



# Understanding the Impact of Phone and Internet Issues in Queensland

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# Welcome

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## Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman



**Judi Jones, Ombudsman**

I am pleased to introduce the report, *Understanding The Impact Of Phone and Internet Issues in Queensland*, in partnership with Community Legal Centres Queensland.

The results show a surprising and varied pattern of issues in Queensland because of phone and internet service problems.

48 per cent of community legal sector workers reported hearing from clients with a phone or internet problem every week. 20 per cent said they hear of these problems every two to four weeks, and 17 per cent stated they hear of phone or internet issues every month.

Community legal sector workers reported bill payments, misunderstanding contracts and overselling, as considerable problems amongst their clients.

As phone and internet service issues increase for consumers, so do subsequent problems. Professionals reported clients' phone and internet problems leading to mental health issues, debt and a suspension of their services.

In 2016/17, 28,988 residential consumers and small businesses contacted us about a problem with their phone or internet service - a 42.7 per cent increase in complaints from 2015/16.

As well as widening our understanding of those who need our help the most in Queensland, this survey gives us an opportunity to be more accessible, improve and shape our services.

Thank you to the community legal sector workers from across Queensland who took the time to respond. Your expertise and input is valuable and helped produce an insightful study.

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## Community Legal Centres Queensland



**James Farrell, Director**

Phone and internet services are integral in our communities. In a varied and diverse state like Queensland, our members, legal centres and professionals in the sector have seen firsthand the impact of problems in phone and internet services increasing over the last few years.

Working with the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman has given us the opportunity to highlight these concerns and work towards change.

Community Legal Centres continue to provide vital services to everyday Queenslanders, including those with phone and internet problems. Ensuring legal services are available and accessible means Queenslanders can get the legal help that they need, and the justice they deserve.



# Survey Overview

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With the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman managing complaints and dispute resolution, and Community Legal Centres Queensland in a leading advocacy and legal advice role, both organisations work directly with those affected by phone and internet problems.

Community legal sector workers in the state were surveyed for an understanding of the issues their clients are experiencing.

Sector professionals have frontline expertise and many of those surveyed have worked in this area over a number of years.

As well as understanding the challenges of people affected by phone and internet issues, these professionals are also aware of the particular issues facing Queensland.

Those surveyed are all community legal sector workers in Queensland. The survey was completed between 19 February, 2018 and 5 March, 2018.

The survey looked at the frequency of phone and internet problems arising, the barriers for consumers in complaining, the most common phone and internet issues, and what could help consumers with their problems.



# Key Findings

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## Community legal sector workers in Queensland

- 137 lawyers, social workers, financial counsellors, NGO workers and professionals in similar fields, completed the survey.
- 64 per cent of professionals (88 respondents) have been in their role for over 3 years. 29 per cent of professionals, 40 respondents, have been in their role for over 10 years.
- 39 per cent of professionals (53 respondents) work at a legal centre.
- 63 per cent of professionals (86 of respondents) work full time.
- 64 per cent of professionals (87 respondents) work in Brisbane and South East Queensland.
- 36 per cent of professionals (28 respondents) have an average caseload of 16 cases or more per week. 8 per cent of professionals have 30 cases or more a week.

## Assisting clients

- 61 per cent (75 respondents) assist clients through advocacy.
- 57 per cent (79 respondents) assist clients through referrals. 33 per cent (40 respondents) assist clients through legal advice; and 29 per cent (36 respondents) assist clients through tenancy issues or through family law.

## Phone and internet services

- 48 per cent (60 respondents) reported hearing from clients with a phone or internet problem every week. 20 per cent said they hear of problems every two to four weeks, and 18 per cent stated they hear of phone or internet issues every month.
- 54 per cent of professionals said their clients do not know how to complain about problems with their phone or internet service.
- The most common phone or internet issues reported by clients were being unable to pay for a service, increasing debt, and not enough money to pay bills.
- Debt, suspension of phone or internet services, poor financial management and mental health problems were identified as issues that arise as result of phone or internet problems.
- The most common reasons for clients not complaining about their phone or internet service are that people don't know how they can complain, people don't know who to contact to complain, and a lack of confidence.
- Payment plans, clear information and restrictions on overselling were identified as the top ways which would help people avoid problems with their phone or internet provider.

