)+ |
|---|---|---|---|
| In-place connection | All | All | within 2 working days |
| No in-place connection (*Close to available infrastructure*) | Urban | Equal to or more than 10,000 people | within 5 working days |
| | Major rural | Between 2,500 and 10,000 people | within 10 working days |

| | Minor rural and Remote | Up to 2,500 people | within 15 working days |
|---|---|---|---|

*+ If a customer's phone company makes a commitment to connect in less time than outlined in the above table, the reduced period becomes the connection time.*

**Maximum timeframes for connecting services not readily accessible to cabling**

The maximum timeframe for connecting new services where the premises are not readily accessible to cabling is set out in the ACA-approved standard marketing plan for the primary universal service provider, which is currently Telstra.

Telstra's standard marketing plan states that:

> *If Telstra cannot supply the standard telephone service on the date the customer requires it to be connected, Telstra will aim to supply the standard telephone service within one month (equivalent to 20 working days) from the date of the customer's request, or on a later date if requested or agreed to by the customer.*

This timeframe applies to all locations, regardless of the size of the community.

**Maximum timeframes for repairing faults**

Once reported, faults must be repaired within the timeframes in Table 2.

**Table 2**

| Community | Community size *(no. of people)* | Repair time |
|---|---|---|
| Urban | Equal to or more than 10,000 people | End of next working day after report |
| Rural | Between 10,000 and 200 people | End of second working day after report* |
| Remote | Up to 200 people | End of third working day after report* |

*In certain circumstances (for example, where the fault can be repaired by the phone company without attending the customer's premises), the fault repair period is the end of the next working day after report.

**Maximum timeframes for appointments**

If a phone company gives a customer an appointment for connecting or repairing a service then the appointment period must be no longer than five hours. The phone company must keep this appointment unless it gives the customer reasonable notice. Table 3 outlines when appointments are officially missed.

**Table 3**

| Appointment period | Definition of missed appointment |
|---|---|
| Four hours or less | Phone company does not attend within 15 minutes of the appointment period# |
| Between four and five hours | Phone company does not attend within the appointment period# |

*# An extra 45 minutes is allowed where the phone company must travel long distances for an appointment at a premises in a community of under 2,500 people.*

**Situations where CSG timeframes do not apply**

In certain circumstances the CSG performance requirements do not apply to phone companies. These include situations where a customer accepts a phone company's offer to supply an interim or an alternative phone service or a customer refuses a reasonable offer of an interim or an alternative service.

Phone companies are not required to meet CSG timeframes where there are circumstances beyond their control, such as when natural disasters or extreme weather conditions cause mass disruptions of services.

**Compensation**

A phone company must automatically pay the customer compensation for each working day that connections or repairs are delayed beyond maximum CSG timeframes or if it fails to keep an appointment. Table 4 outlines the compensation for each situation:

**Table 4**

| Customer | Services delayed | Compensation for first 5 working days (per working day) | Compensation after first 5 working days (per working day) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Residential/ Charity | Connection or repair of standard telephone service | $12 | $40 |
| | Connection or repair of enhanced call handling features to an existing service | $6 | $20 |
| | Connection or repair of two or more enhanced call handling features to an existing service | $12 | $40 |
| | Not keeping an appointment | $12 for each missed appointment | |
| Business | Connection or repair of the standard telephone service | $20 | $40 |
| | Connection or repair of enhanced call handling features to an existing service | $10 | $20 |
| | Connection or repair of two or more enhanced call handling features to an existing service | $20 | $40 |
| | Not keeping an appointment | $20 for each missed appointment | |

**Claiming compensation**

If the phone company fails to pay compensation or there is a dispute as to the amount of compensation paid, the customer should contact the company and seek to resolve the issue directly.

If the issue is not resolved with the phone company, the customer may raise the matter with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO). The TIO is able to investigate complaints and, if necessary, determine an outcome.

The TIO can be contacted as follows:
Telephone: 03 8600 8700
Fax: 03 8600 8797
Free call: 1800 062 058
Free fax: 1800 630 614
TTY: 1800 675 692
Website: **www.tio.com.au**
Email: **tio@tio.com.au**
Mail: PO Box 276, Collins Street West, Melbourne VIC 80

**More information**

For more information about the CSG Standard, customers should first contact their phone company.

Full details are contained in the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2000 (No. 2)* and the *Telecommunications (Performance Standards) Determination 2002*.

