



## Special Edition – ACC News March 2011

### Editorial

This special edition of ACC News focuses solely on the Christchurch earthquake.

ACC saw firsthand the impact of the earthquake, with our clients, providers, people, property and operations all impacted. Like other organisations, we've seen the enormous resilience of Christchurch people and been part of the nationwide call to action in response.

Our initial estimates suggest ACC will receive nearly 10,000 earthquake related claims, including more than 2,000 moderate to serious injury claims. Dealing with that number of claims all at once is challenging, and it is more so when the treatment providers we rely on are, themselves, dealing with the consequences of the earthquake.

I have been repeatedly amazed by the commitment, resourcefulness and endurance of the providers we deal with. Many have stepped well outside their normal roles and that has been appreciated. For example, we asked physiotherapists in the area to help with claim lodgement and injury assessment and they were happy to do so. Home and Community Support Services and Community Nursing providers are other examples. They have been delivering services to clients under exceptionally trying conditions.

ACC is now working hard to re-establish our usual Christchurch services. In the meantime, most of the 3,000 existing claims that were being managed in Christchurch have been reallocated to ACC offices in other parts of the country. All new claims from the Christchurch area are being handled in Dunedin on a temporary basis.

If you want to discuss a Christchurch claim please phone 0800 101 996.

For Christchurch we've also taken a fairly pragmatic approach to dealing with the paperwork and administration that usually accompanies claims. It was important in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake to get people treated first, and deal with the formalities later. But sticking, if possible, to existing processes makes it easier to sort things out in the future, especially when it comes to determining our responsibility for claims and entitlements.

There's a lot to do to get things back to normal and we'll be working with the various professional bodies to ensure we keep you informed. In the meantime there is some early information below and more is available on our website [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz) and a new provider area we have set up [www.acc.co.nz/providers/canterbury-earthquake](http://www.acc.co.nz/providers/canterbury-earthquake)

If you are a provider based outside Christchurch, you may notice that our response times are down slightly, as our staff pick up extra work from Christchurch. Please bear with us. It may take some time to get back to normal. Of course urgent matters will still be attended in the normal timeframes.

## Cover for people who have developed a mental injury from the earthquake

It is likely that following the February 22 earthquake, some people will contact their doctor distressed and upset about what they have experienced. For most people, symptoms will resolve over time with help from their family and friends, and contact with support services. However, those with persistent and severe symptoms may have developed a mental injury.

ACC may be able to provide cover for a mental injury caused by the earthquake, in one of two situations:

- the client has developed a mental injury as a consequence of the physical injuries they have received (e.g. a person has suffered a depressive disorder as a result of the physical injury they've sustained, and the effect it will have on their life). Please complete the ACC5778 Mental Injury as a Consequence of Physical Injury Report, or
- the client has developed a mental injury after experiencing/witnessing the earthquake while they were at work in paid employment (e.g. a person witnessed someone trapped in their building as they were running outside during the earthquake, and suffered a mental injury as a result of that experience). Please complete the ACC5774 Work-related Mental Injury report.

In either case, if you assess a client as having the signs and symptoms of a mental injury, please complete an ACC45 as per normal, as well as the reports noted above.

The ACC5774 and ACC5778 will be available tomorrow on our website here: [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz) – type 'ACC5774' or 'ACC5778' into the 'search' field.

## Certifying time off work

With access to many GPs constrained in Christchurch, we have temporarily changed our approach to work certification so that weekly compensation for clients who cannot work due to injury can be organised quickly.

Where existing and new clients' medical certificates expired in the two weeks following the earthquake we extended weekly compensation for a further two weeks. However, we now request clients go to their GP where they are still unable to work as a consequence of their injury.

Please don't forget incapacity should be as a direct consequence of your patient's injury. If the incapacity relates to a health condition, or the patient no longer has a job to return to, it is inappropriate to provide an ACC medical certificate. We can, however, help your patient to link to assistance available from other agencies.

## New hearing aid battery ordering process

Since the earthquake, clients who no longer have access to their order forms (and who may no longer be

in Christchurch) have been asking audiologists to supply them with batteries for their hearing aids.

We would like to thank audiologists for helping out, and advise them that a temporary hearing aid battery ordering process has been implemented which should ensure clients get their batteries quickly. This will negate the demand for audiologists' supplies.