# Community Legal Sector Workers in Queensland



One in three respondents is a Social Worker

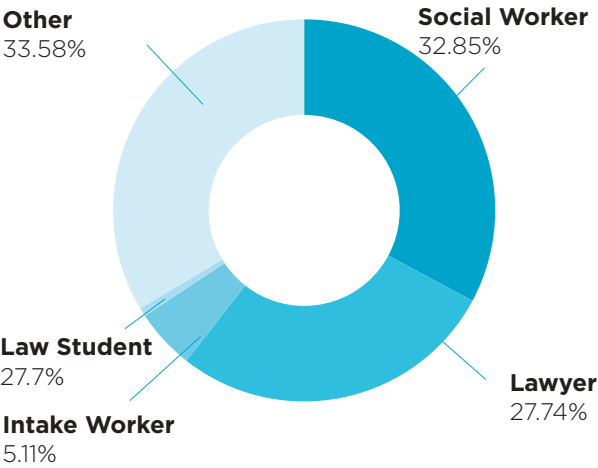


62% of respondents work in Brisbane or South East Queensland



64% of respondents work more than 35 hours per week

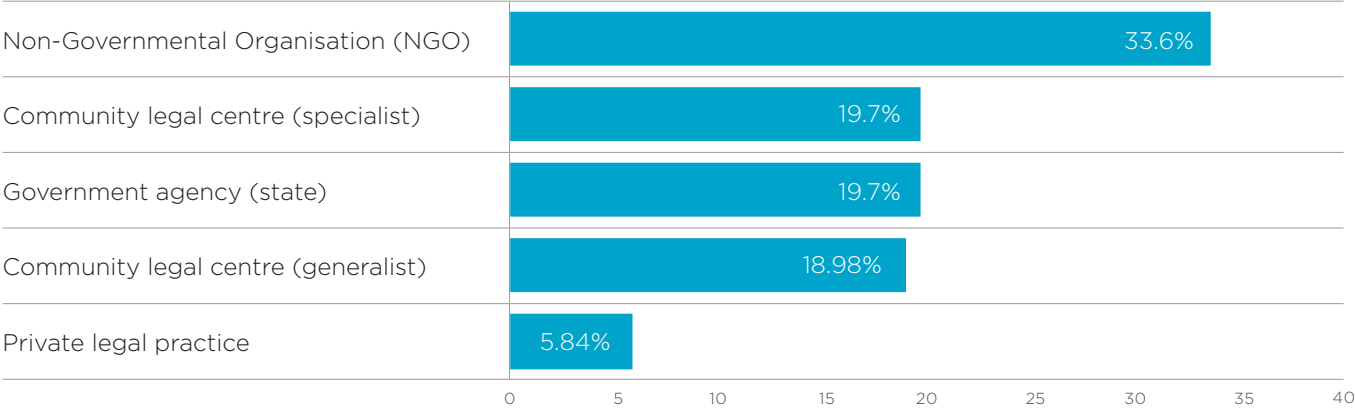
## Who answered the survey



## Where respondents work in Queensland

Brisbane and South East Queensland	62%
South West and Darling Downs	7.3%
Cairns and Far North Queensland	6.6%
Central West (includes Gladstone and Rockhampton)	4.4%
Mount Isa and North West (includes Townsville)	3.7%
Mackay and Whitsundays	2.2%
Wide Bay Burnett	1.5%
Other Areas	12.4%

## Types of organisations where respondents work in Queensland



Other types of organisations includes Legal Aid Queensland (0.73), peak body or professional association (0.73%) and federal government agency (0.73%).



**48%**

of respondents have more than five years experience working in their field



**20%**

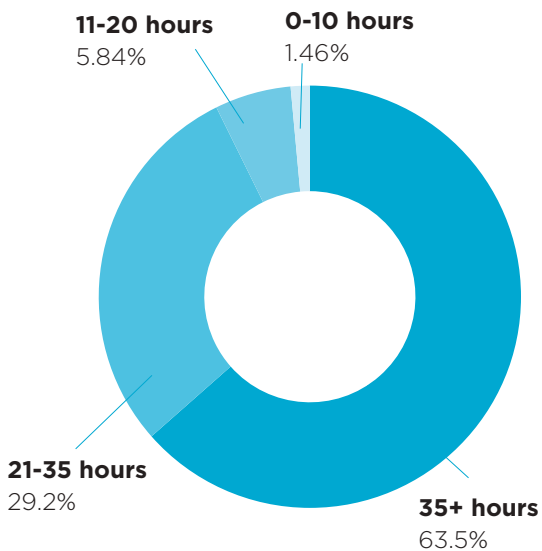
of respondents work at a government agency (state)



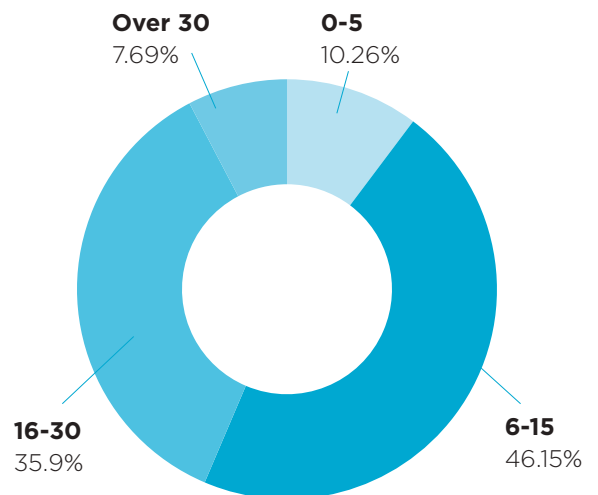
**44%**

of respondents work on over 15 cases each week

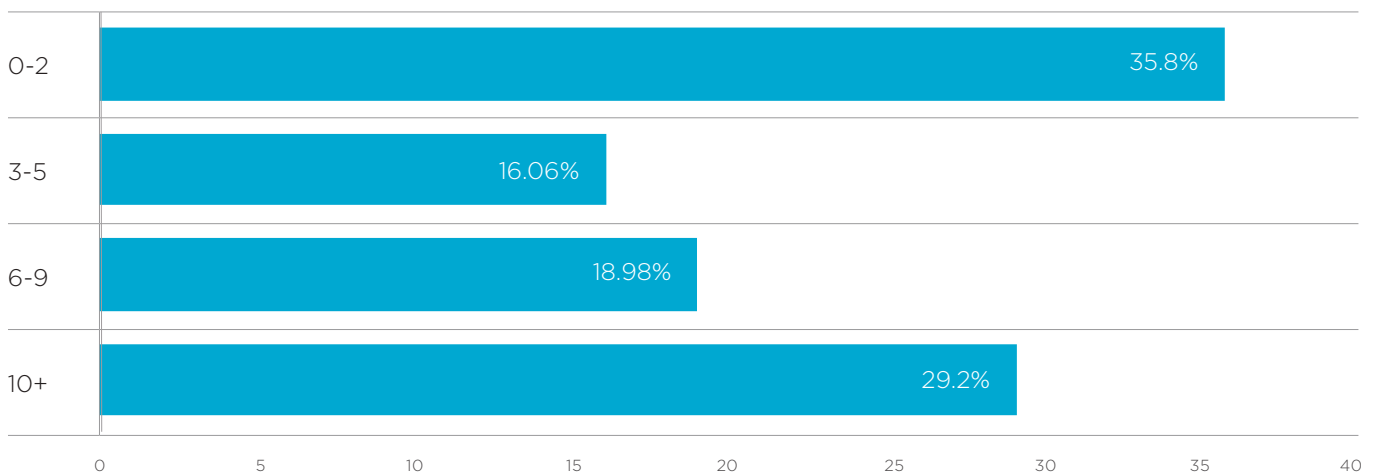
### Average number of hours worked per week



