



Telecom Decision CRTC 2026-64

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Gatineau, 10 April 2026

Public record: 8621-C12-01/08

CISC Canadian Steering Committee on Numbering – Consensus reports CNRE153B and CNRE155A – Changes to the International Mobile Subscription Identity Guideline and introduction of a new area code guideline

Summary

Area codes and unique mobile network identifiers are essential for modern communications systems, and both are finite resources.

On 15 July 2025, the CRTC Interconnection Steering Committee (CISC) Canadian Steering Committee on Numbering (CSCN) submitted two consensus reports, CNRE153B and CNRE155A, recommending updates to the way that Canada manages unique mobile network identifiers (unique identifiers) and area codes.

CNRE153B proposes updates to the guidelines for managing unique identifiers. These updates aim to ensure that unique identifiers are only used where required, clarify the eligibility criteria for their acquisition by public safety networks, and more clearly define the role of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada in their assignment. CNRE155A recommends replacing outdated guidelines for requesting and managing new area codes with new Canada-specific, on-demand guidelines that ensure the efficient use of numbering resources in Canada and support continued coordination with the North American Number Plan Administrator.

In this decision, the Commission approves the recommendations in both CSCN reports. These recommendations incorporate the views of the telecommunications industry, provide meaningful updates to the International Mobile Subscription Identity Guideline, and improve overall administrative efficiency by establishing a new, effective, and sustainable framework for managing Canadian area codes and unique identifiers to the benefit of all Canadians.

Background

CISC report process

1. The Commission administers telephone numbers and other numbering resources pursuant to section 46.1 of the *Telecommunications Act*. It works with various partners, including the

Canadian Numbering Administrator (CNA), which manages Canadian numbering resources on the Commission's behalf and makes them available to service providers on an as-needed basis.

2. The CNA is responsible for a number of guidelines that are relied on for various aspects of numbering resource management. Among other things, the guidelines outline how to forecast numbering demand, how to plan for the use of numbering resources, and how to assign numbers to telecommunications service providers (TSPs). They also define the responsibilities of the telecommunication industry.
3. The CRTC Steering Committee on Numbering (CSCN) is a working group of the CRTC Interconnection Steering Committee (CISC). The CSCN can suggest updates to guidelines, the creation of new guidelines, or the withdrawal of outdated guidelines, all of which require Commission approval.

The reports

4. On 15 July 2025, the Commission received the following CSCN consensus reports regarding the modification of two guidelines:
 - CNRE153B – *Proposed changes to the Canadian International Mobile Subscription Identity Assignment Guideline* (15 July 2025); and
 - CNRE155A – *Proposed replacement of current adjunct with new Canadian NPA Allocation Plan and Assignment Guideline* (15 July 2025).
5. Both reports are based on research and discussions undertaken by industry subject matter experts who participate in the CSCN.

CNRE153B

6. The Canadian International Mobile Subscription Identity (IMSI) Assignment Guideline (the IMSI Guideline) sets out how IMSIs are assigned in Canada to wireless carriers, public safety broadband network operators, experimental spectrum licensees, and other eligible entities.
7. An IMSI is a unique 15-digit number stored on a SIM [Subscriber Identity Module] card that identifies a mobile phone user and their network. It allows carriers to authenticate the subscriber and route calls, texts, and data. The IMSI is composed of three parts: the Mobile Country Code (MCC), which identifies the country of operation (302 for Canada), the Mobile Network Code (MNC), which identifies the specific network, and the Mobile Subscription Identification Number, which identifies individual mobile subscribers.
8. In CNRE153B, the CSCN recommended updating the IMSI Guideline as follows:

- Updating public safety network eligibility: The CNA was made aware of an MNC being assigned to a public safety broadband network (PSBN) operator that may not have met the eligibility criteria. Consequently, the CSCN proposed amendments to the IMSI Guideline to clarify the eligibility requirements for acquiring an MNC, including updated references with regards to which federal organizations can make determinations of status as a PSBN operator.
- Clarifying Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's (ISED) role in assigning MNCs: Current language related to developmental radio licensing implies that ISED has the authority to assign MNCs when in practice it does not. Consequently, following discussions with ISED, the CSCN proposed revisions to the IMSI Guideline to clarify that acquiring a developmental radio licence from ISED only makes the holder eligible to obtain an experimental MNC; nonetheless, that MNC must be acquired from the CNA as the IMSI Administrator.
- Updating MCC 999 availability: The International Telecommunication Union (ITU)¹ recommendation E.212, which addresses the assignment of MCCs and MNCs for IMSI identifiers, allows any operator to use MCC 999 for internal private networks. To avoid unnecessary use of MNCs under Canada's MCC 302, such as for internal private networks, the CSCN proposed that the IMSI Guideline clearly convey to Canadian private network operators that they may use MCC 999.

