

[Media release](#) from Croakey Health Media: 18 December 2019

Where is the vision for sustainable public interest journalism?

The Australian Government has missed a critical opportunity to support public interest journalism at a time when the sector is in crisis, according to [Croakey Health Media](#), a non-profit, public interest journalism organisation.

Mrs Janine Mohamed, the chair of Croakey Health Media, said [the ACCC inquiry](#) into digital platforms had made important policy recommendations, aimed at improving the viability of Australia's public interest journalism sector, after documenting the crisis in public interest journalism in Australia.

Mrs Mohamed said it was a disappointment for democracy that [the Government's response](#) to the report, released on 12 December, largely ignored these recommendations.

"At Croakey Health Media, we are especially disappointed by the Government's failure to enact the recommendation to enable deductible gift recipient or DGR status for non-profit journalism organisations undertaking public interest journalism," Mrs Mohamed said.

"This is a simple, relatively low-cost initiative that could make a real difference to the capacity of non-profit journalism organisations to meet the needs of communities, especially those who are currently under-served by public interest journalism, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"The ACC report noted that philanthropically-funded and not-for-profit journalism could perform a more significant role in addressing the under-provision of public interest journalism in Australia, as has happened in other countries."

Mrs Mohamed said the ACCC report had laid out in great detail the impact of the digital platforms on the media industry, as reflected by the significant job losses in journalism and the closure of many media outlets.

Extracts from the ACCC report:

- Census data shows that from 2006 to 2016, the number of Australians in journalism-related occupations fell by nine percent overall, and by 26 percent for traditional print journalists (including those journalists working for print/online news media businesses).
- Data provided by the main media companies show the number of journalists in traditional print media businesses fell by 20 percent from 2014 to 2018. This is at a time when Australia's population and economy were growing strongly.
- Highlighting significant issues for rural health, data collected by the ACCC show that between 2008 and 2018, 106 local and regional newspaper titles closed across Australia, representing a net 15 percent decrease in the number of these publications.

- These closures have left 21 local government areas previously covered by these titles without coverage from a single local newspaper (in either print or online formats), including 16 local government areas in regional Australia.
- The ACCC also carried out a quantitative assessment of print articles published in all metropolitan and national daily newspapers by the three largest Australian news publisher groups, and found a significant fall in the number of articles published covering local government, local court, health and science issues during the past 15 years. The publications published 30 percent fewer articles on health issues in 2018 than at the peak of health reporting in 2004 (a drop from around 21,600 articles a year to around 13,300 articles a year).

Mrs Mohamed said she echoed the concerns raised in [a media statement](#) by the Public Interest Journalism Initiative that “now is the time to act”.

The PIJI chair, Professor Allan Fels, said in the [PIJI media statement](#) that public interest journalism is “dying before our eyes”, particularly in rural, regional and suburban areas.

PIJI research [found that](#) 68 percent of metropolitan suburbs and 45 percent of regional areas have already experienced a very sharp decline in journalism.

Mrs Mohamed said: “Public interest journalism is critical for ensuring that we have informed and engaged communities, as well as accountability for our institutions and powerbrokers.”

“I encourage the health sector and MPs across all parties to engage in advocating on this important issue for the future of our democracy, and for healthy policy.”

Background information

- The PIJI statement: <https://mailchi.mp/bed703f764b9/media-release-professor-allan-fels-ao-appointed-piji-chair-3971313>
- The MEAA statement: <https://www.meaa.org/mediaroom/government-gives-up-on-tackling-google-and-facebook/>
- An ACCC statement on the Government’s response: <https://www.accc.gov.au/media-release/accc-welcomes-comprehensive-response-to-digital-platforms-inquiry>
- The Government’s response to ACCC report: <http://www.treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/Government-Response-p2019-41708.pdf>
- Croakey’s previous coverage of the ACCC report: <https://croakey.org/health-sector-urged-to-engage-with-calls-for-regulatory-crackdown-on-powerful-digital-platforms/>

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