

How to get a telephone



Background

Access to a telephone is especially important for people living in remote, isolated communities. The telephone allows people to use services, stay in touch with friends and family, and also to get help in an emergency.

Having said this, many people living in remote communities don't have access to a telephone. Figures provided by Telstra to a *Study into Telecommunications in Remote Indigenous Communities* estimates that only one in ten people in Indigenous communities subscribe to a fixed service, compared with five in ten persons in Australia as a whole.

Public payphones are a very popular way of accessing the telephone. However, Telstra generally only provides public payphones to communities that have 20 adults or more. This means that many small communities, such as outstations and homelands, cannot get a public payphone. For these communities, the options are a home telephone or a privately operated payphone. If a private payphone service is considered, then customers have a choice of payphone terminals and what tariff they charge users.

This BushTech explains how people can get a home telephone service connected under the Commonwealth Government's Universal Service Obligation (USO). It also outlines the various costs involved in getting a telephone connected. The Universal Service Obligation (USO) ensures that everyone in Australia can have access to telephone services (public or household) wherever they live. Telstra is the primary service provider of services under the USO.

Whose house, whose phone?

Public payphones are located in places that are accessible to anyone. However, Telstra will install a home telephone service in someone's house. If a home phone is to be shared with people who do not live in the house, then community members will need

to discuss how these people will be able to access the phone, and how they will help pay the bills!

An application for the telephone service is usually made by the person, or family, who has the house where the telephone is to be installed. These people will receive the bills.

Sometimes the telephone service can be in the name of a community organisation. The bills would be received by the administrator.

How much will it cost?

There is no simple answer to this question. The actual cost of getting the telephone connected will be different for each community.

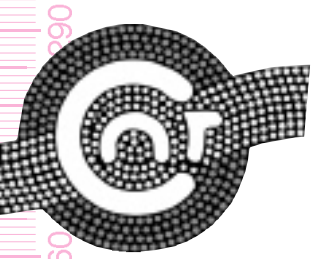
There are a number of items that householders or communities may be expected to pay:

Network Extension Fee

Some remote communities don't have any telephone infrastructure installed (cable or radio towers, etc.). In these situations, Telstra needs to install extra equipment to extend the reach of its network to the community. In such cases, Telstra may charge a Network Extension Fee. This charge is capped to a maximum of \$1,540. Most remote communities that don't have an existing telephone service will need to pay the Network Extension Fee. There may be cases where communities that are close to an existing service will pay a lower Network Extension Fee.

Trenching Costs

Telstra lays an underground cable to connect the house to the telephone network. For many remote communities this cable will run from the house to a nearby radio tower. The householder or community needs to organise and pay the costs of having a trench dug. Members of the community or a local CDEP crew can



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carry out this work as long as it meets Telstra standards. Alternatively the community can negotiate a price for trenching with the contractor who lays the cable.

Standard Connection Fee

This is a fee for connecting the house to the telephone network and all customers pay it. This fee is set at \$209 but there is a discount for eligible pensioners (\$135.30).

Handset Rental Fee

A rental fee of \$2.75 per month is charged for use of a telephone handset. The initial cost for a standard Telstra telephone handset is \$30.80. A wall mounting kit costs \$10.12. Delivery charges are added.

Paying the telephone bill

CAT has heard many stories of people getting huge telephone bills and eventually having the telephone disconnected because they simply couldn't pay the bill. This is perhaps the biggest problem experienced by people who have a telephone.

There are different ways to organise the costs, so it is best to contact Telstra on 1800 688 437 to discuss what would suit you best. For example, the most popular service, HomeLine Complete, costs \$21.90 each month. This fee covers rental of the telephone line. Extra features, such as Message Bank, will cost extra.

In addition, there is the cost of the calls made. A local call on a HomeLine Complete service will cost 22c. Charges for calls outside the local area are more expensive and the longer you talk the more you pay.

Accepting "reverse charge" calls also increases your telephone bill. A customer can request reverse charge barring, which stops reverse charge calls.

