

FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

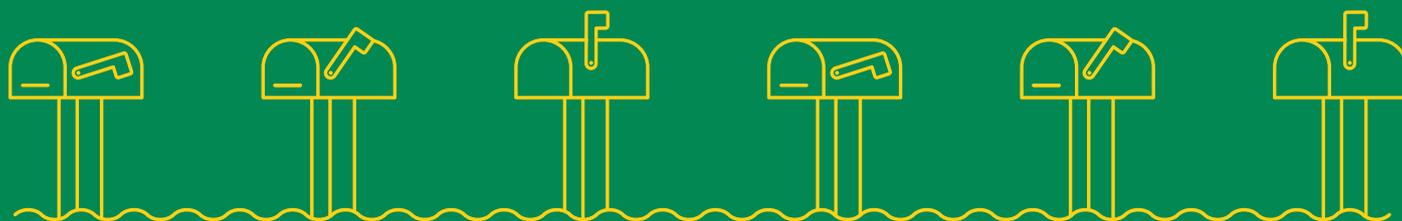
THE KEEP ME POSTED CAMPAIGN IS A MOVEMENT ACROSS AUSTRALIA FIGHTING FOR THE CONSUMER'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE HOW THEY ARE CONTACTED BY BUSINESSES. THEY ARE CALLING FOR AN END TO FEES FOR PAPER STATEMENTS AND LOOKING FOR EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL.

A people's choice movement has been gaining momentum in Australia and around the world as businesses such as banks, telcos and energy providers apply pressure to move their customers online, often without consent and sometimes without their knowledge.

Those wanting to hang on to their paper correspondence may be charged a fee for receiving a hard copy of their bill or statement, something that has previously been provided free. With companies charging their customers \$1.69 to \$2.50 per statement or bill, many are left asking the question, "wait a minute, isn't billing customers simply a cost of doing business?"

These excessive charges are usually beyond the actual cost of printing and postage, estimated to be \$0.88 per item in Australia for businesses who enjoy reduced postage rates and cheaper printing because of buying power.

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THE PAPERLESS PROBLEM

The Keep Me Posted campaign advocates every Australian's right to choose, free of charge, how they are contacted by businesses, especially for the members of the community who are disadvantaged by lack of choice because of their personal situation. Often, the most vulnerable members of society are those most dependent on traditional mail with access to the internet falling to just 57% for households with an income less than \$40,000. Older Australians are likely to be left behind as well, with only 51% of those over 65 using the internet. People who are disabled, in a low-income household or dependent on a parenting payment, an age pension, disability support pension or a Newstart allowance, are twice to almost five times more likely to not have internet at home than the national average. Further, indigenous households in Central Australia are 76% less likely to have internet access than non-indigenous metropolitan households.

"With 1.3 million households not having internet access at home, this adds up to around 3 million Australians without equal access to information," commented Ged Kearney, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions at the campaign launch earlier this year.

The campaign launch also received the support of many MPs including Independent Senator Nick Xenophon who commented, "the fact that there are millions of Australians who live in households without internet access is a big issue. Why should these people, particularly senior citizens, be impacted in this way? It really does seem to be quite discriminatory and counterproductive."

A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

The campaign is part of an international movement with consumer groups lobbying against the practice. Since 2013, countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Finland, Ireland, Belgium, Canada and several American States have changed their legislation to protect consumers from charges for billing or statement information, making this practice illegal.

Most recently, the Dutch national Ombudsman strongly opposed paper statement charges. With 50,000 citizens (less than 1% of the population) not having access to the internet, he deemed the transition from paper statements to digital intolerable and unfair to these parts of the population. Comparatively in Australia, 13% of Australians do not have access to the internet, yet this practice by companies continues unchallenged by government.

There are clear signs that this global issue will not be tolerated by those who believe in equality, fairness and the consumer's right to choose. Keep Me Posted is calling for Australia to rise to the occasion.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE
KEEP ME POSTED CAMPAIGN, GO TO
WWW.KEEPMEPOSTED.ORG.AU