

# PROJECT PHOENIX PILOT OUTCOMES REPORT

Renewing Devices. Restoring Connection. Strengthening Communities

March 2026





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# 1. Executive Summary

Project Phoenix was established to test a practical proposition: that mobile phones currently stored, underutilised, or destined for premature recycling may be suitable for safe refurbishment and reuse, extending their operational life while supporting digital inclusion.

Mobile phones are not comparable to most other consumer electronics. They enable access to telecommunications connectivity and the essential services that rely on it. For people experiencing crisis or disadvantage, a working phone can be the difference between being connected to support networks and being effectively offline.

The pilot demonstrated that low-value devices that are often deprioritised within commercial refurbishment pipelines can be safely recovered, refurbished and redirected to people who rely on them for safety, communication and participation in society.

One hundred mobile phones were refurbished and distributed through DV Safe Phone and the KARI Foundation, with support from Optus, PhoneCycle and the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA). Each device was supplied with an Optus Donate Your Data Crisis SIM, ensuring recipients received a working phone ready for immediate use.

The devices were immediately impactful. Victim survivors were able to maintain safe communication with support services and emergency contacts, while First Nations community members gained reliable access to family, education, employment opportunities and essential services.

The pilot also confirmed an important structural insight within the refurbishment ecosystem. Many technically recoverable devices remain unused because their resale value does not justify the cost of repair within commercial markets. With modest funding and coordination, these devices can be activated and directed towards communities where they deliver substantial social value.

## Pilot Outcomes:

- 100 mobile phones refurbished and redistributed
- 5.6 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions avoided through device reuse
- 72 Crisis SIM activations recorded to date
- zero devices identified as lost or stolen following IMEI verification
- full traceability maintained from device source to end user distribution

Project Phoenix demonstrates that a secure and scalable device reuse pathway can be delivered with relatively low operational complexity. The technical capability already exists within Australia's refurbishment ecosystem, and trusted community organisations are ready to distribute devices to people who need them most.

AMTA's role in coordinating the pilot also demonstrates the value of an industry-led body providing oversight, traceability and governance across a national reuse pathway.

The pilot therefore highlights a structural opportunity rather than a technical barrier. With modest support from government and philanthropic partners, thousands of additional devices could be activated each year, improving digital access, strengthening community safety and reducing avoidable emissions.

This report outlines the outcomes of the pilot, the lessons learned, and practical recommendations for establishing a coordinated national mobile phone reuse pathway that supports digital inclusion, circular economy objectives and community wellbeing.





## 2. Definitions

Term	Definition
BER (Beyond Economical Reuse)	A device assessed as unsuitable for reuse because the cost, effort, or risks associated with repair or refurbishment exceed its potential value or utility. BER devices are directed to secure recycling.
Device Grading	The process of categorising a device based on cosmetic condition, functionality, and overall reuse potential. Grading provides a consistent way of determining suitability for donation, refurbishment, or recycling.
Device Repair	Targeted repair activities such as replacing a screen, battery, or other components to restore a device to working order. Repair may be part of the broader refurbishment process.
Device Refurbishment	A structured process that includes testing, repair, data sanitisation, cosmetic improvement, and quality assurance to return a device to a functional, safe, and reliable condition suitable for reuse.
Device Testing	The diagnostic assessment of a device's hardware, software, connectivity, and security features to determine condition, functionality, and reuse potential. Testing underpins grading and refurbishment decisions.
IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity)	The unique 15-digit identifier assigned to every mobile device. Used in Project Phoenix for device tracking, verifying authenticity, checking lost/stolen status, and confirming eligibility for reuse.
Lost and Stolen Register	Managed by AMTA on behalf of the telecommunications industry, the national IMEI-based database is used by carriers to block devices reported as lost or stolen. Handsets with IMEIs in this register cannot connect to mobile telecommunications networks operated by Telstra, Optus or TPG/Vodafone.
Low-Value Devices	Devices that have limited commercial resale value due to age, condition, or repair cost, but may still be suitable for social reuse where functional performance meets community needs.
Secure Data Sanitisation	The process of permanently erasing all personal data from a device using certified tools and methods. Sanitisation ensures that no recoverable data remains before the device moves into refurbishment or reuse.



# 3. Purpose of the Pilot

Project Phoenix was designed to test a secure, practical and auditable workflow for identifying, refurbishing and redistributing mobile phones that would otherwise remain unused or be prematurely recycled. In doing so, the pilot applies waste hierarchy principles by prioritising reuse and life extension ahead of recycling, recognising that the greatest environmental and social value is achieved by keeping devices in use for as long as possible. The pilot sought to establish a scalable model that:

- activates idle devices with limited commercial resale value
- improves digital access for people experiencing crisis or financial hardship
- strengthens safety and connectivity outcomes for victim survivors
- reduces avoidable emissions by extending device life
- demonstrates a traceable and safe national reuse pathway
- provides government and philanthropic funders with evidence to inform future investment

A central focus of the pilot was understanding how and where to intervene within the existing refurbishment ecosystem, particularly in relation to devices that are routinely deprioritised due to low resale value. The pilot examined whether modest, targeted funding could enable these phones to be returned to service and converted into high-value social outcomes.

