

27 August 2021

Tristan Gilbertson
Telecommunications Commissioner
Commerce Commission New Zealand
By email

Dear Tristan

Marketing of alternative services to consumers during copper/public switched telephone network (PSTN) withdrawal Submission

With New Zealand transitioning away from copper-based services, you are seeking feedback on the proposed outcomes and principles set out to protect consumers still on copper-based services, and views on how these should be implemented.

I am making a submission on behalf the Office for Seniors (the Office) on this important issue as your letter identified that “consumers who are currently on copper-based services are more likely to be vulnerable, older people or less technologically aware. They are potentially unaware of the options available to them, or their rights, and are therefore less able to choose an appropriate service when services are being withdrawn”.

The Office advocates for older people

The Office is a small team with seven full-time staff, led by a Director. The Office is located within and administered by the Ministry of Social Development. The Office:

- provides advice on the rights and issues of older people
- develops and implements Better Later Life He Oranga Kaumātua 2019–2034
- leads the Age friendly Aotearoa New Zealand programme
- promotes and encourages digital literacy for older people
- raises awareness of elder abuse
- supports the Minister for Seniors to advocate for and raise awareness of issues facing older people
- informs and communicates with older people on news and information important to them

The Office supports the proposed outcomes and conduct principles

The Office supports the Commerce Commission New Zealand’s (Commerce Commission) proposed outcomes and conduct principles to protect those consumers who are still on the copper-based services.

We would like to make the following suggestions to the outcomes and principles:

- **Outcome 5 and Conduct Principles** – retail service providers (RSPs) should also consider offering alternative plans that meet consumers needs at a cost that is similar to their existing plan. The plans for the general market may not be suitable and affordable for these consumers as many of them are on limited incomes and their internet usages are different to the general public (or some might just want/need a telephone line). We have heard many stories of people being sold plans that greatly exceed their needs. Breaking these contracts represents a financial burden which is exacerbated by the opaque way that consumers advised of the review period before the same contract is rolled over.
- RSPs need to provide information in plain English and in alternative languages for those non-English speakers. Older people has been identified as a digitally disadvantaged group. Many lack basic understanding about technologies and face multiple barriers to digital inclusion. A significant proportion of older people are much less likely to have essential digital skills for everyday life – 33% of people aged 60-69 lack essential digital skills, this increases to 50% for those aged 70-79 and 79% for those aged 80 and over
- RSPs need to provide information in non-digital forms as some people are unable to access information online. It should also include information about locally available services (e.g. Digital Inclusion Alliance Aotearoa, 20/20 Trust, and SeniorNet) to assist (older) people with developing skills and knowledge to use digital technologies

Views on implementation

The Commerce Commission should issue the principles and outcomes to the telecommunications industry in the expectation that RSPs would comply with, and at the same time, work with the telecommunications industry to incorporate the principles and outcomes into a Commerce Commission retail service quality (RSQ) code under section 236 of the Telecommunications Act 2001. This will not only encourage voluntary compliance from RSPs at the meantime, but also future proof any withdrawal of the current technologies as new technologies comes about (e.g. when new technologies evolves and broadband is being phased out or withdraw in the future).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this important issue.

Yours faithfully



Diane Turner
Director