

Consumer guide when retail services are suspended or disconnected by a wholesaler



This guide sets out some practical steps you can take to minimise loss and inconvenience when your services are suspended or disconnected because a wholesaler has taken action.

Your contract for telecommunications services is with a retailer. Most retailers buy their services from wholesalers. If there is a dispute between a retailer and a wholesaler, the wholesaler may suspend or disconnect the services it supplies to the retailer.

When does a wholesaler suspend or disconnect services?

While uncommon, wholesalers sometimes stop supplying services to retailers, which affects the retailers' customers. Typical reasons are:

- A billing or contract dispute between the wholesaler and the retailer
- A retailer goes into administration, receivership or liquidation

Sometimes a wholesaler will give advance notice that it will stop supplying services, but often the customer only finds out the wholesaler has acted after the customer has already lost their services.

What is the effect of having a service suspended or disconnected?

If your service is **suspended**, you won't be able to make or receive calls. You won't be able to transfer your service to another provider until the suspension is lifted.

If a service is **disconnected**, you won't be able to use or transfer the service. Your number will be given back to the provider that originally held it. This may not be your retailer. The number will be taken out of circulation for a minimum period of six months. The number needs to be retrieved before you can transfer it to another provider.

What to do if you receive notice of suspension or disconnection

If you get notice that a wholesaler is going to suspend or disconnect your service, or notice your retailer is stopping trading, you need to act quickly. Contact the retailer and ask if it can help. Ask what options there are available so that you don't lose your service, or your number.

Remember that if your phone service is disconnected in these circumstances, you are likely to lose your number. It is not possible to transfer a number that is not connected.

What to do if your retailer can't help

If you can't contact your retailer, or your retailer can't help, you need to take steps to protect your service and number.

You can consider the following steps:

- Find a new retailer and transfer your services before they are disconnected
- If your services are already disconnected, get services with a new retailer and ask it to help you retrieve your number
- Buy pre-paid SIM cards for mobiles while you look for a provider
- Buy pre-paid internet dongles, or portable wi-fi
- If you are running a business:
 - Update your website with the new contact details
 - Talk to your financial services provider about mobile EFTPOS solutions, if you need to process payments electronically

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If you want to claim for compensation

If you want us to consider a claim for compensation for financial loss, you must keep detailed records of your situation. We will need this information to assess your claim. However, we can only consider a claim against a retailer that is continuing to trade. If the retailer has gone into liquidation or stopped trading, there is nothing we can do. We won't consider a claim against a wholesaler.

You need to give us:

- Detailed records of contact with the provider, who you spoke to, and what you spoke about
- Emails from customers or business partners about difficulty contacting you
- A diary of issues as they arise
- Evidence of what steps you took to minimise the effect on your business
- Evidence of financial loss

The role of the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman

The Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman handles complaints made by consumers about their retailer.

We can assist with complaints about retailers from consumers whose services are not working, or who have lost numbers. In some cases, we can deal with receivers, administrators or liquidators of retailers who have stopped trading, but this is not common. We can't resolve disputes between wholesalers and retailers.

Our [Terms of Reference](#) say what types of complaints we can and can't handle.

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman contact details

- Make a complaint online at <https://www.tioonline.com.au/consumers/new/>
- Phone: 1800 062 058
- Email: tio@tio.com.au
- Post: PO Box 276, Collins Street West, VIC 8007
- Fax: 1800 630 614

Web links

Australian Communications and Media Authority factsheet on telephone numbers:

<https://www.acma.gov.au/Citizen/Phones/Numbers/Keeping-your-number/telephone-numbers-and-number-portability-your-rights>

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman factsheet on compensation claims for loss of business:

<https://www.tio.com.au/publications/factsheets-and-brochures/factsheet-compensation>

Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman Terms of Reference:

<https://www.tio.com.au/about-us/terms-of-reference-and-company-constitution>