

22 July 2010

Rt Hon John Key
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Prime Minister

“Half a hearing aid doesn’t work”

Because you are a member of the New Zealand Parliament that has changed the way ACC provides rehabilitation to people who are hearing impaired or deaf, I am writing to explain how these changes will affect the people that you represent in your electorate.

Those of us with hearing disabilities, and the professionals who work with us, believe that if you understood the real impact of these changes, you would not have allowed them to proceed, because they are inhumane.

The NFD and audiologists have numerous cases of clients with injury damage whose professional and personal lives have suffered significant impact.

The latest regulation change ACC is planning – the introduction of part-charges – has the potential to deny tens of thousands of New Zealanders the rehabilitation they are entitled to and I beg you to read the enclosed information to learn why half a hearing aid is inhumane and ***“not the New Zealand way”*** of caring for those who are injured and vulnerable. For the full facts check: www.nfd.org.nz

Yours sincerely



Louise Carroll QSO, JP, GDPPA, MPM
Chief Executive

1. What is the issue?

ACC is introducing part-charges for hearing injuries that will deny New Zealanders rehabilitation if they cannot pay their “share”

This is not the New Zealand way

2. Why should you care?

Because it affects your constituents – it could affect your whanau
Because it is discriminatory – against an injury group, a disability group, an age group
Because it is the start of a slippery slope of changes that will undermine a world-leading scheme
But most alarmingly, because ACC is re-shaping New Zealand’s culture of caring and infringing human rights

3. What do we want you to do?

Please read this
Please support a moratorium on the implementation of ACC changes to the management of noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) until NZ University research findings on NIHL are available (late 2010)
Please meet with us and listen to what we have to say – we can give wise counsel as we too want to do what is best for New Zealand and New Zealanders.

THE FACTS

4. The Case

- 4.1 ACC says that in “fixing” noise-injured hearing it is fixing other conditions like age-related hearing loss:
- Fact: any collateral benefit the rehabilitation has for other hearing loss comes at no extra cost to ACC
 - Fact: ACC currently provides rehabilitation to only 42% of the claims it receives.
- 4.2 ACC says it’s cutting services for hearing injuries because future costs are unsustainable but:
- ACC bases its future projections on historical figures
 - Research funded by ACC and HRC is currently being undertaken in New Zealand to understand more about the level of noise induced hearing loss and its prevention in New Zealand. This should be allowed to be reported on to inform the development of policy.

5. The Science

- 5.1 ACC is trying to assign hearing loss, by percentage, to injury, age, and other causes but:
- University of Auckland scientists say there is no reliable test to separate hearing damage and age-related hearing loss retrospectively
 - Research funded by ACC and HRC is currently being undertaken in New Zealand to understand more about the level of noise induced hearing loss and its prevention in New Zealand and these findings should be allowed to inform policy development.

6. The Victims

- 6.1 The people hit by these changes are those have spent a considerable time working in noise toxic environments and:
- Hearing protection was rarely thought of or provided
 - Many agreed, in 1974 or thereafter, to give up their right to sue for injury, in return for ACC cover
 - After decades of work, they can’t hear their spouses, they can’t hear their grandchildren, they can’t hear in social situations; they are often lonely and isolated
 - Just as your fingers don’t grow back if they are chopped off in an accident, your noise-damaged hearing doesn’t return either
 - They need rehabilitation now – hearing aids and audiologist care – which can make a real difference in their lives
 - **These are our people and New Zealand should be valuing them and looking after them but we are not.**

7. The Hurdles

- 7.1 People with hearing that is damaged at work are now required to pass the following hurdles:
- **Threshold:**
 - They must have a total hearing loss of more than 6%
 - It requires a significant loss in the high tones attacked by toxic- noise to get a total loss of 6%
 - **Age scale:**
 - Every male aged 57+ and female aged 65+ is deemed to have a hearing loss according to a pre-set scale – whether they actually have that loss or not. This “loss” is then subtracted from the overall hearing loss the ACC assessors find, and is used to limit the percentage of hearing damage ACC will support

- Because of the age scale, a person who has e.g. 15% noise damaged hearing at 56, will have only 11.6% noise damaged hearing loss at age 66, and only 5.4% noise damaged loss at 76 even if their hearing loss does not change over this time period.

- **Upgrades:**

- The age scale can result in the person getting hearing aids at 56 and then not being eligible to have them upgraded or repaired as they get older.

7.2 Ministry of Health:

- Those who fail to get support from ACC must turn to an overloaded and under-funded Ministry of Health hearing aid scheme where the maximum subsidy for someone aged over 65 is \$500 per aid

8. ACC information

8.1 In presenting its changes to the public, parts of ACC's message have become clouded:

- ACC Minister Dr Nick Smith told Parliament on May 17 the cost of hearing injury claims to ACC was \$80m but that figure is in fact a projection for 2014
- The current figure is closer to \$61m - this is why you need to meet with us – to hear the facts

8.2 The number of ACC claims is continuing to rise but ACC's figures show the number of claims received to date in 2010 are less than those received in 2009 – this is why you need to meet with us – to hear the facts

8.3 Dr Smith told Parliament on May 17 audiologists were sending claimants' hearing aid batteries without regard for need, and by changing this practice ACC had cut battery costs 45%.
But the truth is that ACC distributes hearing aid batteries and did this automatically for 15 years. It changed to a request-driven service only after repeated advice from audiologists to do this to save on wastage – this is why you need to meet with us – to hear the facts

9. Prevention

- Hearing injury by definition is preventable
- A core part of ACC's role is to prevent injury as well as rehabilitate it
- ACC is not doing enough in this area – check out building sites or drop into any nightclub
- If ACC wants to cut the costs of hearing injury, this is where it should be focusing, not denying rehabilitation to those who can't afford their "share"

10. It is not the New Zealand way

- It is not the New Zealand way to deny disability rehabilitation and support to those with limited funds
- It is not the New Zealand way to penalise and discriminate against our elderly because of their age
- It is not the New Zealand way to abandon the principles of our world-leading scheme that was accepted in good faith by Kiwis and now they are being abandoned
- It is not the New Zealand way to allow an insurance/rehabilitation organisation to determine our culture – and you can do something about this.

It **is** the New Zealand way when you see what is wrong to do something about it, which is why I am writing to you. What will you do now that you know the facts?

- Please support a moratorium on the implementation of ACC changes to the management of noise induced hearing loss (NIHL) until NZ University research findings on NIHL are available (2010).
- Please meet with us and listen to what we have to say – we can give wise counsel as we too want to do what is best for New Zealand and New Zealanders.

Read the full story and get the other half of the hearing aid at: www.nfd.org.nz