Telstra’s *Access for Everyone* low-income measures package

Report to the Minister for Communications
Information Technology and the Arts
From the chair

This year has seen a change of focus from just monitoring the effectiveness of Access for Everyone to discussing the future of communications for people on a low income.

On behalf of my colleagues, I am pleased to present this fourth annual report of the Low Income Measures Assessment Committee (LIMAC) covering the 12 months to 31 December 2006.

The report details the work of LIMAC, the results of the commissioned market research among low-income Australians, our assessment of the effectiveness of the low-income programs, together with recommendations for further work in 2007.

The past year saw significant work on implementing the distribution networks for the Phonecard™ Assistance Program … This program has now become quite popular with good take-up.

At the end of 2006 there were some 5600 community agencies delivering Access for Everyone programs.

LIMAC has again worked extremely well during 2006. The Committee was able to respond to a request from the Minister to review Telstra’s public payphone removal consultation process, to ensure that it took into consideration the needs of people on a low income.

The 2006 market research commissioned by LIMAC focussed on the use of mobile phones and Internet by people on a low income. The results confirmed the increasing anecdotal evidence to the Committee that the use of these new communications services is highly preferred by some low-income groups. This raises a number of public policy issues that test the boundaries of the Committee’s role.

In January 2006 the Committee took up the issue of affordable Internet services through submissions on the draft Broadband Connect program guidelines. This and other matters were taken up directly with the Minister’s office in December 2006 and are subject to ongoing consultation.

The 2006 market research provides positive evidence that access and affordability of communications services has improved significantly for low-income Australians since the beginning of the Access for Everyone programs in 2002. Telstra has provided regular briefings to LIMAC on the take-up of each of the programs, promotional activities, and specific initiatives undertaken in response to recommendations, actions and commitments contained in the 2005 report, all of which were either completed in 2006 or are in progress.

Telstra provides LIMAC with regular financial reports on its low-income package, with the latest report for 2005-06 showing the value of Telstra’s low-income package again exceeding $200 million.

Chris Dodds, LIMAC Chair
30 April 2007

LIMAC has again worked extremely well during 2006. The Committee was able to respond to a request from the Minister to review Telstra’s public payphone removal consultation process, to ensure that it took into consideration the needs of people on a low income.

As Chairperson I wish to communicate my appreciation of the Committee members who have contributed so well. Further, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to indicate our appreciation to the Telstra staff who have consistently met our requests and needs.

This fourth report is in a more concise and accessible format to those previously prepared by LIMAC so that it can be more widely published. I trust that you will find it of interest, and the findings of the independent market research useful in pointing to emerging needs and evaluating the effectiveness of consumer protections for low-income Australians.

Yours sincerely

Chris Dodds, LIMAC Chair
30 April 2007
Low-income measures

The Low-Income Measures Assessment Committee (LIMAC) comprises representatives of community organisations who are approved by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, as well as a representative from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

LIMAC is comprised of the following members:
- Anglicare Australia
- Australian Council of Social Service
- Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations
- Council on the Ageing
- Jobs Australia
- The Salvation Army
- The Smith Family
- Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

There are also a number of representatives who attend the LIMAC meetings who have observer status. These include representatives of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), St Vincent de Paul Society and Telstra.

Access for Everyone monitoring
LIMAC receives regular briefings from Telstra on the development and rollout of its low-income programs, both formally at meetings and informally by email from the LIMAC Secretariat. During 2006 the following significant items from the Access for Everyone program were discussed:
- Telstra’s Pensioner Discount Scheme and the intention to carry out a validation campaign;

Role and activities
LIMAC’s role, as set out in its governing rules is:
1. To produce a report annually which:
   a) assesses whether the resources committed under the low-income package by Telstra are best allocated to the needs of low-income consumers;
   b) evaluates the effectiveness of the low-income package in making telecommunications services available to the disadvantaged and those on low incomes;
   c) advises on the effectiveness of the promotion of the low-income package; and
   d) makes recommendations on how Telstra can improve the utilisation of resources committed under the low-income package to maximise the benefits to low-income telecommunications consumers.
2. To assess proposed changes to the low-income package or to the marketing plan for the low-income package.

