



**NZ College of Clinical Psychologists**

*Te Whare Wānanga o te Mātauranga Hinengaro*

6<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for ACC

Dear Minister Doocey,

**Re: Shortages of clinical psychologists prevents effective rehabilitation of ACC claimants.**

Many congratulations on your own re-election to parliament and National's overall election victory. We're pleased to welcome you to government and, personally, to your ACC portfolio.

We will be writing to you separately in your role as Minister for Mental Health (and Associate Minister for Health), however we particularly wanted to draw your attention to a number of issues within ACC that are of relevance to both these portfolios. These issues are particularly important in this context, as they currently limit ACC's ability to offer effective rehabilitation, preventing many claimants from returning to work and to normal functioning.

**ACC relies heavily on psychologists to rehabilitate claimants.**

Evidence-based psychological rehabilitation is vital to help claimants return to work and normal functioning, as well as decreasing the economic burden upon tax payers. A large number of ACC service contracts require input from clinical psychologists. Many psychologists are employed within physical health settings, including ACC-funded Brain and Spinal rehabilitation, concussion services, chronic pain management, non-acute inpatient rehabilitation and training for independence contracts.

Most commonly, however, psychologists are employed in the rehabilitation of clients with 'mental injuries' under Section 21 and 21A of the current Act, where the vast majority of treatment is undertaken by registered psychologists, through the Psychological Services and Integrated Service for Sensitive Claims contracts.

**There are currently not enough psychology professionals to meet demand.**

The long-term shortages of clinical psychologists in New Zealand have been well documented over recent years, with all of the [major psychology associations](#) recently calling for urgent attention to this issue. The shortage of psychologists has particularly impacted on ACC services, where it has been reported that [psychologists had to turn down more 10,000 referrals in 2021, due to lack of capacity](#). According to data from the NZ Psychologists' Board, ACC currently employs approximately 10% of the psychology workforce. We were pleased to hear your own commitments, prior to the election to [double the number of training places available for clinical psychologists](#).

## **ACC no longer supports the training of psychologists within their services**

As you are aware, a significant aspect of training is the 'internship' year, where students undertake supervised work within a health service. Intern psychologists are registered professionals and are largely autonomous, however they require some oversight from a qualified practitioner.

Intern psychologists were regularly employed by ACC for many years and this was a significant source of internship training and treatment of ACC claimants, as well as preparing clinicians for work in the ACC system.

In 2021, however, ACC made the decision to end the funding for the work of interns on their contracts, despite strong protests from the sector. This has added to the significant shortage of training places for psychologists and continues to limit the growth of a workforce that is fit for practice in ACC.

Despite being a large consumer of the clinical psychology workforce, ACC currently does not contribute to the training of psychologists, which is largely funded by Health and Education budgets.

## **Our organisation is keen to support the government in developing a fit-for-purpose ACC system.**

Clinical psychologists are experts in the delivery of rehabilitation approaches and we are keen to support the growth and development of the workforce available to ACC, as well as ensuring that ACC legislation and provision remains effective and evidence-based.

We would very much appreciate the opportunity to engaging with with your Ministry on workfore and other matters during the course of this parliament.



Yours sincerely,

Dr Paul Skirrow

Strategic Advisor NZCCP



Angus Maxwell

President NZCCP



Tricia Stuart

President NZCCP