There are several options to help control the cost of calls:

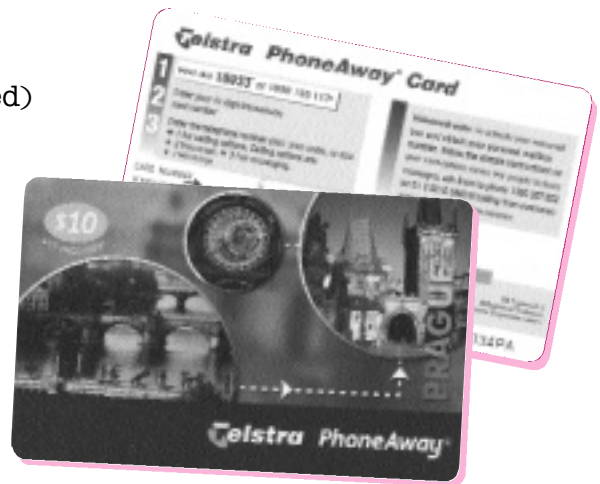
Local calls only – You can have your telephone set up so you can only make local calls. You will be able to receive calls from anywhere. This service costs an extra \$3.30 each month.

Prepayment Options – There are several pre-payment options available for household telephones, including PhoneAway and Communic8. All your calls are pre-paid through the purchase of special telephone cards. Once the credit on the card runs out, you can't make any more calls. Communities will need to check that the cards can be sold through a store, Resource Centre or Council Office.

Making an application

An application can be made by calling Telstra on 1800 688 437. Telstra staff will ask you questions over the telephone.

- 1. Credit Assessment** – The name and date of birth of each person applying for the service. They also will ask for a driver's licence number or pension number. Where an application is made by a community organisation, the administrator's details will be required.
- 2. Address Details** – Telstra needs to know exactly where the telephone service is to be installed. If you can't provide an actual address then you can help by letting Telstra know the location and telephone number of the nearest service. You could also provide a mud map showing where the community is.
- 3. Reliable Contact Number** – Telstra needs a reliable contact person and telephone number so they can get messages to the community when they are organising getting the telephone service installed. This could be a resource agency or community council office.



- 4. Has trenching been organised?** (see Trenching Costs above)
- 5. Who will be paying the bills?** – If the charges are to be paid by someone else, then the person applying for the telephone service will need to give written consent.
- 6. Mailing address** – This would be the address where the bills are to be sent.
- 7. Other** – Telstra staff will also ask questions about the ownership of land where the telephone is to be installed, what type of building it is to be in and the power supply available.

A short time after this, Telstra will contact the community to organise getting a telephone installed. Where no infrastructure exists to provide a permanent service, an 'interim' telephone service generally will be offered. If accepted, an interim service will be provided within four to six weeks of the application being made. In many cases the interim service will be a satellite telephone, but you shouldn't have to pay higher call costs just because the interim service is a satellite telephone.

After an interim service has been installed, the Connection Fee, Handset Rental and any Network Extension Fee are billed to the first account for the service. Once an interim service is installed you can choose to take up any Call Control options or to switch the telephone to a pre-payment scheme such as *Communic8*.

A permanent service is guaranteed within six months of the application being made. The permanent service might be provided by cable, microwave or even satellite telephone. Telstra makes the decision about how the permanent service is provided.

When you apply for a service, it is importance to write down and keep the Telstra reference (order) number. If you want to talk about the service, call Telstra again and give this number.

Recent Developments

- PY Com, based in the Anangu Pitjiti tjantjara Lands, has received Networking the Nation funding for iConnect, a program that will lower the cost of getting the telephone connected and help people to control their costs. iConnect will operate in South Australia, the southern portion of the Northern Territory and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia.
- Cape York Digital Network has secured funding through Networking the Nation to subsidise the installation and network extension changes for outstation communities in Cape York.
- The Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) will soon implement a strategy aimed at making it easier for Indigenous people in remote communities to access telephone services.

For more information

Call Telstra on 1800 688 437.

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