



# Financial support for state and territory infrastructure projects

Finance and Public Administration  
References Committee

*27 January 2026*

## Recommendations

This submission recommends the Finance and Public Administration References Committee:

1. Prioritise reliability and resilience alongside coverage expansion in telecommunications infrastructure funding programs.
2. Develop a national telecommunications connectivity and resilience strategy for telecommunications infrastructure.
3. Establish a national partnership agreement between federal, state, and territory governments to fund and coordinate telecommunications infrastructure in regional, rural, and remote Australia.

## About this submission

ACCAN is pleased to provide this submission to the Finance and Public Administration References Committee (**the Committee**) on financial support for state and territory infrastructure projects (**the Inquiry**). ACCAN recommends federal telecommunications investments prioritise resilience, coordinated national planning, and stronger accountability measures to ensure all Australians can access reliable connectivity.

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ACCAN is the peak national consumer organisation advocating trusted, accessible, inclusive, affordable and available communications and digital services.

## 1. Introduction

Telecommunications infrastructure is essential to economic participation, access to government services, emergency preparedness, and social inclusion. How financial support for state and territory telecommunications infrastructure is assessed, allocated, and overseen has direct consequences for consumers, particularly those in underserved areas who depend on federal financial support to access reliable connectivity. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, strengthening telecommunications networks to withstand such events has become a critical national priority for Australia.

To ensure networks are available when Australians need them most, the Finance and Public Administration References Committee (**the Committee**) should explore how the criteria and processes used by the Government to assess, prioritise, and allocate telecommunications funding could be strengthened to include resilient infrastructure as a key priority alongside coverage expansion. This should be guided by a national connectivity and resilience strategy that sets clear priorities for future infrastructure planning – thereby also improving the transparency, consistency and accountability of federal funding decisions. To improve governance, oversight, and coordination of funding and delivery across jurisdictions, we recommend the Committee consider the merits of a national partnership agreement among federal, state, and territory governments, with a particular focus on regional, rural, and remote (**RRR**) areas. Such an agreement would help ensure infrastructure investment keeps pace with the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters.

## 2. Background

Australia's telecommunications landscape is undergoing significant change driven by technological innovation and increasing exposure to natural disasters. Recent events, including bushfires, floods, and cyclones, have exposed the vulnerability of existing networks.<sup>1</sup> Outages affecting mobile and broadband services have hindered emergency response, disrupted essential services, and deepened digital disadvantage in RRR communities.<sup>2</sup> These experiences demonstrate that telecommunications infrastructure funding must evolve to prioritise reliability and resilience alongside coverage expansion, ensuring connectivity is available when most needed.

The market and technological environment is also transforming. Low Earth Orbit satellites (**LEOSats**) and Direct-to-Device (**D2D**) technologies are reshaping contemporary understandings of reasonable access and are increasingly being adopted by RRR communities and critical industries, including farming and health. As the LEOSat market continues to develop and additional operators prepare to enter, Australia has an opportunity to strengthen its telecommunications infrastructure, reduce infrastructure vulnerabilities, and extend better services to areas with limited terrestrial infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Huon Curtis et al, *Australian telecommunications sector resilience profile: Keeping Australia connected in an uncertain world* (Report, ANU Tech Policy Design Centre).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, as the Government implements the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (**UOMO**), the challenge will be ensuring that coverage translates into functional connectivity, particularly during emergencies.<sup>3</sup> ACCAN stakeholders frequently note that RRR communities routinely experience extended outages due to insufficient backup power and a lack of redundancy options.

The criteria and processes used by the Government to assess, prioritise and allocate infrastructure funding must therefore prioritise and focus on telecommunications infrastructure that strengthens national resilience. A national strategy linking resilience investment, emerging technologies, and collaborative governance across all levels of government will help ensure that Australians, regardless of location, can access secure and reliable telecommunications.

### **3. ACCAN's response to the Committee's terms of reference**

ACCAN's submission responds to the terms of reference (**ToR**) by examining how federal funding processes can better support telecommunications infrastructure that meets the needs of all consumers.

#### **3.1. Assessment, prioritisation and allocation of infrastructure funding (ToR 1)**

The Committee should recommend the development of a national telecommunications connectivity and resilience strategy for state and territory telecommunications infrastructure investment in RRR Australia. This strategy should prioritise future place-based investments according to the social, cultural, economic, and geographical needs of each community, with a strong emphasis on ensuring existing infrastructure can withstand and recover from disaster events. Importantly, the strategy should be developed collaboratively with telecommunications consumer advocacy groups, telecommunications providers, First Nations communities, representatives from RRR Australia, and all levels of government.

To further support the strategy, ACCAN suggests that the Committee support an independent audit of connectivity infrastructure and allocate funding for a mapping tool.<sup>4</sup> This tool should examine existing infrastructure, identify vulnerabilities and resilience gaps, and allow all levels of government to collaborate in strategically targeting investment where it is most needed. The audit should specifically assess the disaster resilience of current networks, rather than focusing solely on geographic coverage.