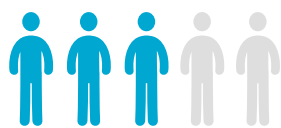
### Average weekly caseload



### Number of years respondents have been in their role



# How Community Legal Sector Workers Assist Their Clients



**Three in five**

respondents assist their clients through advocacy



**One in three**

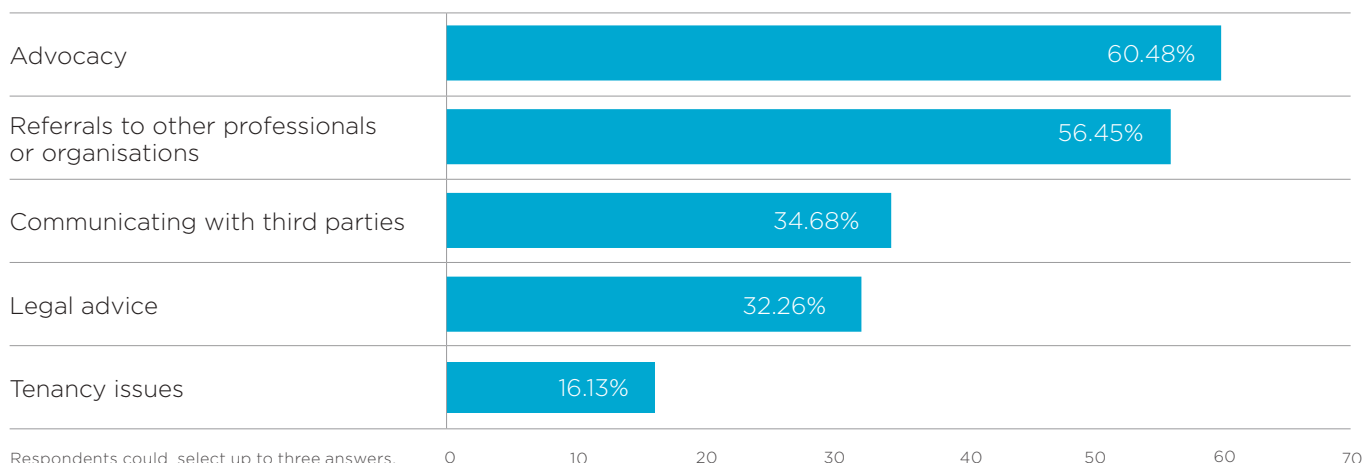
respondents assist their clients by communicating with Third Parties



**71%**

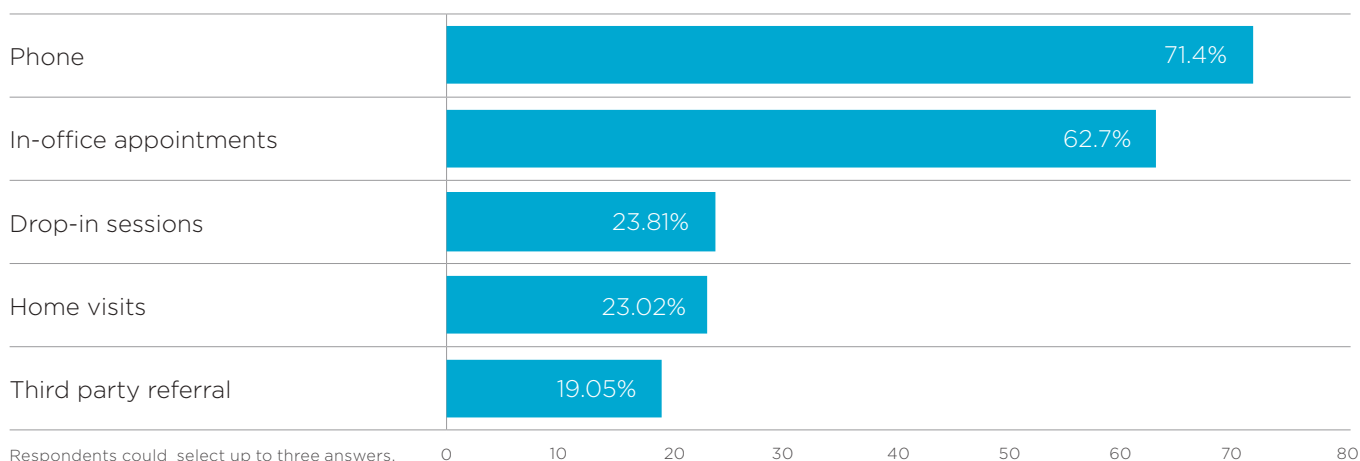
of respondents say their clients use their phones to access their services

## Most common assistance given to clients



Other areas of assistance include court representation (13.7%), family law issues (12.9%), dispute resolution (9.7%) and community legal education (8.9%).