The pilot responds directly to a request from the Minister for Communications to explore practical approaches to increasing access to refurbished devices as part of Australia's efforts to close the digital divide.

Australia generates a significant volume of used mobile phones each year. AMTA market research indicates that there are an estimated 23.7 million unused working phones in Australia, based on its June 2025 survey. When asked what they did with their previous handset, 21 per cent of respondents reported that they sold it, gave it away or donated it. While this represents a substantial recovery opportunity, many devices remain economically unattractive for refurbishers, as repair costs cannot be justified against low resale value. As a result, these phones are often stored indefinitely or recycled before their usable life is exhausted, representing a missed opportunity for digital inclusion, community wellbeing and circular economy outcomes.

While mobile phones contribute to the broader e-waste stream, their role as connectivity devices means they also underpin participation in essential services. A working mobile phone is often the difference between being connected to essential services and being effectively offline.

Mobile phones are therefore not directly comparable with most other household electronics. While they are consumer devices, they enable access to telecommunications connectivity, which supports participation in a wide range of digital and social systems that underpin modern life.

A functional mobile device supports the ability to:

- access emergency services
- maintain personal safety and safety planning
- seek and maintain employment
- access banking and digital payments
- verify identity and manage accounts
- access government services
- participate in education and learning



For people experiencing crisis, financial hardship or social disadvantage, the absence of a working phone can significantly limit their ability to engage with these services. Ensuring suitable devices remain in use therefore delivers benefits that extend well beyond traditional waste reduction objectives and reinforces the importance of prioritising reuse ahead of recycling wherever devices remain functional.

Ensuring suitable devices remain in use therefore delivers benefits that extend well beyond traditional waste reduction objectives and reinforces the importance of prioritising reuse ahead of recycling wherever devices remain functional.

Project Phoenix was designed to test whether industry capability, targeted funding and community partnerships can unlock these devices and create a scalable national reuse pathway.

## 4. Partners and Roles

Project Phoenix brought together a group of organisations with deep experience across telecommunications, device refurbishment, crisis support and First Nations community services. Each partner contributed a distinct capability that shaped the integrity and impact of the pilot.



### 4.1 Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA)

#### About

AMTA is the peak industry body for Australia's mobile telecommunications sector. Its membership includes mobile network operators, device manufacturers, retailers, network equipment suppliers and businesses that support the mobile ecosystem. AMTA's work spans policy, regulation, safety, consumer education and stewardship.

AMTA also manages MobileMuster, Australia's accredited national product stewardship program for mobile phones and accessories. This program has operated for more than 27 years and is recognised as a trusted national recycling initiative that delivers high recycling rates and transparent reporting.

AMTA provides national expertise in product stewardship, device traceability, regulatory compliance and program governance. These capabilities were essential in ensuring that the pilot followed secure processes, aligned with data integrity requirements and maintained full chain of custody.

#### Role

- Program lead and overall coordinator
- IMEI verification through the Lost and Stolen Register
- Oversight of device security and chain of custody
- Logistics coordination with partners
- Consolidated reporting, environmental analysis and lessons learned
- Principal contact point for government, industry and philanthropic supporters



## 4.2 PhoneCycle

### About

PhoneCycle is an Australian owned refurbishment and reuse specialist that has operated for more than a decade. The business focuses on device testing, grading, repair, refurbishment and responsible reuse pathways. PhoneCycle works with corporates, insurers, schools and government to recover, refurbish and repurpose mobile devices and tablets.

A national reuse model must incorporate high quality refurbishment processes. PhoneCycle provided technical leadership across device selection, battery replacement, firmware updating, quality assurance and environmental impact reporting.

### Role

- Identification and supply of 100 candidate devices
- Battery replacement, cosmetic repair and quality checks
- Data erasure and device sanitisation
- Logging of IMEI, repair notes, parts used and technician information
- Packaging and preparation for distribution
- Carbon reporting and post-implementation review



## 4.3 DV Safe Phone

### About

DV Safe Phone is a registered Australian charity that collects, repurposes and distributes mobile phones to victim survivors of domestic and family violence. The organisation has a phone collection network of over 1,500 locations, distributes phones to over 500 front-line domestic violence agencies and has provided phones to over 18,000 domestic violence survivors across the country.

The pilot required a partner with secure distribution pathways for recipient groups who may be at risk. DV Safe Phone provided this channel and offered insights that strengthen the case for a national device reuse program as part of domestic violence prevention and response strategies.

