



Australian Government

**Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts**

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN FOR REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES (TAPRIC) - COMMUNITY PHONES SUBSIDY SCHEME GUIDELINES

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Overview of Community Phones Program (CPP)

The Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities (TAPRIC) was released in May 2002. The Australian Government is providing funding of \$8.3 million in the Action Plan to support improved telecommunications services in remote indigenous communities. TAPRIC is managed by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA).

TAPRIC has been put in place following a major study into the needs of remote communities, undertaken by the Australian Government in response to the Telecommunications Service Inquiry in 2000.

TAPRIC has four key service objectives for remote Indigenous communities:

- improved and sustained take-up and use of telephone services;
- improved take-up and effective use of Internet services;
- improved viability and provision of broadband services for community service delivery and community development; and
- increased awareness of telecommunications opportunities and rights.

The Community Phones Program (CPP) is a key element of the TAPRIC Program, and aims to improve community access to, and take-up of telephone services in remote Indigenous communities. The CPP has two separate parts:

- (i) the **Community Phones Subsidy Scheme (CPSS)** is subsidising the cost for communities to connect to community phone services. Under the Scheme, payments are made to registered carriers who provide communities with approved community phone services. The services are approved on the basis that they provide a more affordable basis for communities to have phone services connected. In addition, they offer communities culturally appropriate and effective ongoing access arrangements, for example through improved billing and payment arrangements to address credit management issues; and
- (ii) the **Community Phones Demonstration Program (CPDP)** is providing financial assistance to communities to partner with carriers and/or service providers to conduct demonstration projects of innovative products and systems to improve access to community telephone services for remote Indigenous communities. Again, these projects should focus on supporting innovative and effective ways of improving all aspects of the provision of telephone services in remote Indigenous communities.

Further information on the Community Phones Program

The information below sets out guidelines for the operation of the Community Phones Subsidy Scheme and the Community Phones Demonstration Program. After you have read these guidelines, if you require further information please contact a DCITA officer on 1800 883 488 (press 2 when prompted). You may also make contact via email to tapric@dcita.gov.au or visit our website at www.dcita.gov.au/.

Community Phones Subsidy Scheme (CPSS) Guidelines

Guidelines for Communities

This part of the guidelines is to assist remote Indigenous communities applying for a subsidised community telephone service under the CPSS.

What are community phone services?

The Australian Government is seeking to subsidise community phone services that are more affordable and suitable for remote Indigenous communities. The Australian Government is seeking to support connection to services that better address the needs of communities in such areas as service costs and credit management.

Community phone services under the CPSS are defined as telephone services that are available for use by all members of a remote Indigenous community on an equitable basis. It is expected that telephones supported under the CPSS will be made available for use in a publicly accessible place, such as a community centre, and that the community will ensure that any charges associated with the use of the telephones, for example calls, rentals and insurances, will be met. In some circumstances a service could be located with a private residence, but the applicant would need to demonstrate that community members would have reasonable access to the service.

Community phone services will provide a similar service to that provided by Telstra payphones under the Universal Service Obligation (USO). However, communities should note that receiving support from the Australian Government for a community phone service does not take away their right to a Telstra payphone service where they are eligible to receive one. The two kinds of services are intended to complement each other. In some smaller communities that are not eligible for a payphone service, an Australian Government supported community phone service will provide important new community benefits.

Who is eligible to apply for a subsidised service?

Applications will be assessed on the degree to which they meet eligibility requirements. The Australian Government's objective is to support the maximum number of remote Indigenous communities under the CPSS, subject to meeting eligibility requirements.

Applications will be accepted from organisations that are legal entities, and that are representative of one or more discrete remote Indigenous communities, as defined by ATSIC for the purpose of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS)¹.

¹ A discrete Indigenous community is a geographic location, bounded by physical or cadastral (legal) boundaries, and inhabited or intended to be inhabited predominantly (i.e.