Committee
LIMAC made representations to the Minister concerning the changing nature of communications usage by people on a low income and the consequent implications for consumer protections.

TBAP & TPCAP monitoring
LIMAC appointed a sub-committee to oversee the operational aspects of the Bill Assistance and Phonecard Assistance Programs. It generally met before each LIMAC meeting with representatives from the following organisations: Anglicare Australia, Australian Council of Social Service, St Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, The Smith Family and Telstra.

Telstra Carrier Licence Condition 22

22. (1) By 1 July 2002, the licensee must offer, or have a plan for offering, products and arrangements to low-income customers (the low-income package) that has been:
   a) endorsed by low-income consumer advocacy groups; and
   b) notified in writing to the ACA.
(2) The low-income package must include details of the dates by which products or arrangements not offered to low-income customers from 1 July 2002 will be offered to such customers.
(3) The licensee must comply with the low-income package as in force or existing from time to time.
(4) The licensee must maintain and adequately resource a Low income Measures Assessment Committee (LIMAC), comprising representatives of such organisations as are approved by the Minister in writing from time to time.
(5) The role of LIMAC will be:
   a) to assess proposed changes to the low-income package or to the marketing plan for the low-income package; and
   b) to report annually to the Minister on the effectiveness of the low-income package and of its marketing by the licensee.
(6) From 1 July 2002, the licensee must have in place a marketing plan for making low-income consumers aware of the low-income package, being a plan that has been approved by LIMAC.
(7) The licensee must seek and consider the views of LIMAC before it makes any significant change to the low-income package. Note: It is intended that the licensee may make minor non-substantive changes to the low-income package (such as minor editorial or typographical corrections) without having to seek and consider the views of LIMAC. LIMAC is to be consulted on other proposed changes to the low-income package.
(8) If the licensee makes a significant change to the low-income package, the licensee must give the ACA a revised version of the package incorporating the change.

The Low-Income Measures Assessment Committee (LIMAC) is resourced by a secretariat maintained within Telstra Consumer Affairs in the Public Policy & Communications Business Unit. The committee met four times in person and twice by audio-conference in 2006. The table on the following page shows representation at each meeting.
Committee continued

At each meeting detailed data is presented on the customer take-up of the programs, the number of community agencies that have joined the programs, and the relative distribution across Australia of the benefits of the programs compared to Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program benchmarks. The sub-committee also discusses awareness raising, optimising distribution and resolves any policy and process problems that arise.

During 2006 the sub-committee was pleased to note the increasing take-up in Queensland and Northern Territory, which historically had lower than expected rates of usage. In response to a recommendation in the LIMAC 2005 Report, relevant product information and hints for case-workers is now included on the TRAP Certificate books. The issue of increasing mobile phone usage by people presenting to community agencies for assistance was again highlighted by the sub-committee.

Telstra initiatives

Telstra regularly consults LIMAC on proposed pricing and process changes that affect residential customers. During 2006 this included the following matters:

• changes to new service connection fees where cabling work is required;
• change to the flag-fall for timed calls on HomeLine® plans;
• introduction of new “subscription based” HomeLine plans such as HomeLine Ultimate and changes to bill formatting for these plans;
• changes to HomeLine Budget pricing;
• changes to HomeLine Part pricing;
• migration of HomeLine Low Income Health Care Card customers due to the withdrawal of this phone plan, as per the recommendation in the LIMAC 2005 Report;
• introduction of Telstra’s Financial Assistance Hardship Policy;
• Telstra’s Pensioner Discount.

Reporting

LIMAC submitted its third report to the Minister on 24 March 2006 covering the 12 months ended 31 December 2005.

Payphones consultation process

LIMAC responded to a request from the Minister for Communications to review Telstra’s public payphone removal consultation process, to ensure that it took into consideration the needs of and impacts on people on a low income who may rely on public payphones.

LIMAC met with Telstra on two occasions to discuss Telstra’s processes and how socio-demographic factors including low income and cultural diversity might be taken into account. As a result, Telstra changed its notification processes to the relevant local government authority to cover these issues.

Research

LIMAC commissioned its fifth round of market research on the Access for Everyone package. The research also focussed on the use of mobile phones and the Internet by people on a low income.