These documents and a guide to the CSG are available from ACA regional offices (telephone 1300 850 115), or from the **ACA website** at, or contact the ACA's Industry Monitoring Team on telephone (03) 9963 6800, email **service.guarantee@aca.gov.au**.

The ACA has **consumer** and **industry** fact sheets on a range of other topics available from ACA regional offices and the ACA website.

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason the information contained herein should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.*

TOP

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [          ] GO

## Consumer fact sheet

## Priority assistance – a rapid telephone repair and connection service

### What is priority assistance?

Priority assistance is an enhanced telephone connection and repair service for people with a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition who are at risk of suffering a rapid, life-threatening deterioration in their condition. The service is offered by Telstra to ensure access to a reliable, fully operational home telephone service to call for assistance.

To be eligible, someone living in a customer's household must have such a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition, where access to a telephone could assist in a life-threatening situation. Some examples of life-threatening medical conditions are provided below.

### Priority assistance entitlements

Priority assistance customers are entitled to faster connection and fault repair of their fixed-line telephone service, thus reducing the time that customers will be without access to a phone service. For a priority assistance customer, a service must be connected or a fault repaired within 24 hours in urban and rural areas (an area with a population of more than 200 people) or 48 hours in remote areas (an area with a population of less than 200 people.)

In addition, Telstra undertakes to provide priority assistance customers with enhanced service reliability, so that if a priority assistance customer experiences two or more faults in a three month period, the phone service must be tested.

### Who offers priority assistance?

Telstra is the only service provider required to provide priority assistance services to its customers as a condition of its licence. Under the licence condition, Telstra must have an effective policy for offering priority assistance services to people who have a life-threatening medical condition.

Other service providers voluntarily offer priority assistance services in line with the requirements of the Australian Communications Industry Forum (ACIF) industry code (*ACIF C609:2003 Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions*), which has been registered by the ACA. The code was designed to establish consistent, industry wide arrangements for providing assistance to residential customers with life-threatening medical conditions.

The code also specifies the minimum standards for the information that must be provided to customers for service providers not offering priority assistance. You should check with your service provider to see if it offers this service.

Telstra's policy for priority assistance arrangements are set out in its Priority Assistance for Individuals Policy. The policy and information about Telstra Priority Assistance is on the Telstra **website** at  or contact Telstra on telephone 13 22 00.

### How to apply

To be eligible for priority assistance, either you or someone living at your home must have a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition. If you are unsure whether you are eligible, consult your doctor.

You must complete an application form.

You must either obtain a certificate from a medical practitioner or, if you have difficulty in obtaining a certificate, you must complete a statutory declaration about your condition. The statutory declaration must be signed by you in the presence of a witness.

Send the application form directly to Telstra.

If Telstra has provisionally offered you priority assistance, you must send a completed form back to Telstra within 28 days.

Telstra does not charge eligible customers for registering and receiving priority assistance, nor does it affect connection fees. Priority assistance is designed for customers in genuine need. However, if a customer is found to be ineligible for priority assistance, for example, the customer is granted provisional priority assistance status and does not return the completed application form, a fee may be charged.

Things you should know about priority assistance:

- priority assistance only applies to standard telephone services
- customers must let their service provider know of any changed circumstances that may affect their eligibility for priority assistance
- customers need to advise their service provider when moving residence, moving from one service provider to another or where there is a change to the customer/lessee name for a service and
- priority assistance services are governed by strict privacy protection principles.

These arrangements are in place to ensure that, as a priority assistance customer, you get the highest level of service available. Despite these safeguards, it is not always possible to guarantee continuity of service for customers in medical emergencies.

Other communication services

You should consider having a contingency plan in case you find yourself without access to a telephone. For example, in some situations, a mobile phone or other communications products, such as medical alert buttons and home security monitoring systems can be used to provide back-up access to emergency services. While some of these products still require an operational telephone service, they may assist in reducing your reliance on a telephone handset for contacting emergency services.

**More information**

For more information about priority assistance services, please refer to the ACA's website **here**.

For more information about Telstra's obligations to provide priority assistance, contact the ACA's Industry Monitoring Team on telephone 03 9963 6800 or email **priorityassistance@aca.gov.au**.

**The ACA also has consumer and industry fact sheets on a range of other topics available from ACA regional offices.**

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only and should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.*

TOP

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [          ] GO

## Consumer Fact Sheet

## Network Reliability Framework

### What is the Network Reliability Framework?

The Network Reliability Framework (NRF) is a three-tiered compliance and reporting framework that aims to improve the reliability of Telstra telephone services. The NRF forms part of a range of consumer safeguards such as the universal service obligation and the Customer Service Guarantee.

