

Ageing + Communication + Technologies (ACT) of Concordia University joins the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) in its decision to boycott the CRTC's "Internet Code" proceeding.

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MONTREAL, QC – On November 23, 2018 the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) announced it will not participate in the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) proceeding on the elaboration of an *Internet Code* meant to address increasing complaints from Canadians about telecommunication providers. Our research organization, Ageing + Communication + Technologies (ACT), supports PIAC in this decision and will also boycott the CRTC's Proceeding to establish a mandatory code for Internet services: CRTC 2018-422.

The problem: Short deadline and inadequate information

The CRTC issued its call for comments (CRTC 2018-422) on November 9, 2018. On November 10, 2018, PIAC wrote a letter to the CRTC requesting revisions to the proceeding, including a request for an extension of the timeline set out by the CRTC. In the letter, PIAC states that an extension of the proceeding's timeline would allow it to "develop a public interest position and consult the public." PIAC also pointed out that the CRTC's current timeline prevents organizations from reviewing the CRTC's upcoming report on misleading and aggressive sales practices (Telecom Notice of Consultation CRTC 2018-246) before making recommendations about a future *Internet Code* for Canada. PIAC explains:

It is extremely awkward for the parties to this proceeding to be ignorant of the Commission's reported views on the potential of a pan-service code of sales conduct before making submissions on an *Internet Code* that likely will overlap significantly with the potential sales code or similar regulatory control.

In response, the CRTC has stated that the two proceedings are separate. The CRTC made this statement despite the fact that the need for an *Internet Code* came up numerous times during the CRTC's October 2018 hearing on misleading telecom practices. ACT agrees with PIAC that these two proceedings are very much interrelated.

Why does ACT support PIAC?

ACT has actively participated in the inquiry into misleading and aggressive sales practices and is committed to ensuring the voices of older Canadian are heard by the CRTC. ACT includes researchers who investigate digital divides, including how 'digital ageism' – the individual and systemic biases that exclude older populations – operates in the Canadian context. The CRTC's denial of PIAC's reasonable request perpetuates digital divides in Canada as it prevents non-profit and research organizations – many of whom represent older and vulnerable populations – from participating in public proceedings that are foundational to a healthy democracy and fair media policy.

ACT Director, Dr. Kim Sawchuk, echoes PIAC's frustration with the CRTC's unwillingness to commit to a process that allows for genuine public participation: "that the CRTC expects us to drop everything and contribute meaningfully to something as important as an *Internet Code* in six weeks is unrealistic. Organizations like ACT and PIAC have a strong sense of what Canadian citizens think about issues like this, but we won't have time to represent these important perspectives."

PIAC states that they are "deeply concerned that the Commission is proceeding with so much haste and in such a superficial manner that the public interest in achieving a durable, consumer-friendly and workable *Internet Code* will be jeopardized."

ACT works with older adults, including financially vulnerable seniors, who have a stake in the development of an *Internet Code*. "At the end of the day, codes are supposed to protect our citizens – particularly those who are put in a vulnerable position by service providers. It is unlikely that a proceeding that does not allow time for meaningful civic participation will result in a code that protects Canadian citizens," points out Sawchuk.

NOTE: As we send this press release, we are aware of other Canadian organizations who have stated publicly that they cannot participate in this proceeding due to time and resource constraints: Public Interest Law Centre (Manitoba) and the The Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC).

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