

POLICY BRIEF – UNIVERSAL SERVICE POLICY

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Telsoc is the Australian telecommunication industry's oldest learned society. TelSoc's mission includes encouraging productive debate, illuminating what the future holds and promoting excellence in Telecommunications.

Universal service policy is one of the most important reforms for Australians currently underway in the telecommunications industry. Universal service ensures all Australian's have access to the communications services they need wherever they are.

Over the last six months, Telsoc has debated and developed an ambitious universal service proposal. Telsoc encourages the next government to adopt this policy to ensure all Australians get the most from their communications services, and communications providers are able to invest and deliver those services in the most efficient way.

TelSoc's proposed universal service policy is set out below.

1. Australians should be able to connect to communications networks wherever they live, work and travel

Statutory Infrastructure Providers (SIPs) and Telstra are already required to ensure Australians can connect to a telecommunications network at their homes and businesses. SIPs are required to connect and supply broadband services capable of delivering 25/5Mbps on request from an end-user (they are also required to support voice services in their fixed wireless and fixed line footprints). nbn co has additional speed and coverage targets. Telstra is required to provide copper connectivity supporting minimum voice services in NBN Co's non-fixed line footprint.

Government policy should also support mobile carriers so they can connect Australians to their networks where they might live, work and travel within Australia. Mobile networks have claimed to cover most of where Australia's population live today. If so, this covers up to a third of Australia's landmass. Mobile network technology will soon be supplemented with satellite connectivity to enable connectivity for Australians living, working or travelling in the remaining of Australia's landmass.

Connectivity must be affordable so price is not an unreasonable barrier to take up of communications services.

2. Communications and content services should enable all Australians to contact each other, do business, and participate in the modern economy

The minimum communication and content services Australians need include messaging, voice calling, video conferencing, internet access and triple zero calls.

3. Any legislation or regulation must enable and encourage service providers to use the most efficient technologies and methods to supply connectivity

Legislation and regulation supporting Universal Service policy must be outcomes based, and define the minimum communications and content services Australians need.

Legislation and regulation supporting Universal Service policy must also be technology neutral, allowing carriers, carriage service providers and content service providers to adopt new and more efficient ways to supply the minimum services Australians need.

Carriers, carriage service providers, and content service providers must publish information to their customers that sets out how they are enabling the minimum services Australians need to communicate with each other, do business and participate in the modern economy.

4. Subsidies should be targeted to only where the market is not delivering the agreed minimum service outcomes, and funded in the most economically efficient way possible

Government should commission detailed reviews of gaps in service outcomes for Australians, and the likely causes of those gaps. Where subsidies are required to fund non-commercial connectivity, government should ensure those subsidies are funded.

Government should consider providing resources in kind (e.g. spectrum in regional areas), but only in a transparent way. Otherwise, subsidies must be funded from the broadest base possible to minimise the economic harm of subsidies, while delivering the minimum service outcomes for Australians. Where subsidies cannot be funded from consolidated revenue, they must be funded at a minimum by all service providers offering communications services to Australians on an equitable basis.