

AGE CONCERN NEW ZEALAND

Submission: Telecommunications Dispute Resolution Scheme

To: Commerce Commission

From: Age Concern New Zealand
He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa

Date 9 December 2020



Serving the needs of older people

Age Concern New Zealand: Who are we?

Age Concern New Zealand is a registered charity working for the wellbeing, rights, respect, and dignity of the 750,000 people aged 65 and above that call New Zealand home.

Our vision:

Older people live valued lives in an inclusive society

He pāpori e whai whakaarohia ana, e whakanuitia ana, e tautokona ana, e whai mana anahoki te hunga kaumātua

Age Concern New Zealand provides expert information and support services in response to older people's needs through our network of 29 local Age Concerns, seven branches and a national office. We have 40 front doors as well as delivering services in older people's homes, over the phone and in community venues throughout Aotearoa.

Age Concern provides key services for older New Zealanders including:

- Elder abuse and neglect prevention
- Advocacy and public awareness
- Services to enhance social connection, including a visiting service
- Health promotion programmes

We provide leadership on issues affecting older New Zealanders and represent their perspectives by making submissions on national policy and providing input on national working groups. We are active and vocal on relevant issues and work to assist older people to stay connected with their whānau / family, friends, and community.

We want everyone's contribution to society valued and respected regardless of age.

The mahi we do is only possible through the generous support of all our donors, sponsors, and funders.

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Introduction

Age Concern New Zealand thanks the Commerce Commission for the opportunity to offer feedback on the Telecommunications Dispute Resolution Scheme. We are keen for all New Zealanders to benefit from a well-known, respected and effective disputes scheme that meets everyone's needs, including people aged 65 and older.

1. What do you think is currently working well?

- That a disputes scheme is in place that is reviewed regularly, with complaints recorded and monitored for trends.
- That the number of complaints is growing, which hopefully indicates increasing knowledge about the disputes scheme.
- Feedback from local Age Concerns is that a good service is provided by the Telecommunications Dispute Resolution Scheme and that staff appear to have good relationships with telecommunication providers and can get them to fix problems that older people are experiencing.
- *An example to illustrate our feedback:* A local Age Concern referred a client to the Telecommunications Disputes Resolution Service (TDRS) during Covid-19 Level 4 lockdown. The client had changed her internet and phone provider on the day prior to Level 4 commencing and lost her phone connection as a result. It had not been adequately explained that the change in provider and connection would result in a need for a VOIP phone. She contacted her local Age Concern by email as she had no phone connection. She was very upset as she lives in a rural location and would become very isolated without a phone. The client was referred to TDRS and emailed back two days later to say they had contacted the provider and got her situation sorted promptly; she was very pleased to now have a working phone.

2. What do you think could be improved and how?

- Increased public awareness raising about the Disputes Scheme via various mediums including newspapers, television, radio, internet, social media. People do not generally know where to go with their complaints about telecommunications - the Commerce Commission is not known as the place to go. Age Concern New Zealand is contacted by older people asking who they should contact to make a complaint or inquiry. The public are aware of the Consumer Guarantees Act and Fair Go but not the Telecommunications Disputes Resolution Service

- We recommend that the Commerce Commission's full name is used. Confusion arises when the Commission refers to itself as Com Com. This is jargon that does not necessarily make sense to the general public.
- Clear communication is required along with awareness raising. For example, Broadband doesn't necessarily come to mind for everyone as a part of telecommunications.
- *An example to illustrate our response:* A gentleman contacted their local Age Concern about a neighbour whose phone line was not working; he was concerned his neighbour's monitored alarm was therefore also not working. The gentleman had been phoning Spark for several days who kept promising to send someone to fix the fault, but nothing happened. The Age Concern advised him to contact the TDRS which he did. He also reported back that the TDRS contacted Spark directly and the phone had been reconnected very quickly. The outcome was positive, but the gentleman did not know about the TDRS and therefore was not able to contact them directly without a referral.

3. Are there any other ways you think the TDRS could be improved for the benefit of consumers?

Greater publicity and awareness raising is our primary recommendation. It appears the TDRS provides an effective service but the general public do not know about it. Once referred to TDRS, complaints are typically followed up efficiently and effectively. Developing and implementing a communications plan would be a useful step.

Closing comment

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the *Telecommunications Dispute Resolution Scheme*.

We value the opportunity to comment and welcome any questions or clarification you may require.

Kind regards



Stephanie Clare
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand