

How we can help with complaints about billing

Guidance Document

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Who is this document for?

This document is for anyone who wants to understand how the TIO approaches complaints about billing. It's designed to help consumers, representatives, and members of the scheme understand our work process and our expectations.

Whether you're making a complaint or responding to one, this guide explains how we work towards fair and consistent outcomes.

1. Common types of billing complaints

The following is a list of common billing complaints we can help with. This list does not cover all complaints, and we encourage parties to contact us to find out if we can help with the complaint or concern.



1.1 Cancellation charges

- Early termination charges when consumers cancel services
- Ongoing charges after consumers cancel services
- Charges for devices after a consumer cancel services



1.2 Unclear bills

- Charges are not listed or explained
- Charges consumers do not understand
- Receiving tax invoices received instead of bills



1.3 Refunds for services not delivered

- Consumers ask for refunds for services that don't work
- Consumers ask for refunds for interrupted services
- Consumers ask for refunds when providers delay connections



1.4 Overcharging

- Providers charge consumers more than the agreed amount
- Regular discounts drop off
- Providers continue charging after consumers cancel

2. How we handle billing complaints

When handling billing complaints, we uphold fair procedures and practices in all aspects of our work. We engage with all parties in a clear, independent and transparent way. We seek to build trust and collaboration through our engagement with all parties.

We use common approaches that help resolve complaints to do this. The following examples show how we may resolve cases. The examples are guides only. What is fair and reasonable depends on the individual circumstances of each complaint.

2.1 Disputed cancellation charges

Sometimes people cancel their services because they say the services are unreliable. They may be surprised by high cancellation fees or early termination costs. These costs could be for things like mobile phones or equipment they bought as part of their plan. If they were paying for these over 24 or 36 months as part of a contract, suddenly being informed that they need to pay a large amount all at once can be difficult. Some people also complain that they cancelled their service, but their provider kept charging them.

Unexpected high bills

We expect providers to understand the impact of unexpected high bills on peoples' lives. We expect providers to explain the reasons for high bills. If they can verify unexpected high charges, we expect providers to offer consumers suitable payment plans or waive some charges where consumers are experiencing financial hardship or vulnerability.

Why people cancel

Common reasons for cancelling services are poor mobile reception at home or changes in their needs. Understanding these reasons helps us assess what a fair outcome may be and what solutions might work.

What did they agree to?

We check what consumers and providers agreed to. With mobile phones, for example, people often agree to pay for them over a long period, such as 24 or 36 months. This is usually explained in contracts or Critical Information Summaries. These agreements might be signed in-store, made over the phone, or agreed to in an online chat.

Once we know what they agreed to, we ask both sides to consider fair ways to solve the problem of providers charging for services consumers have cancelled.

Clear Communication

We expect providers to discuss the possible implications of cancelling services with consumers before cancellation, so they can make informed decisions. This includes the possibility they will still need to pay the balance for any outstanding equipment.

Solutions

If providers have not explained what happens when consumers cancel, we ask them to. If providers cannot supply the agreed services, we may ask them to let consumers keep paying for phones over the original period of the contract (for example, 24 months).

If providers can supply the agreed services, we may ask consumers how they would like to pay for phones. Often, providers accept the payment plans consumers suggest and they agree on an outcome.

If consumers and providers cannot agree, we may ask for more information. This helps us decide how to resolve the complaint in a Fair and Reasonable Assessment.

Case study: Megaphone told Ailin she had to pay the full cost of her phone after cancelling her mobile service

Ailin, a student, signed up for a mobile service and a new Gold Phone over 24 months with Megaphone at its city store. When she got home, she found the coverage was poor and she couldn't hotspot her laptop. The next day, coverage was also poor at the TAFE where she studied. Ailin told Megaphone the service did not work for her, like they said it would in the store. Megaphone said if she cancelled, she would have to pay the \$1,499 cost of her Gold Phone.

