

No more 'pay'phones as Telstra makes calls free

Telstra has announced that all Australians can now make calls right across the country for free on its network of more than 15,000 payphones.

In the past year, about 11 million calls were made across Australia from Telstra payphones.

This included more than 230,000 calls to critical services like '000' and Lifeline, proving a crucial service for some of the country's most vulnerable people and communities, especially those in regional and remote areas.

Telstra CEO Andrew Penn said this decision meant everyone could now use payphones to make a free local or national call to a standard fixed line or a call to an Australian mobile, when they needed to.

"They are an iconic and critical part of our community, and for many Australians, the availability of a payphone is a vital lifeline, especially for those vulnerable including the homeless, people who are isolated or someone escaping an unsafe situation," he said.

"During Covid-related lockdowns, we've seen domestic and family violence agencies report a 60 per cent rise in new clients seeking help for the first time, and an increase in abusive behaviours overall.

"It's not always easy for people in these situations to use a home phone or their mobile to get help, so I hope making payphone



The most used Telstra payphone in Victoria is located on King St, Dandenong. 246265

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

calls free might play a small part in helping them get the assistance they need."

Previously, payphones have been made free for communities hit by natural disasters.

Mr Penn said Telstra had also made domestic calls free across nearly 600 payphones in remote Indigenous communities last year.

The initiative also builds on Telstra's five-year program providing free national calls on its payphones during the Christmas and New Year period, which it works closely on with the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army's Major Brendan Nottle welcomed Telstra's news, saying: "This is

an absolute game changer for many of the people we work with across the nation. The reality is this piece of infrastructure is absolutely critical because a lot of Australians either don't have a mobile phone, lose it or the phone's charger, or simply run out of credit.

"Connection is absolutely vital for every human being, but particularly for those who are vulnerable. It's really important for them to break down that sense of social poverty, social isolation, and to connect with a friend or with support services."

There are more than 2,800 payphones across Victoria. The most used Telstra payphone in Victoria is located on King St, Dandenong opposite the entrance to the Dandenong Market.

Standard national calls and SMS from Telstra payphones will be free from Tuesday 3 August.

International and calls to premium and satellite numbers will still incur a cost, while Telstra Air remains free to eligible Telstra customers.

Payphones will also become coinless from 1 October 2021 with Telstra Phonecards recommended for dialling international and premium numbers.

To find your nearest payphone, visit <http://envinsaonline.mapinfo.com.au/ppol/>