

4 November 2009

Hon Nick Smith
Minister of ACC
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Mr Smith,

ACC clinical pathway for sexual abuse and sexual assault counselling

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is appalled by the changes to ACC funding rules for survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault, which came into force on October 27.

The new rules undermine the severity of sexual abuse and re-victimise people who, by no fault of their own, have been the victim of a serious and traumatising crime.

NCWNZ has policy in place that "supports flexibility of access by victims of sexual violence to fully subsidised counselling and therapy by registered practitioners".

We believe that the bureaucracy involved in the new system will severely limit the number of people who have access to counselling, as well as acting as a disincentive to those seeking help.

The new requirement that sexual abuse survivors must visit three separate ACC therapists for diagnoses, before possibly being eligible for counselling support, is invasive and not in the best interest of the survivor.

NCWNZ does not support the newly implemented guidelines, but instead supports the recommended changes laid out in the recently released Ministry of Women's Affairs report, *Responding to sexual violence: Environmental scan of New Zealand agencies (September 2009)*, which sets out the many changes that are needed:

- The cost of services is a barrier; the counselling should be fully funded by ACC.
- ACC should assist with the costs of transport/childcare necessary to support victims to access appropriate services.
- Currently those sexually abused/assaulted outside of New Zealand but now residing in New Zealand do not qualify for ACC. This means that ethnic minorities, migrants and refugee groups are unable to access the counselling services necessary for recovery. New Zealand citizens going on their OE, who may fall victim to a sex crime off-shore after six months, are also ineligible for ACC support.
- Subsistent funding of counsellors has created the shortfall in availability of services - hence unreasonable waiting lists exist.

- Rape crisis centres and other community-based organisations specialising in sexual abuse are not sufficiently resourced, hence the limited geographical coverage and inability to meet demand.
- Under the current system, the delay in gaining approval from ACC for assistance to partially meet the costs of treatment has been alarmingly protracted. This puts extra pressure on victims and can lead to increased fear and anxiety.

NCWNZ asks that the independent clinical review of the new guidelines, that you have announced is necessary, be undertaken immediately. NCWNZ also requests that the ACC clinical process for survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault be rolled back to the system used prior to 27 October 2009. This needs to remain in place until the review is completed.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bang
National President

Cc: Rgt Hon John Key, Prime Minister
Hon Pansy Wong, Minister of Women's Affairs
Lynne Pillay, Labour Associate Spokesperson for Justice (Victims Rights)
Sue Moroney, Labour Spokesperson for Women's Affairs
Catherine Delahunty, Greens Spokesperson for Women's Affairs
Eric Medcalf, NZAC Ethics Chair
Dr Kim McGregor, Chair of Tauwiwi Caucus, TOAH-NNEST