

# Accident Compensation (Maternal Birth Injury and Other Matters) Amendment Bill

## February 2022



New Zealand Council Of  
Christian Social Services

Contact Name:	Nikki Hurst Melanie Wilson
Organisation Name:	New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS)
Organisation description:	<p>The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Accident Compensation (Maternal Birth Injury and Other Matters) Amendment Bill.</p> <p>NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.</p> <p>Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 250 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. We believe in working to achieve a just and compassionate society for all, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website <a href="http://www.nzccss.org.nz">www.nzccss.org.nz</a>.</p>

### Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

We support the kaupapa to provide more equitable coverage for injuries covered by the Accident Compensation Scheme by extending cover to include a range of maternal birth injuries. NZCCSS recognises the negative impact such injuries have on maternal perinatal physical and mental health and the flow-on effect of this on whanau and relationships. Extending ACC support is likely to lead to improved health outcomes for women and is one step towards addressing gender inequalities in current Accident Compensation legislation.

### Taunakitanga | Recommendations

Our main points are:

#### 1. Improve health outcomes for women

Aotearoa's public health system and the Accident Compensation Scheme currently fail to deliver adequate or timely perinatal care to an estimated 17,000 – 18,000<sup>1</sup> mothers each year who experience the types of injuries that this Amendment proposes to cover. This number is equivalent to approximately 30% of mothers for the 2021 year. Birth injuries and associated issues such as incontinence cause women pain and discomfort, affect their ability to maintain a healthy lifestyle through exercise and often also affect their sexual functioning. To further

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<sup>1</sup> NZ Government,

complicate the physical challenges these injuries present, birth trauma is a known risk factor for postnatal depression and anxiety, conditions that are currently estimated to affect 12-18% of mothers in Aotearoa.<sup>2</sup>

Under the current system, unless mothers can afford to access care via the private health system, they are unlikely to receive support within the recommended timeframes for follow up care, may struggle to access relevant services close to home and in many cases do not receive adequate follow up care at all. Ideally, we would see women in New Zealand entitled to publicly-funded post-birth physiotherapy sessions. In the meantime, this legislation is a no-brainer in terms of improving health outcomes for mothers given the prevalence of these types of injuries, the size of the population affected and the secondary psychological and relational challenges that can result from such injuries.

**Recommendation Proposal 1:** We recommend this Amendment be enacted in order to improve health outcomes for wahine and their whānau.

## 2. Comprehensive review of perinatal care needed

This Amendment is likely to have a significant positive impact on maternal mental health. However, more needs to be done to support mothers in this area. We know that untreated postnatal depression and anxiety has a significant impact on attachment, relationships and the whānau environment. Sadly, in some cases it leads to suicide – the leading cause of maternal death in Aotearoa.<sup>3</sup> We are pleased to see greater investment in culturally appropriate maternal mental health support being rolled out for Māori, Pacific and Asian mothers as part of the Maternity Action Plan. We believe more widespread care in the way of screening; service provision and education are critical to enable whanau and tamariki to thrive.<sup>4</sup>

**Recommendation Proposal 2:** We recommend that the Government continue to invest in the provision of more comprehensive maternal mental health services for low-medium risk women as well as high risk populations.

## 3. Address gender bias in Accident Compensation legislation

NZCCSS endorses this Amendment as a much-needed step towards reducing some of the gender bias evident in the ACC system. Currently, whilst a woman with severe injuries may be able to access follow-up care through the public health system, usually many months or even years post-birth, the health system does not provide for lost earnings should she be unable to work as a result of her injuries, or practical support such as in home help. Ideally, we would see a greater overhaul of the Accident Compensation legislation that is more equitable in recognising the paid and unpaid labour contributions of women in society. This Amendment is a step in the right direction and will have a significant impact on the lives of many women and their whanau.

**Recommendation Proposal 3:** We strongly urge that this Amendment form part of an ongoing review into improving the gender bias inherent in Accident Compensation legislation.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Health, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Fourteenth Annual Report of the Perinatal and Maternal Mortality Review Committee, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Maternal Mental Health Service Provision in NZ - Stocktake, Ministry of Health, 2021