A special effort was made to include a focus group of asylum seekers recently arrived in Australia on Temporary Protection Visas to ascertain if their communications needs were being met. The assistance of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne is gratefully acknowledged.

The results confirmed the anecdotal evidence to the Committee that the use of mobile phones and the Internet is highly preferred by some low-income groups. The research gave a very positive result showing that access to and the affordability of communications services were up significantly compared to five years ago. See next section “Research” for more detail.

Public Policy

Following its recommendation in the LIMAC 2005 Report, LIMAC made submissions to the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts concerning the draft guidelines of the Government’s Broadband Connect programs. The Committee’s view was that the draft guidelines did not address how socio-demographic factors including low-income customer segments;

• 2003 – general survey over seven low-income customer segments;
• 2004 – focus on Indigenous and HomeLine®.

The results confirmed the anecdotal evidence to the Committee that the use of mobile phones and the Internet is highly preferred by some low-income groups. The research gave a very positive result showing that access to and the affordability of communications services were up significantly compared to five years ago. See next section “Research” for more detail.

Public Policy

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Research continued

have a landline, but rely on mobile phones, and are not able to take up the offer.” This result, while not unexpected, does call into question the continuing relevance of the Access for Everyone programs, which are presently targeted towards fixed line services.

Thirdly and finally, the research reveals some disconnect between the public perception of “Access for Everyone” and its applicability. There was a strong awareness that people’s situations in life can change quite rapidly and that the programs may be useful for people who were “doing it tough”. This confirms the need to continue to work with community welfare agencies that assist people during those changes in life circumstances, but may also provide some direction for the overall positioning of the package in the public sphere.

Asylum Seekers

LIMAC requested a specific survey of the needs of asylum seekers recently arrived in Australia on Temporary Protection Visas or similar to ascertain if their communications needs were being met. Visas or similar to ascertain if their needs of asylum seekers recently arrived in the public sphere.

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Asylum Seekers

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Chart 3: Increase in perceived affordability of communications services 2002 & 2007

Resource Centre in Melbourne.

The survey found that the key needs of newly arrived refugees are more fundamental than telecommunications and include:

• Obtaining permanent residency and securing housing/accommodation (some live with friends and family, others are “homeless”);

• Bringing family from their home countries to Australia so they are safe;

• Changing visa status so that employment can be secured and they can support themselves and their family. While telecommunications was not a critical need relative to these more fundamental needs, it was a key facilitator of fulfilling these needs. Unanimously, this group indicated that their core telecommunications need is access to a mobile phone.

• Fixed line services are seen as necessary for international calls to family overseas because it is cheaper than using a mobile for this, but for everyday use mobiles are the number one priority.

• Mobiles are portable – because many refugees only have temporary dwellings or none at all.

• Mobiles are cost effective – the prepaid options of mobile services with free included calls (on-net) means that mobiles are considered relatively affordable.

Poverty as deprivation and exclusion

Professor Peter Saunders (Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW) is conducting new poverty research that seeks to identify Australian views about the types of services that are considered essential. In this survey, the telephone was ranked number 37 out of 48 essentials as rated by more than 50% of respondents. It was rated as number 16 out of 25 of those essentials that were not publicly or freely available.

Some 15% of the welfare client sample said they did not have a telephone, compared to approximately 2% in the general population sample. His initial conclusions were that “the welfare client sample is experiencing high levels of deprivation, across many areas, and multiple deprivation is highest among young people; sole parent families; the disabled; and ATSI.” (Presentation to ACOSs National Congress, Sydney, November 2006)

The following provides a brief about telephone service options for people who are having trouble obtaining or maintaining a service. A number of Access for Everyone programs are targeted to this circumstance, such as Bill Assistance, Phonecard™ Assistance and MessageBox.

Aboriginal people and mobile phones

The Telstra Consumer Consultative Council (TCCG) is another forum where issues of consumer protection are discussed with Telstra senior management. From time to time it commissions consumer research and funds were provided to undertake a survey of Mobile phone use among low income Aboriginal people. A central Australian mobile, Tjampurrula Council and the Central Land Council, Alice Springs, 2007.