## How clients access community legal services



Other ways clients access community legal services are through presentations (7.1%) and online resources (6.35%).





56%

of respondents say clients hear about their services through word of mouth



29%

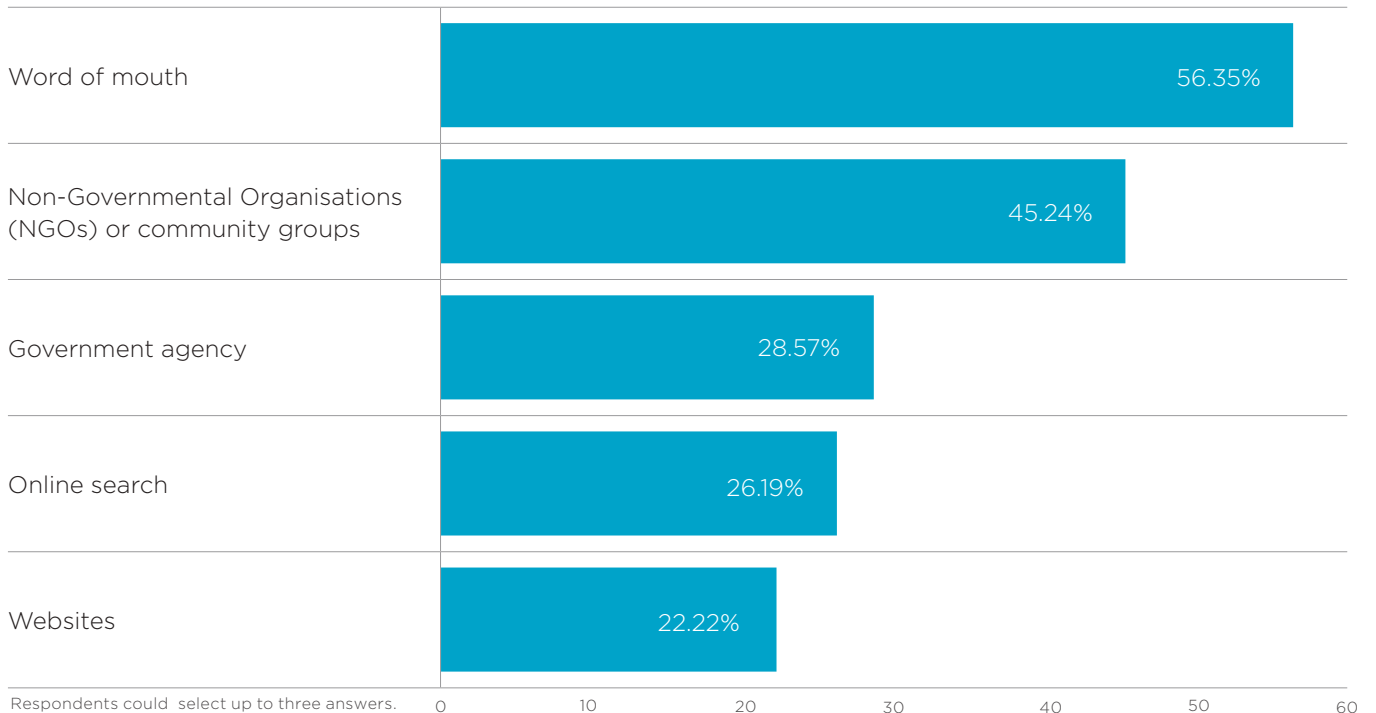
of respondents say their clients hear about their services through government agencies



14%

of respondents say their clients hear about their services through medical professionals

## How clients hear about community legal services



Other ways clients hear about community legal services include medical professionals (14.3%), posters or flyers (8.7%), members of parliaments, senators or councilors (3.97%), newspapers (3.2%), ombudsman (2.4%) and radio (0.79%).