The framework looks at the number of faults occurring in Telstra's network, and is primarily focused on customers experiencing ongoing problems with service reliability. The NRF commenced on 1 January 2003, supported by new licence conditions placed on Telstra in December 2002 by the Commonwealth Government.

Under the framework, Telstra is required to take action before a customer's fault levels exceed specified thresholds as well as to give consumers access to information about service reliability in geographical areas of Australia.

The NRF is a safeguard for Telstra's 7.3 million residential and small business customers who have five lines or less. The framework complements the Customer Service Guarantee which continues to ensure that faults are repaired within reasonable timeframes.

The Australian Communications Authority (ACA) monitors and enforces compliance by Telstra with the NRF. Penalties of up to $10 million can be imposed by the courts if Telstra does not meet its obligations under the NRF.

### What are the main elements of the NRF?

The NRF operates at three levels of aggregation in Telstra's network: the individual service level, the local exchange service area level and the larger geographical area level. The intention of the first two levels is to improve the operation of poorly performing individual services or parts of the Telstra network, while the intention of the last level is to improve consumer awareness of overall service reliability.

### *Reliability of individual services*

Under the NRF, Telstra is required to prevent telephone services from experiencing a prescribed number of faults within set periods of time. If an individual service experiences four or more faults in a rolling 60-day period or five or more faults in a rolling 12-month period, Telstra is required to investigate and take remedial action as is necessary. Action taken by Telstra to remedy the faulty service must be agreed to by the ACA. Telstra must also satisfy the ACA that all agreed work has been completed.

Telstra is required to report each occasion on which the threshold is exceeded to the ACA within 15 working days. Individual services for which remedial action has been required are subject to follow-up monitoring by the ACA for up to two years.

### *Reliability at the local exchange level*

The NRF also targets poorly performing Telstra local exchange service areas, that is, areas served by a specific telephone exchange. These areas are the basic building blocks of the Telstra network and there are more than 5,000 in Australia.

Under the NRF, Telstra is required to report to the ACA each month about any exchange service areas

where a specified number of services each had at least one fault per month for two consecutive months. The number of services varies between 2 and 5 according to the total number of services in the exchange service area.

| Where the exchange service area has☐ | Telstra must report if☐. |
|---|---|
| 1 to 100 CSG services | 2 or more services each had at least one fault in each of the preceding months |
| 101 to 1,000 CSG services | 3 or more services each had at least one fault in each of the preceding months |
| 1,001 to 10,000 CSG services | 4 or more services each had at least one fault in each of the preceding months |
| 10,001 or more CSG services | 5 or more services each had at least one fault in each of the preceding months |

Telstra must provide the ACA with details of any remedial action it has taken or proposes to take to improve service reliability in those exchange service areas. However, the ACA may still request further action, or a particular type of action, to be taken. The ACA will monitor any exchange service areas where remedial action is required.

### Reliability at the geographical area level

To improve consumer awareness of overall service reliability, the NRF requires Telstra to publish recent information about the reliability of telephone services nationally and in 44 nominated geographical areas. These areas, which cover all of Australia, include areas such as Sydney North, the Gold Coast and Central Australia.

Performance information to be published by Telstra includes:

* the percentage of services free from faults or service difficulties nationally and in each geographical area; and

* the average availability (in terms of time) of services nationally and in each geographic area.

This information is available on Telstra's website at **www.telstra.com.au/servicereports/**. The ACA will independently publish analysis of Telstra's performance against NRF requirements on a quarterly basis.

### Further information

The NRF is set out in the *Carrier Licence Conditions (Telstra Corporation Limited) Declaration 1997 (Amendment No. 4 of 2002)*. A copy of the licence conditions is available from SCALEplus at: **http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/html/instrumentsh/0/30/0/2003100108.htm**

Information on Telstra's obligations under the NRF is available from the ACA's Industry Monitoring Team on:

Telephone: 03 9963 6800
Email: **industry.monitoring@aca.gov.au**

The ACA has consumer and industry fact sheets on a range of other topics available from ACA regional offices and the ACA website.

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only and is considered correct at the time of printing. For this reason the information contained herein should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases*

TOP

Australian Communications Authority

SEARCH [_____] GO

## Consumer fact sheet

## Internet Assistance Program

The Internet Assistance Program (IAP) consists of a range of services that help dial-up Internet users improve their Internet experience. The aim of the IAP is to assist dial-up Internet users achieve what is called a 'minimum equivalent throughput'. This refers to a level of performance considered sufficient for simple browsing and email.

