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Technology

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Hundreds of Australians complain of wrongful social media account closures but ombudsman can't help

Increasing number of people asking for help to regain access to accounts, with Google topping digital platform-related complaints

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More than 1,500 Australians in the past two-and-a-half years have complained to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman about digital platforms, with a third complaining about wrongful account terminations.

But the TIO - which is responsible for complaints about mobile phone service, land lines and internet services - has no powers to do anything about it.

The TIO's report, released on Wednesday, comes before Australia's social media ban, which will see teenagers under 16 banned from about 12 social media platforms from 10 December. The federal government has set out that the platforms must have quick appeals processes in place for people who have been wrongly assessed as being under 16 to regain access to their accounts.

In the report, the TIO referred to Karen - not her real name - whose business page on social media was linked to her personal account. It was used to manage advertising and communicating with customers.

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Her personal account was disabled without warning and she couldn't contact customers via the business page as a result. She could not communicate with the platform to have the ban reversed because the response went to her disabled account.

"She could find no other way to get help from them. Karen was worried about the financial and reputational damage to her business, so she contacted the TIO," the report stated.

Karen is one of an increasing number of customers going to the TIO to report problems with social media. The TIO stated that between 1 January 2023 and 31 August 2025 consumers made 1,537 digital platform-related complaints. The TIO found also there had been a 28.6% increase in such complaints between 2023 and 2024.

Guardian Australia [has reported on similar account terminations](#) made on Meta platforms in the past few months. Issues with account access - including platforms blocking or banning users - made up 36% of the complaints reported.

"We have heard from individuals and small businesses whose accounts have been locked due to alleged breaches of community standards, with no warning or explanation, risking personal and financial losses," the TIO said.

Google topped the digital platforms-related complaints to the TIO at 18%, followed by Kayo/Binge/Foxtel streaming company Hubbl at 15%, Apple and Microsoft at 14% of complaints each, and Meta (11%).

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The TIO found it was holding these complaints because they often intersected with telecommunications issues – it can be difficult for customers to know whether an issue with a service is due to the platform itself, or an internet or connection problem.

The ombudsman has recommended its remit be expanded to include digital platforms so they can respond to consumer complaints.

“We are calling for the Australian government to expand the TIO to become the communications ombudsman,” ombudsman Cynthia Gebert said.

“To support government reforms such as the under-16s social media ban and digital duty of care, it’s more important than ever that people have appeal rights when digital platforms get things wrong.”

She said it was heartbreaking to tell people they couldn’t resolve their problems with the TIO.

“When someone loses access to their telco service, we work with the consumer and the company to resolve the issue,” she said. “But when someone is accidentally locked out of their social media or cloud storage account, and the platform is not responding, there’s nowhere for them to go.”

A message from Lenore Taylor, editor of Guardian Australia

I hope you appreciated this article. Before you move on, I’d like to take a moment to talk about why independent journalism matters – and why, more than ever, we need your help to sustain it.

This is a moment of extraordinary global upheaval: when Australia’s most important ally is sliding towards authoritarianism, when press freedom is under increasing attack, and when rampant misinformation is eroding trust in institutions, science and democracy itself.

It is a time when trustworthy, original journalism is indispensable – helping people to understand what’s really happening, to see beyond propaganda and distortion, and hold the powerful to account.

And yet, at the very moment independent journalism matters most, we face a huge new threat to our sustainability – perhaps the biggest we’ve ever encountered.

The rapid spread of AI is transforming how people find and consume news. Readers seeking to understand their world are increasingly served machine-written summaries – sometimes inaccurate, often devoid of context. These summaries might not reference all their sources, nor always include a link back to the original reporting.

This is not only a challenge for truth and transparency, but for the sustainability of journalism itself. If tech platforms keep more of the audience, they also keep