### Role

- Receipt and distribution of 50 refurbished devices
- Allocation to frontline agencies supporting victim survivors
- Recipient and agency feedback
- Confirmation of distribution and impact insights



## 4.4 KARI Foundation

### About

KARI Foundation is a leading Aboriginal community organisation. It provides programs and services that support families, strengthen cultural connection and create opportunities across education, employment and community wellbeing. KARI has a strong presence across Western Sydney and regional communities, and is widely respected for delivering culturally safe, high quality programs.



Digital access has become an essential requirement for participating in education, social services, community life and employment. KARI's involvement in this pilot ensured that refurbished devices reached First Nations people who face additional barriers to digital inclusion.

KARI brought community-centred insight and distribution expertise. Their feedback highlighted how access to refurbished devices and Crisis SIMs can improve connection, financial stability and dignity within First Nations communities.

## Role

- Receipt and secure handling of 50 refurbished devices
- Distribution through existing family support, youth and community programs
- Confirmation of device receipt by partner organisations
- Early SIM activation reporting
- Impact feedback from community members



## 4.5 Optus

### About

Optus is one of Australia's largest telecommunications providers and a long-standing contributor to digital inclusion initiatives. Through the Donate Your Data program, Optus enables unused mobile data to be pooled and redistributed to people in need through community agencies.

Optus has supported a wide range of social impact programs across Australia, including crisis support, education access and youth programs. This experience made Optus an ideal partner for a device reuse pilot with vulnerable communities.

Optus was the principal funder of the refurbishment component of the pilot. The company's Crisis SIMs, data donation program and reporting capabilities provided the connectivity required to ensure that each refurbished device was immediately usable for communication, safety and access to services.

## Role

- Financial support to cover refurbishment costs
- Provision of Crisis SIMs for recipient use
- SIM pairing and activation reporting
- Review of consolidated outcomes data
- ESG alignment and industry engagement insights



# 5. Project Outcomes

Project Phoenix delivered a set of tangible and measurable outcomes that confirm the value of a structured national device reuse pathway. The pilot demonstrated that mobile phones can be refurbished safely, securely and efficiently, and confirmed that targeted funding can unlock devices that would otherwise remain idle, be deprioritised by refurbishers, or enter recycling streams prematurely. The outcomes show that simple, low-cost interventions can deliver significant benefits for vulnerable Australians, support frontline service delivery and contribute to national digital inclusion objectives.

The results also highlight the broader potential of a scaled program. With appropriate funding, governance and community partnerships, thousands of additional devices could be activated each year and placed directly into the hands of people who rely on safe, reliable connectivity.

The sections below summarise the quantitative, social, environmental and operational outcomes achieved during the pilot, highlighting key learnings and establishing a strong case for expansion.

## 5.1 Quantitative Results:

**100** refurbished devices delivered

**5,600** kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e avoided<sup>1</sup>

**Zero** lost, stolen or blocked devices after IMEI verification ensuring those devices can be used on Australian networks.

**72** Crisis SIM activations recorded to date

Full traceability maintained from source to distribution

## 5.2 Social Impact:

### Domestic Violence Survivor Support

The pilot tested two different distribution models to reflect varying risk profiles and community needs.

DV Safe Phone has established a trusted national network of more than 500 frontline agencies, which consistently report that access to a safe, functioning mobile phone is one of the most critical safety interventions for victim survivors of domestic and family violence.

Through Project Phoenix, 50 refurbished Apple iPhone 7 and 8 devices and 50 Crisis SIMs were distributed across five trusted frontline agencies. These agencies are trained to assess risk, manage safety planning and ensure that phones are provided at appropriate moments without increasing risk to recipients.

<sup>1</sup>Aggregate avoided emissions across 100 devices



For many victim survivors, phones provided through DV Safe Phone represent their only safe and private means of communication. Access to a device enables contact with emergency services, legal and financial support, family, and accommodation providers. Agencies reported that immediate access to a phone reduced delays in safety planning, discharge and relocation processes.

DV Safe Phone also provides guidance on Technology Facilitated Abuse (TFA) and ensures discreet handling, packaging and distribution of devices so phones can be provided without alerting perpetrators or compromising survivor safety.

DV Safe Phone received the following feedback directly from agencies involved in this pilot:

“Her old phone screen was badly cracked, she couldn't see who was calling or the keypad to call out. She needed a phone to make emergency calls or to call for help in case her ex-partner put her in danger again. It also helped to give her a new number that the ex-partner didn't have and in case her old phone was being monitored by the ex-partner. For these reasons, her safety has improved.”

“Client had her phone smashed by her perpetrator to prevent her calling emergency services, this phone was provided to create safety for my client so she was able to call emergency services and her support network and prevented isolation and further risk of harm.”

