



Australian Government
**Department of Broadband,
Communications and the Digital Economy**



Your ideas about telecommunications

Questions for people living in rural and regional areas

Easy Read version

November 2011

Using this document



This document was created by the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

The information is written in an 'easy to read' way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Some words are written in **blue**. We explain what these words mean.

There is also a list of these words on page 27.

This document is a summary of a longer document. You can find the longer document on our website:

www.rtirc.gov.au

Look under the 'Submissions' tab.

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What this document is about



This document is about using **telecommunications services** in rural and regional areas.



We explain what telecommunications services are on page 6.

The Australian Government is currently reviewing these services in rural and regional areas.



The review is being done by an independent group of people called the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee.



The committee members must report their findings to the government by 5 March 2012.



The committee members would like to know what you think about telecommunications services.



They are interested in hearing from people who live in rural and regional areas.



If you have any ideas about how the government can improve telecommunication services, please let us know. The different ways to tell us what you think are explained on pages 23 and 24.

What are telecommunications services?



Telecommunications services are some of the tools that we use to communicate with each other.

They usually work over long distances, such as from one part of the country to another.



These services change and improve a lot over time.

New ideas are constantly making telecommunications services better.

At the moment, telecommunications services include:

- telephones
- mobile phones and smart phones
- the internet
- **satellites** – objects in the sky that send and receive information
- other tools that send information over long distances, like the computers at weather stations.

What the Australian Government would like to do

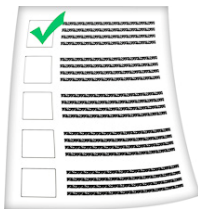


Australian Government

The Australian Government would like to improve telecommunications services.



The government thinks that this is an important thing to do in rural and regional areas.



The government is currently working on a number of ways to make things better.



The most important work that the government is doing in this area is called the National Broadband Network.

This is called the NBN.

It is a new way of making sure that all Australians have access to the internet.



This is a major project that is taking place all around Australia.

The NBN will have benefits for all Australians, including:

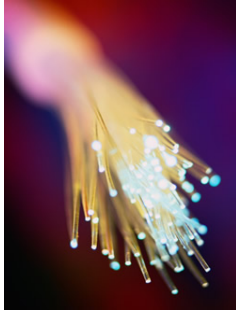
- better services in areas like health and education
- improving the way people do business
- improving the way we all communicate.

It will also help people in our community develop new technologies for the future.



To make the NBN work, new fibre cables are being installed.

These cables will eventually go to as many homes, businesses and other buildings as possible.



These cables will make it easier for everyone to get the internet.

And the internet will be a lot faster.



Let's say you want to learn a new skill over the internet.

With the NBN, you won't have to wait as long for the lesson to load and you may be able to talk to your teacher online.



If, for some reason, the cables can't be connected to a house or property, wireless or satellite services will be used instead.

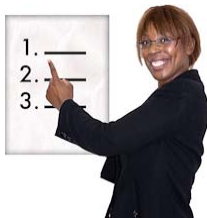


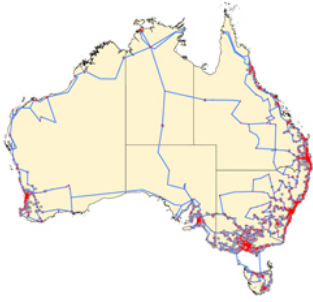
Satellite services are already being used by some people in remote areas. The NBN will make these services even better.

Because creating the National Broadband Network is such a big job, it can't be done all at once.

So it is being done in stages.

This means that some parts of the country will get the National Broadband Network before others.





Most of the places that will get the National Broadband Network first are in rural and regional areas.



We know that the NBN will make life better for people living in rural and regional areas.

It will improve the way people in rural and regional areas:

- do business
- use government services
- take part in education
- use health services.

How do telecommunications affect you?



The committee would like to hear from you if you live in a regional or rural area and:

- can share your experiences about using telecommunications services
- have ideas about how telecommunications services can be improved
- have ideas about how telecommunications services can be used in the future.

There are several areas that we are interested in finding out more about. These are:

- taking part in the **digital economy** – this is explained on page 11
- using telecommunications for government services
- using telecommunications to improve education
- using telecommunications to improve our health
- improving telecommunications in Indigenous communities
- getting the services we want.

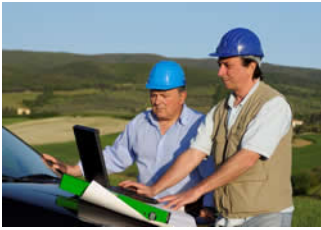
We've explained each of these topics on the following pages.