# Phone and Internet Issues



**48%**  
of respondents hear from clients about phone or internet problems every week

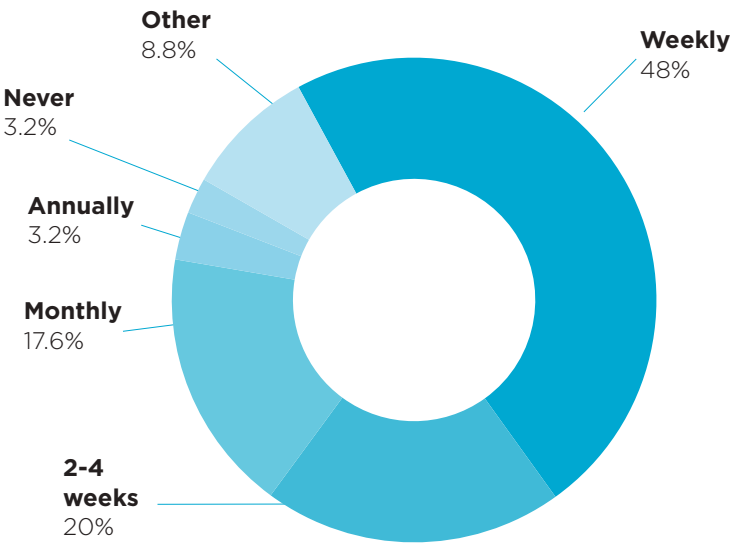


**20%**  
of respondents hear from clients about phone or internet problems every 2-4 weeks

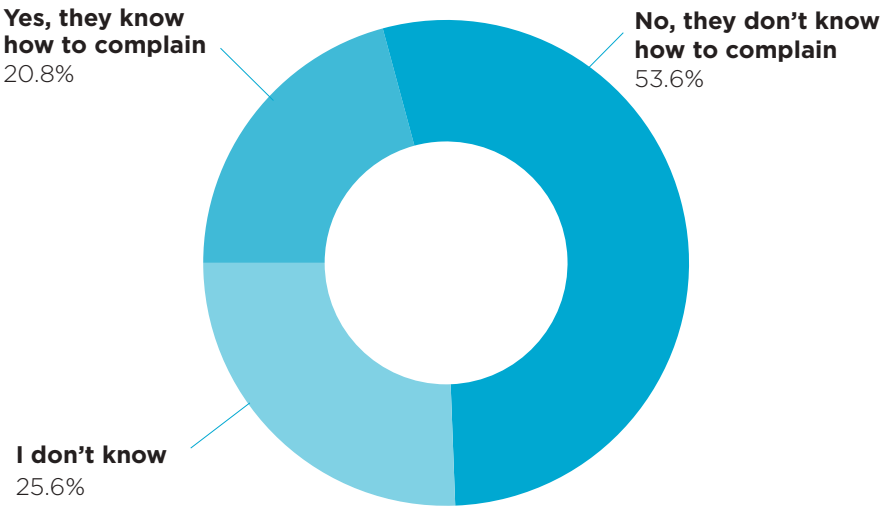


**54%**  
of respondents say their clients don't know how to complain about their phone or internet services

## Frequency of clients' phone or internet service problems



## Clients' understanding of how to complain





## **The most common phone or internet issues reported by clients**

- 1 Unable to pay for phone or internet service
- 2 Increasing debt
- 3 Legal action for debt recovery
- 4 Not enough money coming in to cover required spending
- 5 Misunderstanding their contract

Other issues include late bill payments and extensions, bad relationships with phone or internet providers, overselling, problems moving house and language or cultural barriers.

Respondents were asked to rank statements from a list of 10 choices.

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## **The most common reasons stopping clients from complaining about their phone or internet service**

- 1 People don't know they can complain
- 2 People don't know who to contact to complain
- 3 Lack of confidence
- 4 People don't understand their phone or internet contracts
- 5 Lack of knowledge

Other reasons include not understanding phone or internet bills, language and cultural barriers and repercussions from a phone or internet provider.

Respondents were asked to rank statements from a list of 10 choices.