“Ex partner is being released from prison, this phone will allow this woman to contact with support if required.”

“This individual will now be confident that she is not being tracked. She will re-establish herself from the ground up feeling safer, having some peace of mind that she is safe from the violence”

“Has been able to return home with 6 children with a feeling of safety due to having a phone to call police if perpetrator tries to return to her and children's home“

“Referred from Centrelink as just left Domestic Violence (DV), homeless, and supported connect with DV Connect”.

“The aggrieved phone was not working and ran off Wi-Fi only. Giving her the phone enabled her to contact persons without Wi-Fi and from any house she is residing at in addition to helping assist with her safety by having a working phone on hand to call police at any time she requires help. This will also assist in her managing her 3 kids.”

“Provides capacity for client to contact police when necessary or feeling unsafe to report breaches of Domestic Violence Order (DVO)”.



## First Nations Communities

Fifty refurbished Samsung A30 devices and 50 Crisis SIMs were delivered to the KARI Foundation for distribution to First Nations people experiencing digital exclusion.

KARI works directly with the recipients of the devices, which enabled KARI staff to sit with individuals at the point of distribution and provide hands-on support to set up their phones, activate SIMs and ensure devices were usable immediately.

This approach was particularly valuable given that Crisis SIMs used required ID and activation steps that some recipients may not be able to complete straight away or independently. For people with limited digital confidence, literacy barriers or disrupted access to identification, having a trusted worker assist with setup removed delays and ensured recipients could begin using their device as soon as it was received.

Community response was strongly positive, with high and rapid SIM activation rates and early feedback highlighting the significance of the support for families and individuals. Some recipients shared that opening their refurbished phone felt like receiving a brand new device, reflecting the care taken in refurbishment, packaging and presentation.



KARI staff and partner social service workers observed immediate and meaningful impacts from the distribution of the devices. Access to reliable phones and connectivity improved client safety, service engagement and overall stability. Workers reported higher attendance at appointments, improved communication with support services, faster access to crisis assistance, and stronger engagement in education and employment pathways.

For clients experiencing domestic and family violence, devices supported safety planning and enabled discreet contact with support networks. For families, improved connectivity strengthened children's participation in education and reduced digital exclusion. For individuals reintegrating after incarceration, access to a phone was critical for securing identification, income support, housing and employment.

Overall, the provision of these devices reduced barriers, increased independence and strengthened outcomes across multiple service areas, demonstrating that digital access is an essential enabler of community wellbeing.



KARI Foundation received the following feedback:

“When my son didn’t have access to a phone or internet, he was missing out on school updates, homework apps and messages from his teacher. Since receiving the device, he’s been able to join online learning, submit assignments and stay connected with his class. His confidence has improved and he feels included again. It has made a real difference to his education.”

“Sincerely grateful for not only for making this opportunity available to myself & family but other community members n mob it's so deadly. It's an actual real life everyday or otherwise already disadvantaged struggling people with you lot doing this helps us so we think you're like us like mob.

“Receiving the phone and SIM card changed everything for me. Before that, I had no safe way to reach support services without being monitored. Having my own phone meant I could contact my caseworker, organise safe accommodation, and speak to my family without fear. It gave me back a sense of control at a time when I felt completely powerless.”

### 5.3 Environmental Impact:

E-waste is the fastest-growing waste stream in Australia. Despite its relatively small population, Australia is the fifth-largest generator of e-waste per person globally, producing approximately 21.7 to 22 kilograms per person each year. This places Australia well above the global average and makes it a significant contributor to global e-waste volumes.

While refurbishment involves emissions, these are significantly lower than those associated with manufacturing new devices. Reuse therefore complements recycling by extending device life where possible and reserving recycling for end-of-life devices.

It is estimated that by refurbishing the 100 devices in this pilot, carbon savings of approximately 56 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub>e were avoided compared to manufacturing a new one per refurbished device. Manufacturing and distribution of a new device typically produces between 70 and 90 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub>e<sup>2</sup>

Making mobile phones repairable and refurbishable supports the telecommunications sector’s transition towards a circular economy. Recognising that devices retain residual value enables them to be treated as commodities rather than waste.