The report indicates that Aboriginal people in central Australia are increasingly opting to use pre-paid mobile phones, the main uses are to keep in touch with family and friends and for use in emergencies; and owning a mobile phone is a significant expense for most Aboriginal people who are on low incomes.

For LIMAC, these results are consistent with those from the general research, confirming that people on a low income are increasingly using (pre-paid) mobile phone services as their basic communications service, which has implications for affordability and for access to the Internet (if the household has no fixed line service). These issues require wider public policy discussion and are subject to ongoing consideration by LIMAC.

The initial Access for Everyone package was formally documented in a Marketing Plan endorsed by LIMAC on 3 June 2002. In 2006 the low-income package comprised 11 products and services:

1. HomeLine® Budget phone plan
2. Telstra Pensioner Discount Scheme
3. InContact™
4. Bill Assistance Program
5. MessageBox
6. Homelink® 1800
7. Sponsored Access
8. Multiple Number
9. BudgetPay
10. Access to Centrelink’s Centrepay service for Telstra customers
11. Phonecard™ Assistance Program

A highlight for 2006 was the implementation of the Phonecard Assistance Program, with significant distribution taking place through agencies that support young people and homeless persons.

The HomeLine Budget phone plan offers a lower monthly rental than the standard HomeLine plan, but with higher than standard per-call costs. HomeLine Budget is tarifed such that the average customer using this service will not experience price movement above CPI. It is targeted to residential customers with just one fixed line service who make very few calls, including low-income families and age pensioners.

Customer take-up of HomeLine Budget has been gradual and sustained. Services in operation grew steadily in calendar year 2006. Telstra undertook its annual monitoring campaign in October 2006 contacting approximately 19 000 HomeLine Budget customers to ensure they were taking up the most appropriate HomeLine plan.

However, LIMAC noted with Telstra that many HomeLine Budget customers are using the service as a basis for ADSL Broadband Internet access, which was not planned for in its original specification as a service for people on a low income and may require a response in 2007.
2. Telstra Pensioner Discount Scheme

Telstra’s Pensioner Discount was first introduced in 1992 and then substantially improved under Access for Everyone from 2002. It provides a monthly concession on a range of calls and access charges. It also provides a concession on the cost of a telephone connection and provides free access to Telstra’s Call Control feature. It is targeted to eligible pensioners.

Customer take-up has increased steadily during 2006 to more than 1.5 million households. In early 2007 Telstra intends to revalidate existing Pensioner Discount recipients to ensure the correct targeting of the program, as was recommended by LDMC in its 2005 Report.

3. InContact®

Telstra launched InContact in June 1995 as a limited telephone service free of ongoing monthly access changes. It was significantly upgraded under Access for Everyone and is targeted to low-income families and job seekers. InContact allows incoming calls, limited outgoing calls, eg. to families and job seekers. InContact allows significantly upgraded under Access for Everyone from 2002. InContact was launched “Recognition for Service Provider Innovation Consumer Protection” for 10 years of the InContact service by Consumers’ Telecommunications Network.

4. Bill Assistance Program

The $3m per annum Telstra Bill Assistance Program (TBAP) was launched in August 2002 and provides relief to Telstra customers who have difficulty paying their home phone bill through the provision of one or more $25 certificates. Four lead agencies assist Telstra to implement the program throughout Australia: The Smith Family, The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Anglicare Australia. In addition to those agencies, their sub-agencies, branches and parishes, over 230 other community agencies have joined the program to provide widespread geographic and cultural accessibility.

One recent agency addition to the program is Redkite, an Australian charity that supports children with cancer and their families. They reported in 2005 that 20% of assistance given went towards phone bills so the Bill Assistance Program will significantly help them to help families maintain communication. In 2006 $4.3 million of Bill Assistance Certificates were utilised by customers compared to $4.2 million in 2005. The distribution among the States and Territories closely matched that of the Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program, thus ensuring equitable targeting of the program. On average over 300 Telstra customers are being assisted each month.

The role of the Bill Assistance Program in supporting people doing it tough was recognised by the Country Awareness Network (CAN) in Bendigo, Victoria, who presented Telstra with a 2006 corporate partnership award to Telstra.

Under Telstra’s transformation, the ability to apply TBAP to bills other than fixed line bills will be improved, which will provide an opportunity to broaden the applicability of the program in 2008.