Commission's analysis

9. On the matter of MNC eligibility for PSBN operators, the Commission considers that clarifying the criteria for MNC applications by PSBN operators would support the emergence of local PSBNs and provide greater consistency and certainty for them and for regulators such as ISED, Public Safety Canada, and the Commission.
10. Regarding ISED's role in assigning MNCs, the Commission considers that the CSCN's recommended update would clarify that applicants who receive a developmental radio licence from ISED are not automatically granted an MNC but only become eligible to receive experimental MNCs from the CNA. This update, which was proposed after consultation with ISED, would ensure proper use of IMSI resources and align the IMSI Guideline with current Canadian practices.
11. Regarding MCC 999 availability, the Commission considers that updating the IMSI Guideline to allow MCC 999 to be assigned to internal private networks would reflect ITU rules and help

¹ The ITU is a United Nations agency that sets international standards and regulations for telecommunications, including radio, satellite, and mobile networks.

preserve Canada's MNC resources by reducing unnecessary MCC assignments to networks that do not connect externally under Canada's MCC 302.

CNRE155A

12. Canada, the United States, and several Caribbean countries are members of the North American Numbering Plan (NANP), whose numbering resources are managed by the NANP Administrator. The overarching guidelines and procedures governing the management of numbering resources across the NANP, including area codes and central office codes, are developed by the Industry Numbering Committee (INC). The INC guidelines form the basis upon which each NANP member country develops its own national guidelines for planning, forecasting, and assigning numbering resources and defines responsibilities for its telecommunications industry. Among the INC guidelines are the [Numbering Plan Area \(NPA\) Allocation Plan and Assignment Guidelines](#) (the INC NPA Guidelines), which establish procedures for assigning NPAs, also called area codes, across all countries within the NANP.
13. In 2000, Canada acquired a pool of area codes from the NANP Administrator.² The Canadian Adjunct to the INC NPA Guidelines was developed to govern the management of this pool. In CNRE155A, the CSCN noted that all Canadian area codes in the pool will soon be assigned.
14. In CNRE155A, the CSCN recommended that Canada adopt the “on-demand” approach to acquiring new area codes that is described in the INC NPA Guidelines.
15. Commission staff previously expressed support for this proposal in a [letter](#) dated 3 February 2025. In that letter, Commission staff requested that the CSCN establish the conditions under which Canada could request additional area codes from the NANP Administrator on an as-needed basis rather than in bulk. Specifically, the CSCN was asked to engage the NANP Administrator when necessary to ensure that Canada's needs can be met through the INC NPA Guidelines, either in their current form or as modified through collaboration between the CNA and the NANP Administrator. Commission staff also asked the CSCN to submit new or revised Canada-specific numbering guidelines and procedures for the Commission's consideration.
16. In accordance with staff's request, the CSCN proposed in CNRE155A to replace the Canadian Adjunct with a new Canadian NPA Allocation Plan and Assignment Guideline (the new NPA Guideline). The proposed new NPA Guideline would outline the procedures and principles for reserving, releasing, assigning, and returning NPA codes for geographic and non-geographic use in Canada.
17. The CSCN submitted that the new NPA Guideline would meet the needs of the Canadian industry while ensuring that Canada can continue to acquire additional area codes as required, even if the

² These area codes were granted following a request from the Commission to the NANP Administrator in a [letter](#) dated 2 March 2000.

INC guidelines are amended in the future. The new NPA Guideline would align with the updated INC NPA Guidelines while remaining a standalone document should the INC NPA Guidelines diverge from Canada's current approach to accessing numbering resources.

Commission's analysis

18. The Commission considers that the CSCN's proposal to replace the Canadian Adjunct to the INC NPA Guidelines with the new Canada-specific Canadian NPA Allocation Plan and Assignment Guideline would allow area codes to be acquired as needed rather than in bulk, which would eliminate the need to acquire and maintain a fixed pool of reserved area codes. The CSCN's proposal also aligns with the Commission staff's earlier [request](#) to have the CSCN contact the NANP Administrator when necessary to ensure that Canada's needs are met.³ The CSCN's proposal, which adopts the INC NPA Guidelines' "on-demand" approach, supports the long-term health of the NANP by strictly limiting requests for new area codes to situations that require them based on industry forecasts, which will minimize the risk of area code exhaust across the NANP.
19. This new approach to acquiring area codes from the NANP Administrator renders the previous Canadian Adjunct obsolete and provides an opportunity for the CSCN to develop updated guidelines that reflect an on-demand allocation model, enhance transparency and efficiency, and orient Canadian practices towards sustaining the NANP in the long run. The new NPA Guideline provides greater flexibility and enables the Commission and the CNA to respond quickly to changing demand in coordination with the NANP Administrator. It also allows Canada to manage its numbering resources under independent, Canada-specific rules that reflect Canadian priorities and industry needs.
20. The Commission is of the view that replacing the Canadian Adjunct with the new NPA Guideline is reasonable and appropriate because it reflects developments in Canada's relationship with the NANP Administrator as it pertains to the acquisition of new area codes. Furthermore, the new NPA Guideline offers clear, updated, and Canada-specific guidance on area code management to both the CNA and the industry.

Conclusion

21. The Commission considers that the CSCN's recommendations in its consensus reports CNRE153B and CNRE155A accurately reflect the views of the telecommunications industry.
22. In light of the above, the Commission approves the CSCN's proposal to:
 - modify the IMSI Guideline as set out in CNRE153B; and

³ This "on-demand" approach was successfully executed in March 2025, when the NANP Administrator assigned area code 926 to Canada in response to a request from the CNA.

- replace the Canadian Adjunct to the INC NPA Allocation Plan and Assignment Guideline with the new Canadian NPA Allocation Plan and Assignment Guideline as set out in CNRE155A.

Secretary General