Under the new process:

- if a client asks an audiologist for batteries, the audiologist should contact ACC on 0800 101 996 and advise the client's name, battery type, number of packs and the client's temporary delivery address
- ACC will immediately process the order to the supplier Propharma, which will despatch the batteries the same day. Clients should receive delivery within a maximum of two working days.

## Payment for extra HCSS/Community nursing services

ACC would like to thank Home and Community Support Services and Community Nursing providers for delivering services to clients under such difficult circumstances.

Requests for additional service approvals should be made through our call centre on 0800 101 996, as soon as possible. Providers must state the actual services provided/claimed, and explain why services above the approved allocation, were required. If approved by ACC, a revised purchase order will be issued.

Given the difficult travelling circumstances in Christchurch, ACC will also pay actual travel expenses. Providers should invoice for actual mileage and/or travel time as part of our normal invoicing in accordance with the terms of your contract with ACC.

## Consequential conditions not generally covered

Several GPs have asked whether ACC can provide help for patients who have suffered from such conditions as cardiovascular or cerebrovascular episodes that have emerged since the Christchurch earthquake.

Generally, ACC's legislation does not cover these conditions. However, there are two exceptions. Cover is available for clients where the episodes are caused by treatment injury; or where they are caused by the application of abnormal or excessively intense physical effort or strain when performing employment tasks.

So, for example, a firefighter who climbs a stairwell and collapses as a result of a heart attack may be covered, but someone who succumbs to the stress of being in an earthquake would almost certainly not be covered. GPs are asked to bear this distinction in mind when considering whether to lodge a claim.

## Concussion services available for ACC clients

As people focus on getting through the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquake there is a possibility that people with injuries involving concussion may not yet have sought treatment.

As services are re-established and lives begin to normalise, it is possible that the impact of injury will begin to set in and people will realise they may need help.

GPs are reminded of ACC's concussion service and advised to refer clients who present with mild traumatic brain injury or post concussion syndrome.

If you believe your client fits the criteria for these conditions, please refer them to ACC using an ACC883 form. ACC will then supply this information to a provider who will facilitate the help the client needs.

Just to recap, concussion (often known as mild traumatic brain injury) is a technical term used, more commonly nowadays, in general medical contexts. Frequently defined as a head injury with a transient loss of brain function, concussion can cause a variety of physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms. There does not have to be an observed loss of consciousness.

In post-concussion syndrome, symptoms do not resolve for a significant period after a concussion and may occasionally be permanent. Symptoms may include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, anxiety, memory and attention problems, sleep problems, and irritability.

The ACC883 form is available on our website here: [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz) – type 'ACC883' into the 'search' field.

## Assistance for visitors to New Zealand

ACC provides 24-hour, seven-days-a-week injury cover for everyone in New Zealand, including visitors. This cover removes a person's right to sue for compensation for personal injury incurred while in the country.

When making a claim on behalf of an overseas visitor, please ensure you capture their New Zealand contact details as accurately as possible – especially if the client is travelling around the country. It is also helpful for us to identify any language assistance they require, so we can arrange for an interpreter to help them communicate with us.

Depending on the client's situation we may be able to help with:

- further treatment costs
- prescription costs
- other entitlements where the injury is more serious.

ACC can't provide assistance outside New Zealand, or cover things such as emergency travel home or travel for a relative. These should be covered by private travel insurance.

For more information on how ACC can help visitors to New Zealand, see the fact sheet 'Getting help if you're injured visiting our country' here: [www.acc.co.nz](http://www.acc.co.nz) – type 'ACC5736' into the 'search' field.

## Important contact information

We appreciate that communications can be difficult for vendors and providers at the moment. Here is some advice on communicating with ACC:

- For those who want to email rather than fax reports, assessments etc, use [clinical.notes@acc.co.nz](mailto:clinical.notes@acc.co.nz).

## Information updates

To help vendors and providers keep up to date with all the latest information on working with ACC during the national state of emergency, please:

- visit [www.acc.co.nz/for-providers/canterbury-earthquake](http://www.acc.co.nz/for-providers/canterbury-earthquake) for information updates
- call the Provider Help Line on 0800 222 070.