For the purposes of the IAP, minimum equivalent throughput is defined as an Internet throughput experience that corresponds to what would be experienced if the customer was transferring data over a PSTN (public switched telephone network) service with a 19.2 kilobits per second (kbit/s) line rate capability and using a correctly set up V90 (56 kbit/s) modem.

> The IAP services are provided by Telstra on request, and comprise two processes:
>
> - the On-Line Help Service, available at **www.iapselfhelp.com**; and
> - the Technical Support Service.
>   These services offer self-help advice and technical assistance aimed at optimising the user's dial-up Internet experience.

Telstra is required to make the IAP available to customers under a carrier licence condition that commenced operation on 9 October 2003. The full details are contained in Carrier Licence Conditions (Telstra Corporation Limited) Declaration 1997, available on the DCITA website.

### Eligibility

The IAP is available to residential or small business customers with up to two telephone lines, one or both of which enable the customer to obtain dial-up access to the Internet over the Telstra fixed-line network. These customers are eligible for assistance under the IAP, regardless of where they reside or carry on business in Australia, or which Internet service provider (ISP) or telephone company they use.

The IAP does not apply to users with intervening systems such as PABX that might limit Internet throughput speeds, or to users with interim or alternative telephone services as defined in the *Telecommunications (Customer Service Guarantee) Standard 2000 (No. 2)*, or to users with interim priority services.

### Costs

Almost all the services under the IAP are provided free of charge to eligible Internet users.

Telstra can charge IAP customers only for improvements to customer equipment and only if the customer agrees to the charges in advance.

### Services available under the IAP

The On-Line Help Service
The On-Line Help Service is accessible on the IAP website or call 1800 427 457, between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm Monday to Friday or weekends between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm (EST).

The first step is to assess your Internet throughput using the online self-help test on the IAP website, which measures your Internet throughput against the minimum equivalent throughput.

If the test indicates you are not achieving the minimum equivalent throughput, the website will provide step-by-step instructions on how to adjust your modem and computer settings to achieve the minimum equivalent throughput.

The IAP also provides access to a self-help kit, which is available online from the **IAP website** or by calling 1800 427 457 to request a copy. The kit contains general tips for optimal Internet performance as well as more detailed information on how to configure your computer and modem settings for optimal Internet throughput.

### Technical Support Service

If, after using the On-Line Help Service, you remain unable to achieve the minimum equivalent throughput, you will be referred to the Technical Support Service for more detailed assessment and assistance. This service can include a remote line assessment or on-site inspection to find out why the minimum equivalent throughput is not being achieved. Assistance can also be provided through minor site works or the provision of software solutions such as data compression software.

Under the licence condition, Technical Support assistance must be provided within the timeframes in the table below:

| Technical Support Service activity | Timeframes |
| --- | --- |
| Provision of telephone assistance | At time of contact with the Technical Support Service by the customer; or |
| | If there is unanticipated demand of the service, at an agreed consultation time within 5 working days of first contact by customer, or a later day if the customer prefers. |
| Completion of consultation | Within 5 working days of first contact by customer, or a later day if the customer prefers. |
| Where use of On-Line Help Service has not resulted in minimum equivalent throughput, completion of testing and other activities necessary to determine appropriate way of achieving minimum equivalent throughput | Within 3 working days. |
| Decision as to whether field activities are necessary and appropriate to achieve minimum equivalent throughput | Within 2 working days after the conclusion of all testing and other activities. |
| Where field activities are undertaken, completion of those activities | Within 90 working days after the day the decision was made to undertake those activities |
| Completion of other activities such as the provision of compression software | Within 10 working days after the day the decision was made not to provide field activities. |

### How to register a complaint

Complaints about the IAP should be directed to Telstra. Telstra's Customer Services Centre can be contacted on 13 2200 (residential services) or 13 2000 (small business services). If the complaint is not resolved at this level, the Customer Referral Centre can be contacted on call 1800 011 333 (voice) and 1800 033 433 (TTY).

### For more information

More information is on the **IAP website**. Telstra can also provide more information about the IAP.

The ACA monitors Telstra's compliance with the licence condition and reports publicly on Telstra's performance its annual telecommunications performance report.

You can contact the ACA's Industry Analysis Team on:

Phone: (03) 9963 6800
Email: **industry.analysis@aca.gov.au**

The ACA has **consumer** and **industry** fact sheets on various topics are available from ACA regional offices.

*Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason the information contained herein should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases.*

TOP