

# COVID-19: operators' support during the coronavirus outbreak is going beyond increasing data allowances

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The initial outbreak of COVID-19 (the new disease caused by the coronavirus) led to a sharp increase in home working, and businesses had to move quickly to enable a remote workforce. Some telecoms operators responded rapidly to help support remote working by taking simple steps such as increasing mobile data allowances, as outlined [in our previous article](#). We have also written articles about how operators are helping their [consumer customers](#) and the [implications for operators' fixed networks](#) as more people stay at home.

This comment outlines what operators are doing beyond connectivity and how they are finding other ways to help their business customers.

## Operators are increasing their investments, providing financial support and supporting research and government initiatives

Operators are working to limit the effects of COVID-19 on their business customers.

- [Most of the major operators in the USA have signed up to the FCC's 'Keep Americans Connected Pledge'](#), which asks operators to not terminate any services to homes or small businesses, to waive late fees for any customers who are not able to pay their bills and to open their Wi-Fi hotspots to all Americans for 60 days. [Globe in the Philippines has also implemented similar initiatives](#).
- Vodafone has specifically noted how diminished cash flow will have a significant impact on smaller businesses, [and it has committed to paying the micro and small businesses within its supply chain in 15 days as opposed to the customary 30–60 days](#).
- [Telstra has announced that it is putting its previously announced job cuts on hold for the next 6 months](#). Instead, it will be adding 1000 more contractors to support its customers. It will also extend any sponsorships that are set to expire this year by 12 months, and employees that are sick or are missing shifts because of the coronavirus are guaranteed their salaries.
- [Verizon is donating USD10 million to charity](#); it is supporting funds for online learning and disaster relief.

Some operators have committed to increase their investments to enhance the robustness and capacity of their networks, and also to boost the economy.

- [Telstra](#) has moved forward its planned AUD500 million capex investment from 2021 to 2020 to increase network capacity, accelerate the roll-out of 5G and provide a boost to the economy.
- Similarly, [Verizon](#) has increased its capex guidelines for this year by USD500 million, from between USD17 billion and USD18 billion to between USD17.5 billion and USD18.5 billion.

- [T-Mobile \(USA\) has reported that it plans to increase its network capacity by as much as 58%](#). This follows the donation of Dish's entire 600MHz portfolio to T-Mobile for free for 60 days.

Operators are also supporting research and government initiatives through big data and analytics.

- [dtac in Thailand is providing tourists from high-risk countries with a SIM to help track their movements](#) should the government need to contact them or determine who they came into contact with.
- [Many operators are donating data to research organisations and governments to help map and analyse the movements of people during the outbreak](#), particularly in heavily affected areas. This data helps governments to monitor if people are respecting certain quarantine policies and analyse how the movement of people maps to the spread of the disease. This data has been provided on an aggregated or anonymised basis in Europe, but was supplied on an individual level in some parts of Asia, such as China and Taiwan.

## Operators should ease the financial burden on businesses and enhance their business continuity solutions

Telecoms operators in affected areas should match some of the initiatives set by other operators. Providing financial reprieve to businesses and suppliers will go a long way in helping them to manage this crisis. Operators should also work to match the business continuity efforts made by technology companies.

Companies such as Check Point, Cisco and Microsoft were quick to enable the free use of their remote working tools to help businesses to connect their remote workforces, but similar initiatives by operators have been limited. [Telekom Romania has released a business continuity package that includes fixed/mobile internet, Norton Security, Microsoft Teams and Cisco's WebEx for free for 3 months to help businesses to quickly connect their remote employees with minimal cost](#). Other operators should deploy similar solutions.

Acting quickly is important and operators should concentrate their efforts to business aspects over which they have direct control, at least initially. As the examples in this article show, there is much more that operators can do than simply offer bigger mobile data allowances.