5. MessageBox

MessageBox was launched in December 2002 and is a free messaging service for people who do not have access to a working or secure telephone service and who are homeless, experiencing financial hardship or are in a crisis (e.g. domestic violence situations). Distribution of MessageBox services is via community agencies that are in contact with eligible people including Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) agencies, Domestic Violence outreach services and Job Network and other employment services agencies.

Telstra has distributed MessageBox cards to more than 730 agencies supporting this program. Once registered, agencies are able to remotely order cards and other related materials from the Access for Everyone website.

The number of cards used remained steady during 2006 at around 100 per month, with up to 1000 messages per month being recorded. Where clients are using the service, they do so regularly.

6. Homelink® 1800

Homelink 1800 is a cashless calling service designed to help families maintain communication. It provides a 1800 phone number that is linked to a fixed Telstra phone service. It was launched in Telstra in late 1997 and was improved under Access for Everyone from 2002. It is targeted to low-income families, Indigenous communities, people who are transient, not-for-profit community organisations which want to maintain contact with clients and InContact customers.

The number of Homelink 1800 services has been declining, consistent with a product in the late phase of its life. LDMC has been discussing the impact of Telstra’s transformation on Homelink 1800 and is working with Telstra on suitable strategies for affected customers in 2007.

7. Sponsored Access

Since 1 July 2002 Sponsored Access has offered an InContact telephone service in Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) properties. In this circumstance, InContact offers a relatively secure telephone service, free of ongoing charges, for use by residents. It is targeted to people in need of emergency housing.

The take-up of Sponsored Access continues at a steady rate with approximately 1200 crisis accommodation properties across Australia utilising the service at the end of 2006.

8. Multiple Number

This service provides the ability to have a split account on the one telephone line service by dialling a short account code before calling the desired phone numbers. It enables different people in the household to take responsibility for their own calling costs. An individual sharing a house can change the range of numbers they are able to call and recognise when an incoming call is for them via a different ring tone. It is targeted to independent youth still living at home within low-income families.

Multiple number is an established product and monitoring is not undertaken.

9. BudgetPay

Telstra launched its BudgetPay service in June 2005. The service allows customers to plan their expenses by spreading the estimated total cost of their yearly phone bill across equal monthly or fortnightly instalments. Customers arrange for fixed payments via Telstra EasyPay or Centrelink Centrepay service. It is targeted to low-income customers who want the ability to budget for a regular fixed amount to pay for their telephone service.

Take-up of the BudgetPay service has been very slow; however, this could be due to the popularity of Telstra’s EasyPay service which also allows for fixed payments. Feedback from case-workers also indicates that low-income clients preferred the latter. LDMC has been discussing the impact of Telstra’s transformation on BudgetPay and is working with Telstra on suitable strategies for affected customers in 2007.

10. Access to Centrepay

Centrepay is a service offered by Centrelink that provides the ability to direct government payments, in this case, towards Telstra accounts. Telstra began offering this payment option in April 2003. It is targeted to recipients of government payments made by Centrelink.

The number of payments received through Centrelink’s Centrepay service each month has been increasing steadily during 2006 to approximately 40 000 customers using the service each month.

11. Phonecard™ Assistance Program

This new program was launched in February 2006 with Telstra providing $5 Phonecards for use in its public payphones. Up to $1 million worth of cards per annum is available for distribution by community agencies to their clients. It is targeted to people who might rely on public payphones for their communications, including people who are homeless or in a crisis situation. During 2006 nearly 80% of the available cards were distributed through some 100 agencies across Australia with a usage snapshot showing they were quickly “hitting the streets”. Feedback from agencies indicates that it is a very popular program.

The distribution among the States and Territories reasonably matched that of the Bill Assistance Program, thus ensuring equitable targeting of the program.

12. Other products and services

Telstra provides a range of other services of relevance for low-income customers, which are not part of the Access for Everyone package. These include:

- Disability Services, including the Disability Equipment Program.
- Telstra Pre-Paid Home and Telstra Pre-Paid Plus (mobile phone) services.
- Multicultural Service Centres.
- Country Calling trial.
- Indigenous Communities Helpline.
- Financial Hardship Assistance Policy.