Ailin complained to us, saying she could not afford to buy the phone outright and the mobile service didn't work. We asked Megaphone for an accurate coverage map of its mobile network and account notes showing what Megaphone told her in the store. The parties could not agree how to resolve the complaint, so we investigated the matter fully.

We found Megaphone's mobile network performed badly at Ailin's home and TAFE. In the store, Megaphone had not shown Ailin the coverage map. We decided Megaphone should let Ailin pay for the Gold Phone over 24 months at the agreed rate or return the Gold Phone.

If providers cannot supply agreed services, we can direct them to uphold other parts of agreements or let consumers return goods.

2.2 Unclear bills

Sometimes people cannot understand the bills providers send them. This might include charges that are not listed, and charges consumers do not understand. Consumers may also complain about providers sending them tax invoices instead of bills with listed charges.

Bills must be easy to read and accurate

We expect providers to send bills that clearly list the goods and services they use. We expect the bills to clearly show discounts, credits, payments, due dates and any variable charges. We also expect providers to provide bills that are accurate.

What did they agree to?

We check what consumers and providers agreed to. This is usually explained in documents like contracts or Critical Information Summaries. These agreements might be signed in-store, made over the phone, or agreed to in an online chat.

Do bills match agreements?

We compare agreements and bills. If we find differences between agreements and charges, we ask providers to explain and verify them.

In handling these complaints, if we find duplicate bills or system errors, we ask providers to investigate the problems and fix them.

Solutions

If providers charge consumers for something they do not list clearly on bills but agreed to, we may ask providers to refund unlisted charges and list them clearly in future.

If consumers did not agree to unlisted charges, we may ask providers to explain their mistakes, apologise and refund past charges. For example, if a consumer thought a service, like Netflix, was free forever but didn't want it if they had to pay.

If consumers do not understand charges, we may ask providers to explain them to consumers and refund past charges. If consumers accept the charges, we ask providers to list them clearly in future.

If consumers did not agree to charges and don't want the goods or services, we may ask providers to apologise, explain their mistakes, refund past charges and stop charging in future.

Where consumers and providers do not agree on an outcome, we may ask for more information or decide how to resolve the complaint in a Fair and Reasonable Assessment.

Case study: Zed signs up with TellAll, pays by direct debit, but doesn't get a bill

Zed signed up for an NBN internet service with TellAll and agreed to pay \$99 per month by direct debit. A month later, TellAll sent him a tax receipt instead of a bill. Zed asked the TellAll app why he didn't get a bill. The answer was 'We don't send bills for accounts paid by direct debit, only receipts.' He later spoke to a human at TellAll, who said the same thing. Zed was confused.

He thought companies had to send bills, regardless of how you pay. He complained to us. Zed wanted TellAll to send him bills every month and not receipts.

We think good industry practice is for providers to send bills to all consumers, unless they use prepaid services. This does not depend on payment methods. We shared this expectation with TellAll, which said its billing system could only send receipts to people using services they pay for by direct debit. We suggested it add bill functionality to its system.

TellAll agreed, updated its system and sent Zed bills every month. This shows how we can improve industry practice and add value to providers and their customers.

3. Laws, Codes and relevant information

The laws, codes and relevant information below are what we will consider in complaints involving billing.

- [Australian Consumer Law](#)
- The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's [Contracts](#) page.
- [Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code 2019](#)
- [Telecommunications Act 1997](#).

TIO Good Industry Practice

Our Good Industry Practice Guide for Billing sets out what we think is good industry practice for complaints about billing. We expect providers to send all consumers bills that are easy to read and clearly show the cost of the goods and services both parties agreed to.

The Good Industry Practice Guide for Billing sets out our expectations of providers under these headings:

- Easy to understand and accurate bills
- Payment options
- Disputed charges
- Undisputed charges
- Delayed bills
- Unexpected high bills
- When consumers cancel mobile services.

Please see the [Good Industry Practice Guide for Billing](#).