

ACC's National Serious Injury Service

Background

The National Serious Injury Service (NSIS) is a specialist unit within ACC dedicated to helping people with a significant disability following an accident. Injuries that can result in disability include:

- Spinal cord injury (tetraplegia, paraplegia, and incomplete spinal cord syndromes)
- Severe and moderate traumatic brain injury
- Multiple amputations, accidental blindness, burns to over 50% of the body, and other severe injuries resulting in a significant impairment or disability.

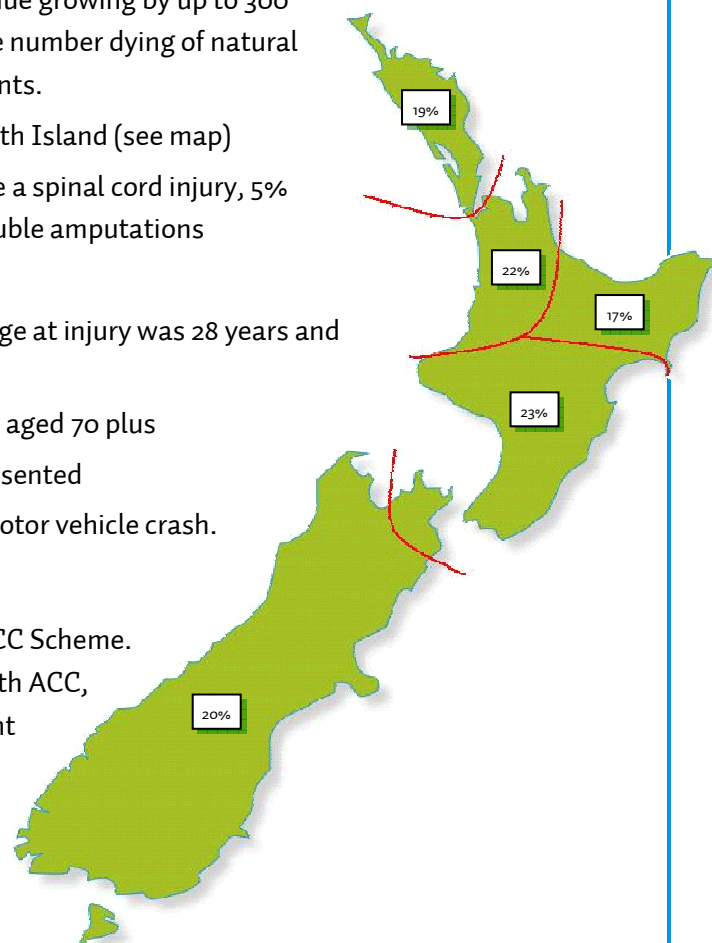
Anyone in New Zealand who has an accident resulting in these types of injuries receives help from ACC for as long as they need it, regardless of the cause of the accident.

Characteristics of serious injury clients

The current portfolio of 4,795 will continue growing by up to 300 each year for the next 20 years, until the number dying of natural causes balances the number of new clients.

- 58% live in the top half of the North Island (see map)
- 58% have a brain injury, 37% have a spinal cord injury, 5% have other severe injuries like double amputations
- 74% are male
- The portfolio is ageing: average age at injury was 28 years and the average age now is 41 years;
- 9% are aged 16 and under, 5% are aged 70 plus
- Maori are significantly over-represented
- 45% received their injuries in a motor vehicle crash.
- Under 3% are work accidents

Serious injury clients will not exit the ACC Scheme. They will have a lifelong relationship with ACC, but it is by no means the most significant relationship in clients' lives.



Serious injury clients are a small but growing group that are costly to support (see box). They receive lifelong support from ACC: in the case of children this can extend to the next 70-80 years.

Liability estimates are difficult because the quantity of support provided is the only variable under ACC's direct control: the health sector is more influential on pricing and the incidence of serious injuries has yet to be curbed through injury prevention.

Quick facts

1. Growing portfolio - currently 4,750 with 300 new clients added each year
2. \$35m each month on social & vocational rehabilitation
3. 37% of ACC's total outstanding claims liability

History

Established in July 2007, the NSIS is charged with achieving two outcomes:

1. Enable serious injury clients to rebuild their lives and take part in the social and working life of their communities
2. Achieve a sustainable rate of growth in ACC's liability for costs of supporting serious injury clients.

Prior to the establishment of the NSIS, the growth in the average cost of a serious injury claim was significantly outstripping the growth in the size of the portfolio¹. Despite increasing expenditure, employment and community participation rates for were substantially lower than international benchmarks.

Today, the NSIS comprises 105 service delivery staff working out of ACC branches throughout the country. Individual performance management is the responsibility of 16 Team Managers. Accountability for business results is spread across five regionally-based managers reporting to a national Service Delivery Manager. Strategic, technical, and administrative support is provided by 10 staff mostly located in Wellington.