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## Additional problems that arise from phone or internet issues

- 1 Debt
- 2 Mental health issues
- 3 Unemployment
- 4 Housing
- 5 Physical health

Other problems include loss or suspension of phone or internet services, relationship breakdown, family violence, poor credit rating, legal problems and poor financial management.

Respondents were asked to rank statements from a list of 10 choices.

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## Solutions identified to help avoid phone or internet problems

- 1 Tighter regulation of phone or internet services
- 2 A variety of payment plans
- 3 Financial education
- 4 Clear information from phone or internet providers
- 5 Restrictions on overselling

Other solutions include tighter regulation of credit, better IT skills, availability of consumer information, information delivered in a variety of languages and cultures, and regulation on phone or internet services advertising.

Respondents were asked to rank statements from a list of 10 choices.

# About Community Legal Centres in Queensland

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## About

Community Legal Centres Queensland provides support and advocacy for 33 independent, community-led community legal centres operating across Queensland.

Queensland's community legal centres provide free information, advice and referral, representation and casework, community education and advocacy for vulnerable clients and communities facing legal problems.

## Objectives

Community Legal Centres Queensland works towards the following objectives:

- to promote the development of community legal centres;
- to enhance communication and cooperation between community legal centres;
- to secure and develop funding for community legal centres;
- to represent the interests and opinions of members

## Services

Community Legal Centres Queensland is an incorporated association which operates through a small staff team along with the volunteered time and energy of Queensland Community Legal Centres workers to provide:

- representation for all members in relation to funding program and law reform issues;
- coordination of the state administration of the National Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme;
- member support services including the coordination of an annual state conference, training on relevant issues and regular bulletins about matters of interest to Community Legal Centres staff, volunteers and management committees;
- encouraging community participation to make the legal system more equitable and accessible; and encouraging community participation in the work and management of community legal centres.



# About the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

**The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman is a free and independent dispute resolution service for residential consumers and small businesses who have an unresolved complaint about their phone or internet service.**

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## The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman scheme

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman was established in 1993 under the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999 (the Act) and is a company limited by guarantee. The Act requires telecommunications service providers to be members of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and to comply with the decisions of the Ombudsman.

## Scope of service

Dispute resolution services include:

- Dealing with individual and systemic complaints
- Promoting fair and effective resolution of complaints
- Providing information and analysis to community, government and members

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman can help consumers and small businesses with:

- Contracts
- Bills
- Faults and services difficulties
- Disconnections
- Debt collection

If a consumer or small business has an unresolved complaint about these issues they should contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

If the individual is unable to call, a friend, family member or financial counselor can call on their behalf.

## How the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman records complaints

When recording complaints, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman collects information from residential consumers and small businesses.

The information collected includes:

- which service provider the complaint is about
- whether the complaint relates to a landline phone, mobile phone or internet service
- the complaint issues
- the postcode of the residential consumer or small business
- the resolution the residential consumer or small business is seeking

## The Telecommunications Industry Sector

The telecommunications industry regulators are the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) [www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au) and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au). Government and the regulators set policy and regulations for the telecommunications sector.

The Communications Alliance is the peak body for the Australian communications industry [www.commsalliance.com.au](http://www.commsalliance.com.au). The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation representing individuals, small businesses and not-for-profit groups as consumers of communications products and services [www.accan.org.au](http://www.accan.org.au).



# Making a complaint to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

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1

Residential consumers and small businesses should first try to resolve their complaint with their phone or internet provider.

2

If the complaint remains unresolved, the residential consumer or small business should contact the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman by visiting [www.tio.com.au](http://www.tio.com.au) or call 1800 062 058.

3

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman will determine whether it can deal with the complaint.

4

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman can work with the parties to resolve the complaint.

5

The Ombudsman has the power to decide the resolution of the complaint.



## CONTACT US

By phone **1800 062 058\***

Online **[www.tio.com.au](http://www.tio.com.au)**

By fax (free) **1800 630 614**

By post **PO Box 276 Collins St West VIC 8007**

If you need an interpreter, please contact us through the Translator and Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman's Privacy Policy explains how we collect, use and handle your personal information.

Ask us for a copy or find it at [www.tio.com.au/privacy](http://www.tio.com.au/privacy)\*  
Free from landlines.

If you are calling from a mobile, you can ask us to call you back.