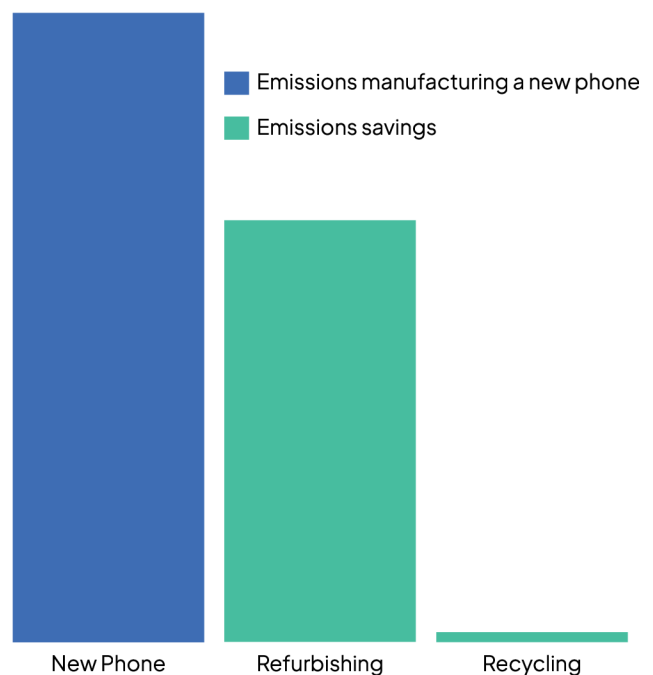


Fig 1: Emissions savings from mobile phone refurbishment and recycling compared with manufacturing a new device

<sup>2</sup> Apple Environmental Reports, ADEME (France’s ecological transition agency), and Fraunhofer IZM, Fraunhofer Institute for Reliability and Microintegration.



This pilot went beyond the existing organic repair market by extracting value from devices with lower commercial worth, while delivering the same environmental benefits through extended device life and simultaneously supporting social outcomes.

Device reuse therefore represents a practical and immediate opportunity to reduce emissions at relatively low cost, while delivering high environmental and social impact.

## 6. How the Model Works

Project Phoenix uses a simple and repeatable workflow that can be scaled nationally with minimal complexity. Each step is designed to ensure device safety, data security, user dignity and safety, and transparent reporting.



### 6.1 Device Sourced

Devices are sourced via refurbishment partners operating within established reuse and recovery streams. Incoming units are subject to an initial screening process to determine refurbishment viability. Only devices meeting predefined technical and economic thresholds are selected, ensuring efficient allocation of repair resources and avoidance of processing non-viable stock.

Selected devices are typically in good structural and cosmetic condition but exhibit limited functional defects. The predominant fault identified across candidate units is battery degradation.

For this pilot, a device is classified as having refurbishment potential when it meets the following technical criteria:

- **No activation lock status:** Devices must not be activation-locked, for example Apple activation-locked units, as such locks prevent reconfiguration, functional testing, and lawful redeployment.
- **Low-complexity repair requirement:** Faults must be isolated and economically repairable, most commonly battery degradation and, in some cases, screen damage. Devices requiring board-level repair or multiple component failures are excluded.



- **Defined repair scope alignment:** For this trial, only devices suitable for battery replacement were accepted to maintain process control and standardisation.
- **Model standardisation and parts availability:** Preference is given to high-volume, single-model devices with established secondary parts markets. Concentrating on a common model supports component harvesting, simplifies inventory management, reduces diagnostic variability, and improves repair throughput.

This structured eligibility framework ensures technical feasibility, operational efficiency, and predictable refurbishment outcomes while minimising processing risk and material loss.

## 6.2 Lost and Stolen Device Verification by AMTA

AMTA, in collaboration with Australian mobile carriers and mobile service providers, administers a database which tracks the 'blocked' status of mobile phones in Australia by Australian mobile carriers using a unique identifier known as an International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI).<sup>3</sup>

The IMEI Lookup Service grants a limited licence to members of the public, to perform a 'lookup' search in respect of the 'blocked' status of an IMEI in Australia as recorded in the IMEI Database. Individuals can do up to 5 searches per day, whereas AMTA and licensees can do unlimited and bulk searches.

AMTA checks the IMEI every device against the Lost and Stolen Register at no extra charge. This step ensures that all devices have not been blocked for reasons that may include being reported as stolen, involved in fraud, or lost by the owner. It is a foundational control for any future national program.

This register will also be leveraged in the future to identify devices which have had services removed in line with the [Australian Communications and Media Authority \(Emergency Call Service Determination\) Direction 2024](#).

## 6.3 Refurbished by Technical Partner

Specialist technicians complete battery replacement, cleaning, cosmetic repair, firmware updates and full data sanitisation. This creates a reliable and high-quality device that can be safely redistributed.