A strategy built around person-centred planning and underpinned by objective assessment methods, specialist case management, and access to short-term outcomes-focused alternatives to human assistance has produced tangible results in less than 3 years. At the end of 2009 the growth in average claim costs has slowed to around 3% per annum and even lower growth rates are being targeted for the end of 2012. In December 2009, \$57 million was shaved off ACC's liability for serious injury social rehabilitation costs.

ACC continues to listen to the needs of clients, families, and carer through the Serious Injury Advisory Group, which meets three times a year to give ACC advice on matters of importance to people living with a serious injury. Representatives on the group are ACC clients and carers.

¹ Annual growth rates in the average cost per serious injury claim were; 4.2% in 2005, 5.8% in 2006, and 14.5% in 2007

Specialist case management

NSIS Support and Service Coordinators work exclusively with serious injury clients (previously these clients were managed by ACC's generalist case managers). Since its inception the NSIS has employed specialist case managers (called Support Coordinators and Service Coordinators). Recruited for their knowledge and experience of disability, Support and Service Coordinators also receive on-going training in contemporary disability practice, enabling them to assist clients, partners, and families with adjusting to life following a serious injury.

In the NSIS, case management revolves around the following functions:

- Engaging specialist independent assessors to determine the client's injury-related needs for support so they can lead an everyday life
- Putting in place services and supports to meet the client's injury-related needs – in most cases these are provided from a mix of sources: the client's family, from the community, from the school or workplace, and from ACC-funded services
- Engaging the client, family members and others involved in their care in an individualised planning process to develop achievable employment/community participation and independence goals
- Facilitating access to specialist services to support the client to achieve their goals

Support Coordinators work with clients whose needs for injury-related support have yet to be determined or are changing. Support Coordinators have comparatively small case listings of up to 30 clients. Service Coordinators work with clients who are many years post-injury and whose support needs are relatively stable. Service Coordinators have larger case listing of between 70-100 clients.

Support/Service Coordinators as well as clients are allocated to one of five specialist "work streams". The work streams are representative of either the goals that clients are working towards such as getting a job, or the unique circumstances they face such as a families with a child that has a disability.

Supports funded by ACC for serious injury clients

Emergency treatment (acute in-patient services) and subsequent rehabilitation at spinal units or brain injury facilities are funded by ACC. When clients return to their community, specialist independent assessors are engaged to determine clients' injury-related need for support. Supports needed to manage ordinary tasks of daily living typically include:

- Rehabilitative therapy such as physiotherapy or speech language therapy
- Pharmaceuticals and medical consumables, such as catheters for bladder management
- Equipment such as wheelchairs and bed hoists
- Housing modifications such as wider hallways, access ramps, and wet-area bathrooms

- Transport assistance such as mobility taxis or the purchase and modification of a vehicle
- Human assistance (attendant care) ranging from help with medications, personal hygiene, and grooming to household chores and child care.

These supports are funded by ACC, but delivered by contracted providers².

Once basic supports and services are in place, NSIS Support or Service Coordinators engage clients and their families in a planning process to develop achievable independence and participation goals. A range of specialised services can be accessed to assist clients to achieve their goals. Support or services provided exclusively to serious injury clients are:

- Supported Activities Programme – a day programme provided to groups of serious injury clients providing social interaction and respite for families providing attendant care
- Supported Living – short-term intensive interventions that enable clients to become more independent in their daily living by providing planning, encouragement, and guidance on accessing agencies such as Housing NZ or educational institutions and community facilities such as libraries and swimming pools
- Supported Employment – a vocational intervention specialising in helping people with disabilities to find and maintain paid employment
- School to Work Transition – a vocational intervention specifically for school leavers to help them plan and realise their further education and employment aspirations
- Assistance Dogs – provision of dogs specially trained to perform many of the daily living tasks that would otherwise be performed by an attendant carer (such as opening doors or fetching a telephone or dropped pen).

Serious injury clients are also significant users of the following services:

- Training for Independence – short term interventions to provide functional improvements through therapy or specific skills training such as learning to use an assistive communications device
- Residential Support Services – medical care and therapy provided in a residential facility - typically a nursing home or aged care facility (note, New Zealand has limited age-appropriate residential care facilities for people with disabilities).

Serious injury clients can also access any of the other social and vocational rehabilitation services available to all ACC clients. Of all the support and services that ACC funds for serious injury clients, human assistance or attendant care is by far the most significant in terms of annual cost and long-term liability

² In the case of attendant care, this can be provided by agencies or through private arrangements (frequently family members). In the case of private arrangements, ACC funding is delivered directly to the client and they make their own contracting arrangements for the provision of attendant care.

Regional NSIS contacts