More information about these products and services is available at www.telstra.com.au/accessforeveryone.
Promotion

This would be a great legacy of the partnership between The Big Issue Australia, Telstra and Melbourne 2006 Organising Committee and will benefit homeless and marginalised people in other Commonwealth cities.

Telstra undertakes various activities to promote Access for Everyone based on a Marketing Plan developed in consultation with LIMAC. There are three overall target groups for awareness activities:

• General public
• Community agencies
• Customers

The following provides a description of the major activities undertaken during 2006.

Public awareness

• Telstra sponsored the participation of The Big Issue vendors at the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games. The vendors, who are generally homeless people, were then able to sell copies of The Big Issue around the Games venues, which contained a full page Access for Everyone advertisement. The same issue was sold around Australia, with an estimated readership of 160,000.

An evaluation of this project concluded: “Having the resources and staffing to fully train and support the project and vendors involved has enabled this to be a success, without it there would have been no capacity to be involved. The success of the initiative in Melbourne has meant that the Melbourne 2006 Organising Committee are now advocating to continue this initiative in all the host cities of all Commonwealth Games in the future. This would be a great legacy of the partnership between The Big Issue Australia, Telstra and Melbourne 2006 Organising Committee and will benefit homeless and marginalised people in other Commonwealth cities.”

• Telstra participated as an exhibitor at the Deafness Expo, Melbourne Town Hall, September 2006, promoting accessibility and affordability options for the Deaf community.

• Telstra was the principal sponsor of “Don’t DIS my ABILITY”, the NSW awareness campaign that celebrated the 2006 International Day of People with a Disability. Messages about Telstra’s disability services were included in a media release and the program booklet. This campaign reached a very wide audience in NSW utilising road and rail billboards, a website, posters, program of events, postcards and special events.

• Telstra has developed a series of radio advertisements about Access for Everyone and Disability Services specifically targeted to Indigenous communities. These are being aired on selected Indigenous radio stations nationwide from November 2006 to July 2007.

• Telstra maintains a 1800 353 652 number for general inquiries about Access for Everyone and affordability during February to April 2006; one on payment options during June to September 2006; and another on the 5th anniversary of the Telephone Service for their Crisis Accommodation Properties.

• Telstra participated in the NT Council of Social Service (ACOSS) bi-annual conference in Alice Springs in September 2006, which brings together most agencies in the Territory. Chris Duddles presented at the conference and Telstra hosted an information stand over the two days.

• Telstra participated in the Jobs Australia annual conference, with Phil Burgess speaking about the social importance of technology and Access for Everyone information provided to all delegates.

• Telstra participated in the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) annual conference in November 2006, hosting a stand with relevant information over the two days and hosting a table at the 50th anniversary dinner.

Community agency awareness

• With the assistance of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Telstra contracted a range of community agencies supporting young people and homeless persons regarding the new Phonecard Assistance Program, which resulted in all States and Territories coming on board with the program.

• A direct mail piece was sent to all 1200 customer orders directly from the website and other materials are maintained and sent to all new partnering agencies.

Customer awareness

• Three bill messages were run on some six million residential fixed line customer bills: one on Access for Everyone and affordability during February to April 2006; one on payment options during June to September 2006; and another on the 5th anniversary of the Bill Assistance Program during December 2006 to March 2007.

• Telstra includes a newsletter with its bills to some six million residential fixed line customers called News You Can Use. Two of these newsletters contained Access for Everyone articles, during October 2005 to January 2006 and during January 2006 to April 2006.

• A letter was sent to all InfoContact and Sponsored Access customers notifying them of the new functionality of their service using a PhoneAway pre-paid calling card following the recommendation in the LIMAC 2005 Report.

However, as recommended in its 2005 Report, LIMAC believes that raising the awareness of community agencies is the most important strategy in addressing the needs of people who do not have reasonable access to personal communications.

At the end of 2006 there were some 3600 community agencies delivering Access for Everyone programs. Building up such an extensive network of grass-roots community contact points for Access for Everyone has been one of the most successful outcomes of the promotional work. Telstra and LIMAC express their appreciation for these community-business partnerships that make the programs effective.
Future

With the rapid changes in communications needs and increased competition in telecommunications markets it is clear that Telstra and its Access for Everyone package can now only form part of the solution.

