Bridging the connectivity gap: an in-depth look at Australiaâ??s Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO)

Description

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The Federal Governmentâ??s announcement of the *Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO)* on 25 February 2025, is a staging point in the countryâ??s approach to nationwide mobile coverage.

As per the announcement, UOMO will ensure up to 5 million square kilometres of new competitive outdoor mobile coverage across Australia, including over 37,000 kilometres on regional roads. Noting that the implementation of UOMO is still under development and will initially focus on SMS messages, with a rollout of voice and data to follow in the coming years. There is no current delivery timeframe in place for the rollout of UOMO technologies.

This announcement leverages advances in *Low Earth Orbit Satellites (LEOSats)* and *Direct to Handset (DTH)* technology and intends to provide coverage to 100% of the country, though you need to be able to see the sky and there may be certain areas of Australia that this technology will not be available, such as radio quiet zones in Western Australia and some Remote Offshore Territories and Islands. Despite some limitations, this technology is primed to reach areas previously considered too remote or too costly to connect with ground-based mobile towers.â?•

DTH technology is potentially game-changing for people across rural, regional and remote Australia as it will:

- expand Triple Zero access for Australians across the nation
- expand outdoor voice and SMS coverage into existing mobile black spots, and
- improve the availability of mobile signals during disasters and power outages, which often disproportionately affect rural and regional Australia.

What is the Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO)

Like the legislated Universal Service Guarantee and Universal Service Obligation for home phone and internet, the UOMO will require telecommunication companies to provide universal mobile phone voice, data and SMS messaging outdoors to all Australianâ??s regardless of their location. This would use a combination of terrestrial infrastructure and satellite DTH constellations (e.g. Starlink).

What is Direct to Handset?

Direct to Handset technology (also referred to as Direct to Mobile, D2H or Direct to Device) will enable your standard mobile phone to connect directly to satellites, providing coverage even in the most remote areas. This technology will ensure you can stay connected without relying solely on traditional ground-based phone towers.

As of February 2025, DTH technology is not available in Australia. Currently, only emergency text messaging is supported on certain Apple iPhone models. SMS messaging and voice calls through this technology are still under development and are expected to become available in the future.

State of play in the UOMO market

Australian telecommunication providers have already progressed agreements to deliver this technology. A summary of those agreements follows:

- *Telstra:* Signed a collaboration agreement with SpaceXâ??s Starlink to further refine the DTH product. No product release date is currently available. Also signed â??no binding agreementsâ?• with Lynk Global & AST SpaceMobile for use of their constellations in 2023.
- *Optus:* Signed a collaboration agreement with SpaceXâ??s Starlink in 2023.
- *TPG/iiNet:* TPG Telecom signed a non-exclusive deal with Lynk Global in 2024, initial text message trials aim to start in 2025.

What does UOMO mean for regional and remote communities?

This new technology will be a significant step toward greater mobile access for rural Australians and has the potential to safeguard lives and support rural businesses by eliminating dangerous connectivity gaps.

It is important to note though, that this technology will not replace the terrestrial mobile network but will be a welcome addition to the technology mix available to people across rural, regional and remote areas. The full implementation of SMS messaging, voice and data via LeoSats is potentially years away. It is expected that SMS messaging will be the first service offered.

Technology driving change

The success of UOMO hinges on advancements in satellite communications. Companies like *Starlink*, *Lynk Global and AST SpaceMobile* have rapidly expanded fleets of LEOSats capable of beaming signals directly to compatible smartphones.

This approach is not without precedent. In the United States, *T-Mobile* partnered with *SpaceX* to deliver similar services, especially during critical situations like the Los Angeles wildfires, where traditional ground-based networks were compromised.

However, it is essential to note the distinction between UOMOâ??s capabilities and existing â??satellite SOSâ?• services offered by companies like Apple. While â??satellite SOSâ?• provides emergency-only access when a call fails to connect via terrestrial towers, the vision for UOMO is to deliver continuous outdoor voice and SMS availability.

Challenges and considerations

While UOMO represents a significant step forward, some challenges remain. Not all mobile devices currently support DTH technology, though the government plans to work with the *University of Technology, Sydney* to expand handset compatibility testing. Additionally, stakeholders have emphasised the importance of maintaining and growing traditional terrestrial networks alongside satellite-based solutions to ensure comprehensive and reliable connectivity.

Looking ahead

Legislation to support UOMO is expected to be introduced in 2025, with the full rollout planned by late 2027. However, many Australians are likely to benefit from expanded coverage before then. The Australian Governmentâ??s broader vision aims to make Australia the most connected continent by 2030, with UOMO a cornerstone of this ambition.

For regional individuals, businesses and communities, the promise of expanded mobile coverage is not just about convenienceâ??itâ??s about safety, economic growth, and ensuring no Australian is left behind due to geography.

To find out more view the Minister for Communications, the Hon. Michelle Rowlandâ??s media release. You can also visit our Direct to Handset information page.

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1. Blogs
2. Resources

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