We've also suggested some questions to think about. You may have other ideas that you'd like to share as well.

There are instructions for telling us what you think on pages 23 and 24.

Taking part in the digital economy



The **digital economy** is the way that people use telecommunication services to work together.



For example, some businesses use the internet to sell products online.

And others use websites to tell people about the services they provide.



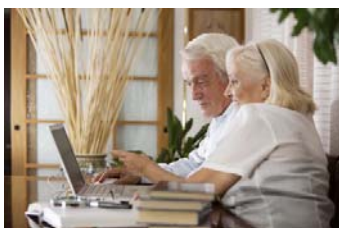
A lot of people use phone calls, text messages and emails to do business.



Telecommunications services allow us to do things like:

- talk to each other
- share information
- send money from one person to another
- buy things online.

All of these things are part of the digital economy.

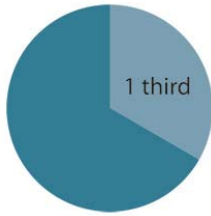


We think that there are a lot of opportunities for people living in rural and regional areas to work in the digital economy.

For example, more people can work from home if they have good internet services.

And this means that they don't have to travel to get to work.

However, we also know that people in rural and regional areas face challenges in taking part in the digital economy.



For example, we know that over one third of people aged 15 or older who live in regional and remote areas have not used the internet.

The NBN will increase opportunities for people to take part in the digital economy. We explain what the NBN is on page 7.



Questions to think about

Do you currently use the internet, telephones or other telecommunications services?

Do you take part in the digital economy at the moment?
If so, how do you take part?

Would you like more opportunities to take part in the digital economy?

If so, what kind of things would you like to do?

Using telecommunications for government services

Many parts of the government use telecommunications services.

These services offer a range of great ways for the government to communicate with people.



For example, most government departments use the internet to tell people about the services and programs they provide.



And they use telephones to talk to people directly.

In the future, online services will be used more and more.



For example, last year 2.37 million people used the internet to send in their tax forms. That's an increase of 3.2% on the year before.



Questions to think about

Have you used telecommunications services to communicate with the government?

This could include the governments at all levels:



- federal



- state



- local – your local council.

If you did use telecommunications services to communicate with government, what kind of experience did you have?

Do you use telecommunications services to find out about government services and programs? If so, please tell us how you did this or what information you found.

Do you have any ideas about how we can improve the way we use these services?

Using telecommunications to improve education



Telecommunications services are often used in education and training.

For example, schools and universities can use videos and online classes to teach students. This allows students to learn without everyone being in the same classroom at the same time.

Providing information online means that people don't always have to travel to receive an education.



This has some great advantages for schools and universities in rural and regional areas.

It also has some great advantages for students.

They can work on their computer at home, perhaps at a time that suits them.

We think that more and more schools and universities will use telecommunications services in the future.



Questions to think about

Have you used telecommunications services as part of your education or training? If so, we'd like to know about your experience.

How do you think telecommunications services can be used to improve education in rural and regional areas?

Using telecommunications to improve our health



Telecommunications services are becoming a useful way of delivering health services, particularly in regional Australia where people live far away from hospitals and specialists.

For example, **telehealth** programs allow people to receive health care at home over the internet. This means they don't have to travel to receive medical advice.



At the moment, a new diabetes telehealth service is taking place in Townsville, Queensland.

In this program, people with diabetes can have their health monitored over the internet instead of having to visit a doctor.

If they need to talk with the doctors or nurses, they can do this from home over the internet.

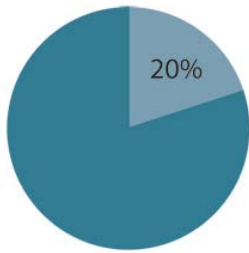


Questions to think about

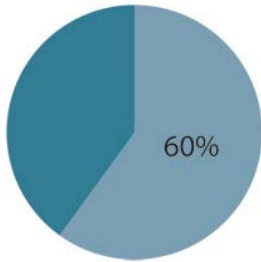
Have you used telecommunications services for health treatment or advice? If so, we'd like to know about your experience.

How do you think telecommunications services can be used to improve health services in rural and regional areas?

Improving telecommunications in Indigenous communities



Recent research tells us that only 20% of Indigenous households in remote and very remote areas currently have an internet connection.



This compares to 60% of non-Indigenous households in the same areas.



Also, people in remote communities (like some Indigenous communities) may have problems with mobile phone **coverage**.

We explain mobile phone coverage in more detail on page 21.



The government would like to increase access to the internet in Indigenous communities.



They would also like to encourage more Indigenous people to learn how to use the internet.

The internet has many benefits for connecting people and helping everyone to communicate.