<sup>3</sup> Mobile phones all have a unique 15-digit serial number, the International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI)



After completing the project and reviewing the associated steps and timelines, we were able to estimate a 20mins repair time for the iPhone model and 25mins for the Samsung Galaxy model under smooth circumstances. Additionally, through bulk purchasing, batteries were secured at a lower cost than initially projected. Based on these efficiencies and process improvements, it is expected to offer cost savings in future project iterations.

iPhone 7/8 Battery Replacement	Time Spent (minutes)
Heat up the adhesive	3
Open the device	2
Disconnect the power and display	1
Remove and isolate the battery	2
Internal cleaning	2
Place new adhesive	2
Install new battery	1
Reconnect the display	1
Complete the repair	1
Outgoing Quality Check (OQC)	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

Galaxy A30 Battery Replacement	Time Spent (minutes)
Heat up the adhesive	3
Open the device	4
Disconnect the power and display	1
Remove and isolate the battery	2
Internal cleaning	5
Place new adhesive	2
Install new battery	1
Reconnect the display	1
Complete the repair	1
Outgoing Quality Check (OQC)	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>

## 6.4 Quality Checked and Sanitised

Each phone undergoes an internal quality assurance process. This includes functional testing, visual inspection, data wiping verification and device performance checks.



## 6.5 Packaged to fit end user requirements

Devices are packaged in a way that supports the end user requirements:

- DV Safe Phone recipients prefer no boxes or identifiable packaging, given the need for the phone to remain concealed.





- For KARI Foundation, the devices were packaged in a way to promote dignity and user experience. Including new phone boxes, and delivering the devices as if it were a new purchase.

Packaging matters for confidence and safety.

## 6.6 Distributed to Community Partner

Trusted frontline organisations place devices directly into the hands of people who need them. These partners have deep community connections and understand local needs, risks and cultural considerations.

## 6.7 SIM Activated and Ready to Use

Devices are paired with Crisis SIMs or data access programs so that they can be used immediately. Activation tracking supports service continuity and provides the foundation for future impact measurement.

## 6.8 Outcomes

This workflow demonstrates that device reuse can be delivered with:

- low operational complexity
- high levels of safety and assurance
- strong social benefit for vulnerable groups
- measurable environmental impact
- clear opportunities for government and philanthropic scaling

The model is already working at pilot scale. With coordinated investment, it can be expanded quickly to create a national reuse pathway that benefits communities across Australia.





# 7. Lessons learned

The lessons from Project Phoenix build on established evidence that reuse and life extension deliver greater environmental and social outcomes than recycling alone. Rather than testing this principle, the pilot demonstrates how these outcomes can be achieved in practice within the mobile telecommunications sector, where devices enable essential services. The lessons below therefore focus on the structural, operational settings required to consistently keep suitable devices higher up the waste hierarchy.

## 7.1 Device Sourcing and Suitability

- **Supply Certainty and Suitability:** Securing a consistent supply of suitable devices remains a challenge. Corporate fleets and stock on shelves are valuable sources, but the suitability of devices varies significantly.

Most people like to be able to replace their current devices, with Apple and Samsung being the most popular options.

Phones affected by software requirements (such as E000 updates) or those that are blocked should be avoided if possible. This helps prevent future connectivity problems when it's crucial for users to stay in touch.

Operationally, devices ideally would be updated to the latest software versions before they arrive for repair/refurbishment.

- **Donor Motivation:** To secure newer devices, it is important to recognise donor expectations regarding the value of their devices and the costs of refurbishment. Corporate recognition and clear articulation of social and environmental outcomes can help align donor motivations with project objectives.
- **National Sourcing Model:** Achieving supply consistency will require a coordinated, national approach to device sourcing, leveraging both philanthropic and industry interest.
- **Audience/outcomes:** The pilot highlighted the importance of aligning device selection with intended audiences and desired outcomes. Where the primary objective is to support people in high-risk or highly vulnerable circumstances, such as victim survivors of domestic and family violence, device familiarity is critical. Newer phones and well-established brands, with consistent software and interfaces, support rapid and confident use in emergency situations, where delays or confusion can have serious consequences. Visual familiarity is also important, as devices should not be easily identifiable as emergency or secondary phones.

By contrast, other cohorts may place less emphasis on accessing the latest technology. For First Nations participants in Project Phoenix, the key value was receiving a reliable, good-quality phone from a recognised brand. In these contexts, device quality and presentation contributed to a sense of dignity and trust, rather than expectations around device novelty or specific operating systems.

For organisations or governments seeking to replicate or fund similar initiatives, it is important to clearly define both the intended beneficiaries and the outcomes they are seeking to achieve. This includes understanding the circumstances people are in, how they are likely to use the device, and what barriers they may face in doing so.



Conversely, where a fixed pool of devices is already available, the audience should be selected based on the characteristics of those devices. Program design therefore needs to be flexible, matching device type to user need, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach. This alignment between available devices, delivery model and target cohort is critical to achieving safe, effective and equitable outcomes

## 7.2 IMEI Verification and Data Security

- **IMEI Accessibility:** IMEI verification is essential for device tracking and security, but can be challenging if devices are not powered or have depleted batteries. In some cases, IMEI may only be accessible after the device has been opened.
- **Community Education:** There is an opportunity to educate the community about IMEI checks and the importance of verifying devices to prevent the circulation of stolen phones.

