



Australian Government

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

FACT SHEET

Consumer Safeguards

Telecommunications companies are required by Law to meet service guarantees.

Your rights to telecommunications services are protected through laws like the Universal Service Obligation and the Customer Service Guarantee. They are overseen by the Australian Communications and Media Authority and an independent umpire, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman. By understanding your rights and how to exercise them, you will get the best out of your telephone service.

The Universal Service Obligation

Your right to a phone service

You are legally entitled to reasonable access to a standard telephone service and to payphones regardless of where you live or carry out business. The legislated obligation to guarantee this access to a service is known as the Universal Service Obligation (USO). Telstra is the universal service provider for Australia.

What is a standard phone service?

In general, a standard phone service means the basic fixed phone line, including access to:

- Local, national and international calls;
- 24-hour access to the emergency call service number;
- Operator assisted services; and
- Itemised billing, including itemised local calls on request.

You are entitled to the supply of one standard phone service to your home and business under the USO. To obtain a standard phone service under the USO, contact your local Telstra office.

Interim and alternative phone services

If Telstra, as the universal service provider, cannot connect or repair your phone in specified timeframes, it must offer you an interim service until your permanent service is provided or restored.

An example of an interim service is a mobile phone or satellite phone. Telstra must offer you an interim service if your permanent service cannot be connected within 30 working days of a connection request or if it cannot be repaired within five working days of you reporting a fault.

Payphones

The USO also covers payphones. Telstra has an obligation to provide reasonable access to payphones and install and maintain these payphones in a timely manner.

The Customer Service Guarantee

Your right to timely connection and repairs

By law, you are entitled to timely service for connection and repairs to your standard phone service. The Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) sets the timeframes for the services and if your phone company doesn't meet the timeframes, you may be entitled to financial compensation.

The CSG covers the supply of standard phone services and special call handling features such as call waiting, call forwarding and calling number display.

The CSG applies to all phone companies. Any phone company that offers these services in your area must meet guaranteed timeframes to:

- Connect standard telephone services;
- Repair faults; and
- Attend appointments with customers.

Timeframes for connecting and repairing a standard phone service

Connection times under the CSG vary from 2 to 20 working days, depending on the existence of a previous connection, the population of your area and the availability of infrastructure. Repair times under the CSG should not exceed three working days, except in circumstances beyond the control of your phone company.

Connection times under the CSG

The following table outlines the maximum timeframes for connecting new services, according to your location:

Connection situation	Community type	Community size (people)	Connection time (following customer application)
Existing connection to network	All	All	Within 2 working days
No existing connection to network Close to cabling or other infrastructure	Urban	10 000 or above	Within 5 working days
	Major rural	Between 2501 and 9999	Within 10 working days
	Minor rural	Between 200 and 2500	Within 10 working days (if Telstra retail customer) or otherwise within 15 days
	Remote	Less than 200	Within 15 working days
No existing connection and not close to cabling or other infrastructure	All	All	Within 20 working days

If your phone company makes a commitment to connect in less time than outlined in the table above, then this becomes the connection time for that company.

Timeframes for repairing faults

The following table outlines the maximum timeframes for your phone to be repaired by your phone company:

Fault situation	Community type	Community size (people)	Repair time (following customers fault report)
Administrative error by the phone company, or phone company can correct fault without attending the premises or undertaking external plant work	All	All	End of next working day
Where the phone company cannot correct fault without attending premises or undertaking external plant work	Urban	10 000 or above	End of next working day
	Rural	Between 200 and 9999	End of second working day
	Remote	Less than 200	End of third working day

Timeframes for appointments

If a phone company makes an appointment with you to connect or repair a service, the company must keep this appointment unless it gives you reasonable notice. Otherwise you may be entitled to compensation. The following table outlines when appointments are officially missed:

Appointment period	Definition of missed appointment
Four hours or less	Phone company does not attend within 15 minutes of the appointment period#
Between four and five hours	Phone company does not attend within the appointment period#

#An extra 45 minutes is allowed where the phone company must travel long distances for an appointment in a community of 2500 people or less.

When the normal CSG timeframes do not apply

CSG timeframes for phone companies are extended in circumstances beyond their control, such as when natural disasters or extreme weather conditions cause mass failure of services. These circumstances are called Mass Service Disruptions (MSDs). In these circumstances, the CSG timeframe is extended for the period of the MSD.

Compensation

Your phone company must pay you compensation for each working day that connections or repairs are delayed beyond maximum CSG timeframes, or if it fails to keep an appointment. You don't have to apply for compensation – your phone company must pay it to you automatically.

The following table outlines the compensation for each situation:

Customer	Services delayed	Compensation for first 5 working days (per working day)	Compensation after first 5 working days (per working day)
Residential / Charity	Connection or repair of standard phone service	\$12	\$40
	Connection or repair of enhanced call handling features to an existing service	\$6	\$20
	Connection or repair of two or more enhanced call handling features to an existing service	\$12	\$40
	Not keeping an appointment	\$12 for each missed appointment	
Business	Connection or repair of standard phone service	\$20	\$40
	Connection or repair of enhanced call handling features to an existing service	\$10	\$20
	Connection or repair of two or more enhanced call handling features to an existing service	\$20	\$40
	Not keeping an appointment	\$20 for each missed appointment	

Complaints and the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) is an independent dispute resolution service, a kind of independent umpire, that can assist you if you have been unable to resolve your complaint with your phone or Internet company directly.

The sort of complaints that the TIO can deal with include billing problems, phone faults, poor customer service, mobile phone contract problems and Internet access difficulties.

If you have a complaint about your phone or Internet company, the first step you should take is to contact the company in question and try and resolve it directly with them. However, if you are not satisfied with the company's response to your complaint, you can make a complaint to the TIO. The TIO can be contacted by telephone on freecall 1800 062 058, freefax 1800 630 614 or you may wish to visit the TIO website (<http://www.tio.com.au>).

Keeping the Network reliable

To make sure Australia's telecommunications network continues to improve, the Australian Government has put in place the Network Reliability Framework (NRF). The NRF requires Telstra to overhaul services that have recurring faults or face penalties of up to \$10 million. For individual services, the reliability requirements are for no more than three faults in 60 days and no more than four faults in 365 days.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), collects data on network reliability and enforces Telstra's obligations under the NRF. The ACMA also publishes reports on the information it receives from Telstra about its NRF performance.

Further Information

For further information about your rights to telecommunications services contact telinfo on 1800 883 488 or visit the telinfo website (www.telinfo.gov.au).