Applications from remote Indigenous communities not listed as CHINS communities will also be considered, if, in the Department's view, they conform to the CHINS definition. Examples could include town camps in Alice Springs and recently settled homelands and outstations.

Where applications are submitted for more than one community, evidence must be provided by the applicant that each of the represented communities is willing to be included in the application, and accepts the responsibilities that go with receiving Australian Government support for a community phone service.

Where it can be demonstrated that no legal organisation exists or is able to act on behalf of a particular community, applications will be accepted from an individual, acting on behalf of his/her community. In these circumstances the individual must be able to demonstrate that the majority of the community supports the application and that the community will ensure that any charges associated with the use of the telephones, for example calls, rentals and/or insurances, will be met.

If you are a representative organisation² applying on behalf of several communities, please provide details for each community in your application.

How is support provided to communities?

Under the Scheme, service providers, and the community phone services they offer, are registered with DCITA.

A list of registered service providers, and the registered services they offer, is attached. Registration is open on a continuous basis, so applicants should check the DCITA website, or email or call DCITA to access the most up-to-date list of registered services.

Applicants seeking support for a community phone service must first select a registered service provider and product, and then demonstrate in their application that contact with that service provider has been made and that the chosen service can be provided to the community.

Once the application is approved by DCITA, the chosen service provider will make the chosen subsidised product available to the community. DCITA will pay the service provider the appropriate subsidy amount, so there will be no need for the community applicant to manage receipt of Australian Government funds. The community applicant will be required to provide their service provider with written confirmation that the service has been satisfactorily installed. Where a community directly meets costs accepted under the CPSS, for example for trenching, DCITA will reimburse the community the subsidy amount on acceptance of invoices.

greater than 50 per cent of usual residents) by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, with housing or infrastructure that is managed on a community basis.

² Representative organisations include: Indigenous community organisations, land councils and incorporated agencies such as resource centres acting on behalf of a community.

What costs will the CPSS pay and what will communities be required to pay?

The amount the Australian Government will contribute to connection costs is specified in the attached list of CPSS registered services.

The CPSS may provide funding support for trenching and network extension costs, because these are significant connection costs for communities to pay. Trenching may be required where there are no existing phone services nearby. In these circumstances the community is required to make a cash or in-kind contribution towards trenching for the phone line to connect to the premises where the handset is located. If trenching is required, DCITA will nominate an appropriate community contribution, at a minimum requiring the community to obtain relevant planning and infrastructure siting clearances and approvals.

Under the CPSS, the community is required to pay all ongoing costs associated with using the phone, such as line rentals, call costs, insurances and handset replacement. It is recommended that communities discuss available registered services with their provider, including service charges and payment options, before applying for a phone under the Scheme.

All remote Indigenous communities that are regularly inhabited (for six months or more a year) and have permanent dwellings and utilities are eligible for a community phone. Where more than one service is sought, applicants will need to indicate why more than one service is required and that they are prepared to pay all ongoing costs associated with each community phone service in their community. In general, applicants are encouraged to apply for one or two services in their initial application. DCITA will consider providing up to one community phone for each 40 to 50 people in the community, up to a maximum of five community phones.

What are the CPSS Terms and Conditions?

The following terms and conditions apply for applicants accepting Australian Government support for a subsidised community phone service:

1. All approved CPSS telephone services are provided to a community on the basis that every member of that community will be able to use a community telephone within the community.
2. Community members are responsible for all ongoing charges for the CPSS service provided by their chosen service provider. Australian Government support is limited to making payments, as set out in these guidelines, so that communities can connect to community phone services at reduced cost.
3. Under the CPSS, community organisations can recover the ongoing costs of maintaining the community phones service through payments from community members, if necessary.

Will arrangements under the CPSS change over the life of the program?

To provide certainty to both communities and service providers, it is recognised that there is value in having a reasonably consistent approach over the life of the program.

However, an evaluation review will be conducted by DCITA at the mid point of the program. This is because it is important to assess whether the operation of the program is delivering the program objectives. Following this review it may be necessary to adjust arrangements to some extent to improve program outcomes.