The focus for LIMAC during 2006 shifted to the future communications needs of people on a low income. This work will continue in 2007 and respond to three main drivers.

1. Changing communication needs
LIMAC’s research confirms that access to mobile phones and information via the Internet are essential requirements for many people on a low income, particularly low-income families and job-seekers.

LIMAC believes that changes in job markets (such as increases in part-time and casual work), in job-seeking (such as needing to be always contactable), in Government policy (greater focus on moving from “welfare to work”) and in educational practices (greater emphasis on access to electronic media) are driving this need.

While highly competitive markets operate for mobile and Internet services in Australia and there is vigorous price competition, LIMAC believes that there is more that needs to be done for people on a low income. For example, meeting the needs of regional and remote Indigenous communities, for whom mobile coverage is a key consideration, and meeting the needs of asylum seekers who are in Australia on Temporary Protection Visas.

2. Telstra’s transformation
In November 2005 Sol Trujillo, Telstra CEO, announced a five-year transformation program for Telstra’s whole business, including networks, and business and operational support systems, which will provide a better and simpler customer experience.

LIMAC will continue to liaise with Telstra on any impacts of transformation for the current Access forEveryone package and will look for opportunities and benefits that new customer systems, such as billing and credit management, might offer to people on a low income.

3. Current limits of consumer protections for people on a low income
With rapid changes in communications needs and increased competition in these markets it is clear that Telstra and its Access for Everyone package can now only form part of the solution.

LIMAC believes there is an urgency in seeking discussions at least at an industry level on meeting the needs of people on a low income.

LIMAC is aware of the development of industry forums of credit management provisions for people who suffer financial hardship. LIMAC believes this offers a useful model in which to discuss and develop broader options for people on a low income. It has taken this up with the Minister and is awaiting consideration.

The above discussion tests the boundaries of LIMAC’s role and responsibilities, which are primarily Telstra facing. It has also taken this matter up with the Minister and is awaiting further consideration.

With rapid changes in communications needs and increased competition in telecommunications markets it is clear that Telstra and its Access for Everyone package can now only form part of the solution.

R.1. That Telstra continue to explore ways in which it can provide a benefit to people on a low income using a mobile phone and/or Internet access that takes into account their distinctive needs and usage.

R.2. That Telstra promotes Access for Everyone specifically through all Asylum Seeker Resource Centre type agencies.

R.3. That Telstra consider a Phone-Anytime card program for asylum seeker support agencies.

R.4. That Telstra extend the Bill Assistance Program, as soon as technically feasible, to include mobile phone accounts.

R.5. That Telstra ensure wherever technically feasible that Centrepay receipting is available as a payment/budgeting/top-up option for all products and services.

R.6. That Telstra ensure wherever technically feasible that Centrelink receipting is available as a payment/budgeting/top-up option for all products and services.

R.7. That LIMAC continue to seek whole of industry responses to issues of access to communications for people on a low income.

David Moffatt (Group Managing Director Consumer Marketing and Channels, Telstra) and Chris Dodds (LIMAC Chair) with Senator the Hon Helen Coonan (Minister for Communications)

Contacts

- For enquiries about residential services, please call 13 2200 between 7 am and 6 pm Monday–Friday and between 9 am and 5 pm Saturday (Eastern Standard Time).
- The TTY number for customers who use a teletypewriter is 1800 808 981.
- The Indigenous Communities Helpline to assist Indigenous consumers in rural and remote areas with specialised products and services which may assist them is available on 1800 444 403.
- Consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds can call the relevant Multicultural Service Centre, available in the following languages:
  - Language | Number
  - Cantonese | 1800 677 008
  - Mandarin | 1800 678 876
  - Italian | 1800 649 013
  - Greek | 1800 189 129
  - Indonesian | 1800 429 432
  - Korean | 1800 773 421
  - Arabic | 1800 726 001
  - Spanish | 1800 726 002
  - Vietnamese | 1800 644 509

- For other languages, the Australian Government’s Translating and Interpreting Service offers a translation service via 13 1450.

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Report to the Minister for Communications
Information Technology
and the Arts