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<sup>3</sup> The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, *Albanese Labor Government building Australia's mobile future* (Media Release, 25 February 2025) <<https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/rowland/media-release/albanese-labor-government-building-australias-mobile-future>>.

<sup>4</sup> ACCAN, *2024 Regional Telecommunications Review* (Submission, Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, 30 August 2024) 45.

### **3.2. Ensuring transparent, consistent and accountable funding decisions (ToR 2)**

ACCAN recommends adopting a data-driven approach to improve the transparency, consistency, and accountability of telecommunications funding. For example, the energy sector uses system-wide reliability metrics such as the System Average Interruption Frequency Index and the System Average Interruption Duration Index to measure how often and for how long services are interrupted.<sup>5</sup> Embedding similar resilience-focused metrics into telecommunications funding frameworks would provide a more meaningful basis for assessment than simple coverage statistics. This would shift the funding paradigm from merely asking whether a community has coverage, to considering whether that coverage is reliable during both normal operations and resilient during natural disasters and emergencies. To strengthen transparency, consistency, and accountability, these metrics should be made publicly available, potentially integrated with existing outage reporting mechanisms such as telecommunications outage registers.

### **3.3. Assessment of state and territory project viability and appropriateness (ToR 3)**

Robust evidence must underpin all federal funding commitments to state and territory infrastructure projects. The national telecommunications connectivity and resilience strategy and mapping tool would help address the current lack of robust evidence by ensuring that investment decisions are based on demonstrated need, with resilience requirements appropriately weighted alongside coverage expansion.

ACCAN's stakeholders have stressed the importance of identifying areas in RRR Australia that are especially vulnerable to power outages and communications disruptions. For these areas, the reliability and resilience of existing services are far more critical than simply expanding theoretical coverage that may fail during emergencies. This equity lens should guide how RRR funding is assessed, recognising that areas with vulnerable populations bear disproportionate risk when infrastructure is not resilient. ACCAN recommends that state and territory governments be required to identify vulnerable populations and areas, along with resilience gaps as part of their funding applications, and that the Government explicitly consider this information when assessing project viability and co-funding decisions.

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<sup>5</sup> ACCAN, *2024 Regional Telecommunications Review* (Submission, Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, 30 August 2024) 45.

### **3.4. Assessing economic, social, cultural, and community impacts (ToR 4)**

ACCAN recommends that economic, social, cultural, and community impacts should be consistently considered in telecommunications infrastructure planning and investment. Connectivity directly underpins access to telehealth, education, emergency services, and social connection. As such, the social and economic consequences of network failures during disasters, including risks to life and business interruption, should be central to impact assessments and prioritising resilience investments.

Telecommunications infrastructure delivers substantial direct and indirect benefits to Australia's economy. Harmonising investment decisions to better capture, measure, and assess these benefits will improve access for communities and drive governance improvements.

ACCAN also recommends that plans for future investment in RRR communications adopt a technology-neutral approach that incorporates emerging technologies, such as LEOSats and D2D. These emerging technological solutions should be assessed not only for their coverage potential but also for their resilience, specifically, their ability to provide service continuity when terrestrial infrastructure is damaged.

### **3.5. Improving oversight and public reporting mechanisms (ToR 5)**

The Committee should recommend further review into how federal, state, territory, and local governments coordinate planning and funding processes for telecommunications services and infrastructure.<sup>6</sup> Currently, coordination between levels of government is often fragmented, leading to duplication of effort, inconsistent prioritisation, and gaps in service delivery. Improved alignment between these processes would reduce duplication, address service gaps, and ensure that funding delivers maximum benefit to communities. Embedding data-driven approaches within assessment and reporting frameworks would strengthen ongoing oversight by providing consistent metrics to evaluate performance over time. Crucially, these metrics should measure not only the existence of coverage, but also their operational reliability during adverse conditions.

## **4. Conclusion**

ACCAN welcomes the Committee's inquiry on financial support for state and territory infrastructure projects as an important opportunity to identify ways to strengthen the resilience of Australia's telecommunications network. Lessons from the telecommunications sector are broadly applicable across infrastructure projects, and the changes to existing processes proposed here would deliver meaningful improvements in connectivity, especially for RRR communities who rely most on reliable telecommunications.

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<sup>6</sup> ACCAN, *2024 Regional Telecommunications Review* (Submission, Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, 30 August 2024) 45.

With climate change driving more frequent and severe natural disasters, the need for resilient telecommunications infrastructure has never been more pressing. ACCAN urges the Committee to rebalance funding priorities, ensuring that resilience becomes a key focus alongside coverage expansion. This will ensure that the telecommunications infrastructure supporting RRR Australians' economic participation, social connection, and safety remains operational when it is needed most.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry. Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission further, please do not hesitate to contact

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communication consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers. ACCAN is committed to reconciliation that acknowledges Australia's past and values the unique culture and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



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