How will funding be prioritised?

Eligible communities will be contacted by DCITA and invited to apply according to a phased targeting of particular regions, starting across the top end of Australia. Priority communities will be those with populations under 50 persons, with permanent dwellings and without payphone facilities.

Prospective applicants should note that communities with no infrastructure are not included in the initial offer by Telstra under the Scheme. It is the Government's intention to particularly target such communities in trialing new service platforms under the Community Phones Demonstration Program, and to extend support to these communities under later phases of the Subsidy Scheme.

Communities may nominate themselves, if they so wish, or if not included on the TAPRIC database, seek to have themselves included and their eligibility assessed.

When does the CPSS end?

The CPSS funding will cease on 30 June 2005. Applicants are encouraged to apply before this date, and definitely no later than 30 April 2005 to ensure that their application is actioned before the end of the Program. While we expect to have funds available over the life of the Program, if there is strong demand all available funds may be allocated before this date.

How does a remote Indigenous community apply for a CPSS product or service?

A community organisation³ can apply for a CPSS service by completing the attached CPSS Community Details Form and CPSS Application Form and following the process set out below:

1. Complete a CPSS Community Details Form and send to DCITA.

³ Representative organisations include: Indigenous community organisations, land councils and incorporated agencies such as resource centres acting on behalf of a community.

2. DCITA will advise on your community's eligibility and priority and, if eligible, will advise when you should apply.
3. When advised by DCITA, your community organisation should approach its preferred CPSS provider to decide the most suitable service to meet the needs of the community. Attachment A lists registered CPSS providers, their registered CPSS products and functionality, together with the price each product will cost the community.
4. When your community has decided which CPSS service it would like to have installed, your community organisation should apply to DCITA using the CPSS Application Form.
5. DCITA will consider your CPSS application. If your application is approved, DCITA will advise your community organisation and CPSS provider accordingly, and provide each with the CPSS approval reference number. DCITA will advise your community organisation and CPSS provider if the application has been declined or not accepted in full and the reason why such a decision was taken.
6. After your community's CPSS subsidy is approved, your community organisation should contact your chosen CPSS provider to make arrangements for the installation of the service. Your community organisation must enter into an agreement with your provider to pay **all** charges **not** covered by the CPSS.
7. After the CPSS service has been installed, the CPSS provider will obtain evidence from the community to provide to DCITA that the service has been provided and installed.
8. Your community organisation will be liable to pay **all** fees and charges of the subsidised CPSS service to your chosen CPSS service provider in accordance with your community's agreement with that provider. Your provider may choose to disconnect your service if payments are not made as required.

Other assistance arrangements to improve telephone accessibility?

Apart from the CPSS, there are a number of other Government and industry initiatives to improve telephone access which a community or individuals within a community may be eligible to access. These initiatives are:

1. The Satellite Phone Subsidy Scheme (SPSS) provides a subsidy towards the purchase of a mobile satellite phone for many people living in areas beyond CDMA or GSM terrestrial mobile phone coverage — as well as community groups, small business, and emergency services operating in these areas. The maximum subsidy payable is \$1,100 including GST. Further information on the SPSS can be obtained by phoning the Administrator of the Scheme on a fixed line free call: 1800 674 058.
2. Access to equipment for people with disabilities is available from Telstra and Optus. Equipment is also available privately. Details are available by contacting the National Relay Service by phone on 1800 555 660, by facsimile on 1800 555 690 or via the website at aceinfo.net.au/services/nrs/.
3. The universal service provider Telstra has a range of services especially designed for customers on low incomes and those facing financial disadvantage. To assist in the development of programs and services within the low income customer group seven sub-segments have been identified.
 - Aged Pensioners
 - Customers with a disability
 - Transient customers
 - Job seekers
 - Customers from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds
 - Customers from Aboriginal/Islander Communities
 - Low income families.

Please contact Telstra if you believe you may be eligible to access this assistance.