



PRIORITY ASSISTANCE FOR LIFE THREATENING MEDICAL CONDITIONS GUIDELINE (DR G609:2017)

PUBLIC COMMENT DRAFT

Introductory Statement

Proposal for the Deregistration and Replacement of C609:2007 Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions Industry Code

This is the Introductory Statement for the DR G609:2017 **Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions** Industry Guideline.

This Introductory Statement outlines the background of Priority Assistance and Industry's intent to deregister the existing **Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions** Industry Code and replace it with the G609:2017 **Priority Assistance for Life Threatening Medical Conditions** Industry Guideline.

The provision of Priority Assistance is a condition imposed onto Telstra as part of its Carrier Licence. It means that Telstra residential customers with a diagnosed life-threatening medical condition (based on eligibility criteria) or a person living in their home, can register as a priority customer in relation to requests for service connection or rectification of a fault of their fixed voice service. The provision of Priority Assistance is not a licence condition for other carriers.

The person for whom Priority Assistance is being sought must have a "condition where there is a substantially increased risk of a life-threatening emergency with a significantly increased possibility of a rapid deterioration in the patient's condition, to the point that they may die; and where prompt attendance by an ambulance, or prompt provision of telephone advice by a doctor or health professional could avert the death."¹

Persons wishing to register for Priority Assistance must provide medical certification (e.g. by a medical practitioner or authorised person specified by Telstra) or, in some circumstances, alternative certification (e.g. a statutory declaration).

Generally speaking, for priority customers, Telstra must try to:

- connect a new phone or fix faults within 24 or 48 hours, or provide an interim service;
- provide a reliable service by investigating faults quickly, especially if there have been two or more reported faults in a three-month period;

¹ <https://www.telstra.com.au/content/dam/tcom/personal/consumer-advice/pdf/priority-assist-medical-practitioners.pdf>

- tell people the priority service is available so they and their doctors know about it;
- make it easy for people to use the priority service; and
- provide specialised credit management processes if needed.

In an attempt to have an equivalent service in place with other service providers, the Priority Assistance Code was developed as an Industry Code in 2003. The Industry Code replicated the key points of the Telstra Licence Conditions, to offer similar arrangements if they meet the minimum requirements for connection, fault rectification, reliability of residential standard telephone services, provision of interim services and wholesale arrangements.

However, since its creation in 2003, not a single service provider has offered an equivalent service. Whilst some suppliers may have had some arrangements that seek to assist customers with a life-threatening medical condition, none has been the equivalent of the obligations set out in the Priority Assistance Code, as the Code places too many rigid and onerous conditions on both the qualification for such a service and strict arrangements for how and when a solution is implemented.

It would appear that the Code has had the effect of discouraging equivalent type services from other service providers, thus depriving the community of alternate Priority Assistance services and broadening their availability.

The intent of changing the Industry Code to an Industry Guideline is to remove the compulsory elements of the Code whilst also giving service providers guidance on what might be offered. This would allow service providers greater flexibility to craft and provide solutions for their customers without the risk of breaching regulatory compliance under a mandated approach.

Allowing service providers to offer Priority Assistance services based on a common set of guidelines is expected to give scope for more service providers to provide Priority Assistance type services. This in turn is expected to benefit the community by allowing service providers to retain customers that might otherwise need to move to Telstra to receive the benefit of a Priority Assistance service.

WC69 – Priority Assistance Working Committee

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