

Community Information Victoria Inc

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Manager, Numbering Project
Australian Communications and Media Authority
PO Box 13112
Law Courts
Melbourne VIC 8010

25 November 2011

Via email: Numbering.project@acma.gov.au

To the Australian Communications and Media Authority

Re: *Numbering: Calls to freephone and local rate numbers, the way forward.*

Community Information Victoria (CIVic) is the peak body of the community information and support sector in Victoria. CIVic provides operational support, sector development, advocacy and representation to its member agencies. CIVic has over 60 member agencies, each managed by autonomous, community-based management committees. CIVic member agencies provide information and support services to people in their local communities, including vulnerable and disadvantaged people. They provide information, referral, advocacy, emergency relief, case work, No Interest Loans. Such services aim to uphold the dignity of all, respond to community needs, alleviate the impact of poverty and promote social justice. With the rising costs of non-discretionary items impacting negatively on vulnerable individuals and families on income support and pensioners, our member agencies are seeing more and more Australians living under financial stress. As a peak body concerned with issues affecting vulnerable individuals and families, we believe it is vital that those living on income support, the pension and low incomes have access to affordable essential services to alleviate the financial stress they are facing.

We are writing to support your proposed changes to the Numbering Plan so that calls from mobile phones to 1800 numbers will be free and 13 numbers will be a low fixed charge, just as they are from landlines and pay phones.

This matters to us because under the current arrangements consumers are charged up to \$1.78 per minute to contact essential services including charity helplines, government services such as Centrelink and basic utilities.¹ People on low-incomes are more likely to be among to 14% of Australians who only have a mobile phone and have no choice but to pay for a free or local-rate call.²

¹ ACMA, *Numbering: structure of Australia's telephone numbering plan, Consultation paper number one*, October 2010, p 45.

² ACMA, *Numbering: Calls to freephone and local rate numbers, the way forward*, October 2011 p 7.

Many charities use these numbers to offer services to people in need or they work closely with people on low-incomes who need to access any one of the 291,000 free and local-rate numbers in Australia.

Mobile services are no longer a luxury and it is important that everyone has access to free and local-call rates.

We encourage you to instigate the reforms you have outlined in *Numbering: Calls to freephone and local rate numbers, the way forward*. It is important that these changes are implemented within one year and apply to all mobile calls to 1800, 1300 and 13 numbers.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding this response, please contact our Sector Development Officer, Minh Nguyen, tel (03) 9672 2004 or email minh@civ.org.au.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'kwheller', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Kate Wheller
Executive Officer