There are currently several government-funded and community-run programs underway that teach Indigenous people how to use the internet.



Questions to think about

Are you part of an Indigenous community? If so, what are your experiences with telecommunications services?

Have you got any ideas about how to improve telecommunications services for Indigenous Australians?

How can we encourage more Indigenous Australians to understand and use telecommunications services?

What changes do you think increased internet services in rural and remote areas will make for Indigenous communities?

How can we promote telecommunications services in Indigenous communities?

Getting the services we want



Everyone has the right to be treated fairly and to receive good service.

Over recent years, people have been making a lot of complaints about telecommunications services.

Some people have been frustrated by things like:



- bad customer service



- unexpectedly high bills



- not fully understanding what they were signing up for – especially in relation to money or credit



- confusing advertising.



The government has been working hard to fix these issues. Over the past few years the government has examined the problems and suggested solutions.

They are now working to change the law to protect people who use telecommunications services.

The committee is keen to understand how people living in rural and regional areas experience these kinds of problems. This will help us to find solutions for people living in these areas.



Questions to think about

Have you had any problems using telecommunications services?

For example, have you ever made a complaint to a telecommunications company?

If so, we'd like to know about your experience.

Was the problem resolved? Were you satisfied with the service you received?

Do you feel that there are any specific problems faced by people living in rural and remote areas? If so, what are these problems?

How do people living in rural and regional areas find out about their rights?

Getting the coverage we need



Coverage is access to mobile phone services in different areas.

At the moment, there are 3 main phone companies that provide mobile phone **networks** around Australia.

These companies estimate that they each provide between 94-99% of Australians with mobile phone coverage.



However, most of these people live in city and suburban areas.

Only about 25% of the country's land actually has mobile phone coverage.



Instead, people living in the country may use satellite phone coverage.

There have been some issues with satellite phones in the past, including:

- they are expensive
- the call costs are high
- the phones need to have clear access to the satellite to work properly.

These problems are improving over time and the costs are coming down.



Satellite phone services have the advantage of being more reliable than mobile phones in emergency situations, such as bushfires.



Questions to think about

Do you use a mobile phone network or a satellite phone? We'd like to know about your experiences with either of these.

Do you have any ideas or opinions about mobile phone coverage or satellite services?

How to tell us what you think



There are lots of ways to have your say.



- You can write to us or send an email.

The information about how to do this is on page 24.



- You can call us on the phone.

Our phone number is **1800 064 851**.



TTY users phone 133 677 then ask for 1800 064 851



Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech relay) users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1800 064 851



Internet relay users connect to www.relayservice.com.au and then ask for 1800 064 851.



Please tell us what you think by 11 December 2011.
If you need more time, please let us know.

You can write to us or send an email



You can write to us to tell us your ideas about telecommunications services in rural and regional areas.

If you want to send us your ideas, please also include your name and contact details.

Sending us your ideas is called 'making a submission'. Please state in your letter or email that you are making a submission.

Please let us know if there is any information in your submission that you want to keep private.



Your submission can be sent to:

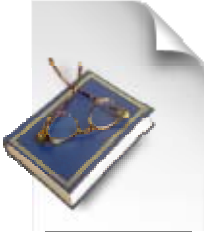
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601



You can also make a submission by email.

Our email address is secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

About your ideas



We will read the ideas that you send us. Your ideas will help us as we decide how to improve telecommunications services.



We might put your ideas on our website at www.rtirc.gov.au.



We might put your ideas in a document, such as a report.



If we do this, other people will be able to read your ideas.



We might edit your ideas. For example, we might just use one or two sentences from your idea, or group several ideas together.



By sending us your ideas in a submission, you are saying that it is OK for us to use them in these ways.

Contact us



Department of Broadband, Communications and the
Digital Economy

GPO Box 2154

CANBERRA ACT 2601



secretariat@rtirc.gov.au

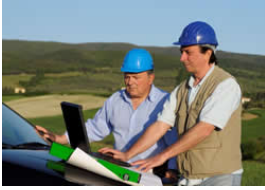


1800 064 851



www.dbcde.gov.au

Word list



Digital economy

The digital economy is the way that people use telecommunication services to work together.



Mobile phone coverage

Access to mobile phone services in different areas.



Network

A network is a system that allows computers or mobile phones to connect to each other.



Satellite

An object in the sky that sends and receives information.



Telecommunications services

Telecommunications services are some of the tools that we use to communicate with each other. They usually work over long distances, such as from one part of the country to another. There are examples of telecommunications services on page 6.



Telehealth

Programs that allow people to receive health care at home over the internet. This means they don't have to travel to receive medical advice.