## 7.2 Repair and Refurbishment

- **Battery Health:** Battery condition is the primary factor limiting device reuse. While Apple devices provide relatively accurate battery health information, Samsung devices present more challenges. Charge cycles can be used as an additional indicator, is not always easy to know the current battery status without removing the battery itself.
- **Repair Simplicity:** Keeping repairs simple and focusing on minimal refurbishment enables greater scalability. More substantial repairs require additional investment and planning.
- **MDM/Locks:** none encountered during the process. Some companies may consider a data wipe service / repair, for iCloud locks there were none encountered on the project but is a broader consideration for donated devices.
- **Refurbisher Engagement:** Refurbishers demonstrated a willingness to scale participation, particularly when supported by funding that unlocks idle devices not otherwise prioritised.

## 7.4 Packaging and Recipient Experience

- **Dignity and Discretion:** Packaging plays a significant role in recipient dignity. For domestic violence survivors, discreet or non-existent packaging is essential to maintain recipients safe, while Aboriginal organisations value a “new phone” experience that supports recipient dignity.
- **Supporting Materials:** Including clear instructions for SIM activation and use is important, though not all recipients will engage with written materials.



## 7.5 Secure Distribution and End User Safety

- **Distribution Partners:** Secure and trusted distribution partners are essential to ensure recipient safety, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- **Reporting and Administration:** Balancing the need for impact reporting with the administrative burden on agencies is critical. Overloading agencies with reporting requirements to measure project impact can detract from their core focus on supporting end users.

## 7.6 SIM Activation and Technology Barriers

- **Activation Challenges:** SIM activation rates were lower than anticipated, partly due to agency qualification processes and ID requirements. Activation rate across the two different social partners were different and results may be impacted by the chosen or available distribution model:

KARI achieved a 100% activation rate, likely influenced by their distribution model. A KARI representative met with each recipient individually to assist them in activating their SIM card.

DV Safe Phone recorded a 40% (and increasing) activation rate. Unlike KARI, they do not distribute phones directly to end users; instead, they partner with agencies that provide the phones to victims and survivors. As a result, ensuring SIM activation depends on whether these agencies can effectively communicate the process to the recipients, which may be deprioritised, since the primary objective is simply getting a phone into the hands of those in need.

A “no ID” SIM activation may help address this barrier.

- **Technology Changes:** Changes in telecommunications technology, such as the closure of 3G networks and updates to emergency call requirements, can render older devices unsuitable for reuse. Software and firmware compatibility must be considered in device selection.

## 7.7 Funding and Industry Engagement

- **Unlocking Idle Devices:** Targeted funding can unlock devices that refurbishers would not otherwise prioritise, increasing the pool of available devices for social impact.
- **Strong Interest:** There is strong philanthropic and industry interest in supporting circular economy initiatives that also have a social benefit, which can be leveraged for future program expansion.

## 7.8 Data Quality and Reporting

- **Structured Reporting:** Implementing structured activation and distribution reporting improves data quality and enables better measurement of program outcomes.



# 8. Opportunity for Government & Philanthropy

Project Phoenix shows that device reuse is a low-cost, high-impact way to improve digital inclusion, safety and environmental outcomes. The model aligns with national priorities including:

- Cost-of-living support
- Family and domestic violence prevention
- First Nations digital inclusion
- Climate and circular economy goals

Philanthropy and Government funding can amplify these outcomes by funding refurbishment, supporting distribution and strengthening the data and measurement capabilities of the program.

## 9. Recommendations

### 9.1 Strengthen National Mobile Phone Reuse Pathways Through AMTA-Led Industry Coordination

The pilot has shown that mobile phones can be safely refurbished and supplied at scale when the process is supported by clear industry coordination. AMTA is well placed to facilitate this coordination as the trusted national body representing the mobile sector.

Government should consider supporting an AMTA-led mechanism that brings together refurbishers, network operators and community partners to activate unused mobile phones and direct them into existing frontline distribution channels. This approach does not replace existing programs. Instead, it strengthens the mobile phone supply side by ensuring a consistent flow of safe, refurbished devices to the organisations already supporting vulnerable Australians.

This model uses the capabilities AMTA already has in place, traceability, IMEI verification, stewardship, and industry-level coordination, and aligns with existing national efforts to improve digital access and community safety.

### 9.2 Develop a Secure and Government Endorsed Framework for Device Reuse

A national framework is needed to standardise IMEI verification, data sanitisation, device suitability criteria and quality assurance requirements. This will ensure safety, maintain public trust and give refurbishers clear guidance for participation. A government-endorsed framework will also reduce duplication and give frontline agencies confidence that devices are safe and reliable.



## 9.3 Create a Sustainable Funding Model to Support Refurbishment

The pilot demonstrated that small funding interventions can unlock devices that are either currently not commercially viable, or not prioritised for repair and refurbishment. A sustainable funding strategy should compensate refurbishers for the cost of activating these devices. This will increase device availability, reduce carbon emissions and provide equitable access to connectivity for vulnerable communities.

## 9.4 Formalise an Industry Reuse Network

Multiple refurbishers have expressed interest in joining the next phase of Project Phoenix. A structured network should be created to coordinate technical capability, support secure data handling and share best practice. This network will provide national coverage, improve cost efficiency and ensure continuity of supply even as device models and market conditions change.

## 9.5 Establish Consistent Refurbishment and Repair Standards for Mobile Device Reuse

As mobile phone reuse programs scale, consistent refurbishment and repair standards will be essential to ensure that devices placed back into the community are safe, reliable and fit for purpose. Project Phoenix demonstrated that consumer and end-user confidence depends on devices being refurbished in line with established industry practices, including the use of quality replacement components, appropriate software and firmware updates, and comprehensive functional testing prior to redistribution.

Industry and Government should consider supporting the formalisation of principles-based refurbishment and repair standards that reflect the practices already applied across the professional mobile refurbishment sector. These standards should set clear expectations for repair quality, component suitability, battery performance, device functionality and end-of-process quality assurance, ensuring refurbished phones operate reliably and meet the needs of end users.

Importantly, such standards should be proportionate and flexible, enabling participation by a range of refurbishers while maintaining consistent quality outcomes and reinforcing reuse as a credible, trusted pathway alongside new device supply and end-of-life recycling.

## 9.6 Establish a Structured Device Supply

The pilot highlighted that a large supply of potentially recoverable devices exists within corporate fleets, repair pipelines and insurance channels. A structured supply pathway should be developed in partnership with industry and government agencies to ensure that recoverable devices flow into reuse streams rather than sitting idle or heading directly to recycling.



## **9.7 Expand Access Across Additional Community Cohorts**

Demand across frontline services exceeds current device availability. In addition to supporting the initial pilot organisations DV Safe Phone and KARI Foundation, a scaled program could include additional cohorts such as people experiencing homelessness, newly arrived refugees, First Nations communities, older Australians and young people at risk. Ensuring access to safe and functional devices will improve participation, safety and economic opportunity.

## **9.8 Invest in Long Term Social and Environmental Impact Measurement**

Government and philanthropic partners should support investment in robust data collection that quantifies safety outcomes, digital inclusion benefits, reduced service system pressure and emissions avoided. Strong and transparent evidence will inform future policy settings, optimise funding allocation and demonstrate public value.

## **9.9 Use Project Phoenix to Inform Modernised Product Stewardship and Circular Economy Policy**

The pilot provides real-world evidence that can inform the evolution of telecommunications stewardship frameworks. Government should consider incorporating repair and reuse pathways into future stewardship models, ensuring alignment with circular economy goals and digital inclusion strategies.

This includes reinforcing waste hierarchy principles by prioritising repair and reuse ahead of recycling where devices remain functional, recognising that refurbishment generates lower emissions than new manufacture while recycling remains critical once reuse is no longer viable.

## **9.10 Fund an Activation Mechanism to Unlock Devices Sitting Idle in Refurbishment Pipelines**

There is a significant opportunity to activate devices that refurbishers cannot currently prioritise. Government or philanthropic funding should support an activation mechanism that compensates refurbishers for processing low-value devices. This mechanism would recover thousands of additional devices each year, increase the pool of available devices for vulnerable Australians and reduce premature recycling of recoverable assets.

## **9.11 Position Australia as a Global Leader in Secure Device Reuse**

With coordinated investment, Australia can establish a scalable, secure and socially impactful device reuse program that demonstrates leadership across digital inclusion, circular economy performance and social service innovation. Project Phoenix provides a ready-made template for national implementation.



# 10. Conclusion

Project Phoenix has shown that secure device reuse is practical and impactful. The pilot did not highlight technical barriers. Instead, it revealed a clear structural gap. Many usable devices sit inactive because there is no mechanism to prioritise or fund their repair. With modest support, these devices can be refurbished, connected and placed with people who rely on a working phone for safety, stability and participation.

The pilot proved that the model works. The workflow is simple, the controls are strong and the partners involved are capable and ready to scale. Community demand is clear, and the benefits are immediate.

A national reuse pathway would reduce pressure on support services, strengthen digital participation, improve safety outcomes and reduce emissions. It would also make better use of resources already available across Australia.

The evidence is strong, and the foundations are in place. The next step is investment. With coordinated support from government and philanthropy, Australia can establish a national mobile phone reuse program that delivers safety, connection and environmental benefit at very low cost. No workable device should sit on a shelf when it can support someone who needs it.



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