



Wellington, New Zealand



New Zealand's ACC becomes IDMSC Certified – the Country's First

April 18, the IDMSC's representative in Australasia, Alan Clayton, travelled to Wellington, New Zealand to present the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) with the certificate that signifies its newly minted status as the first IDMSC Certified organization in the country. It's an accomplishment of which ACC's Chair of the Board Ross Wilson is justifiably proud. He credits the organization's high score on the Consensus Based Disability Management Audit to teamwork and dedication to best practices. And the ACC is setting an example for other employers across the country.

"One of the things that has made ACC's programme successful to date has been our commitment to be a leader for the management of disability in the workplace. That commitment has been demonstrated through a dedicated team, participation as an accredited employer under ACC's Partnership Programme (to Tertiary Level) and the development of a holistic approach to employee safety and well-being," explains Wilson.

The Accident Compensation Corporation is the Crown entity that administers New Zealand's accident compensation scheme providing no-fault personal injury coverage to all New Zealand citizens, residents and temporary visitors to the country. The scheme is unique in the world in that it provides coverage for both work-related and non-work-related injuries.

Along with its mandate to prevent injury, ACC's pledge is to "provide the best treatment and care if injury occurs, and to quickly rehabilitate people back to work or independence at a price that offers high value to levy payers and all New Zealanders."

Wilson emphasizes the need to employ best practices that deliver good value. "ACC is a unique organisation in that it provides disability management and return-to-work services for all New Zealanders when affected by injury. ACC therefore needs to ensure its disability management practices are robust and pragmatic. More generally, employers' management and practice towards disability management in New Zealand is still developing. Staff rights, however, are well defined within legislation."

The New Zealand economy is based around the primary, services and manufacturing industries. Service industries (such as tourism) account for two-thirds of the nation's GDP and a similar percentage of the workforce. Most of the remainder of the workforce is employed in the primary sector (for example, agriculture, forestry, fishing), or in manufacturing industries based on primary processing (such as food and timber products). Consequently, the workforce has a strong component of semi-skilled or unskilled labour.

Wilson notes, "The challenges for return to work are greatest in manual/labouring roles where alternative duties and/or roles are less available."



Engaging Employers

In April 2007, ACC secured five-year licence agreements for curriculum, professional certifications and auditing program standards through NIDMAR for New Zealand and since then has been busy laying the foundations for a proposed whole-of-country implementation.

“ACC has decided to take a wider leadership role for New Zealand. This includes engaging with employers and employees about the value of developing a broader disability management framework. The NIDMAR approach provides the opportunity to build collaborative relationships across both government and non-government organisations that can focus on better outcomes for those affected by disability or illness in the workplace,” says Wilson, who adds that the process of engagement is well underway and will continue.

Graeme Osborne, ACC’s General Manager, Information Management, reports that an Interim Implementation Steering Group has been established at ACC with members from business, unions, and government agencies.

“The group is responsible for setting the direction for, and overseeing, the New Zealand implementation of products under the NIDMAR licences. The operation of the group is in keeping with NIDMAR’s consensus-based approach,” he explains. Currently, Osborne chairs the group. Ultimately, however, it is envisaged that the group will become an external, stakeholder-led body.

In October and November 2007, three stakeholder consultation forums were held around the country to discuss NIDMAR’s programs and identify issues for the sector. Meetings with providers and others in the wider disability management sector are continuing.

Endorsing Certification

ACC purchased the NIDMAR licenses with the belief, says Wilson, “that the disability management sector in New Zealand would benefit from a more cohesive approach to the development of professionals and practitioners operating in the sector.”



*Ross Wilson, Chair of the Board
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Both he and Osborne agree ACC staff members across the country have shown keen interest in the NIDMAR approach, and it is expected a group of experienced case managers and clinical advisors will sit the certification examination in 2008. As was reported in the IDMSC Communiqué of December 2007, six medical professionals on ACC’s clinical advisory team achieved the Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP) designation last year.

Wilson lauds the value of the designations. “By undertaking the certification, it has confirmed to ACC that the disability management programmes are well understood and practised across the organisation. It provides assurance that the ongoing work programme is on the right track and we will continue to implement this. Having six senior medical practitioners achieve certification provides ACC with credible champions who will continue to promote the value of both the NIDMAR training programme and the IDMSC professional certification to other staff as well as with colleagues in the wider sector.”



“Acing” the Audit

ACC, along with five of New Zealand’s larger employers, took part in a pilot of the Consensus Based Disability Management Audit (CBDMA) tool between December 2007 and February 2008. To achieve the “IDMSC Certified” designation requires a score of 80 percent or more on the CBDMA audit.

Wilson advises the overall pilot results have been positive. The “pilot” employers represented a diverse range of industries, including single site and multiple sites in both metropolitan and provincial centres. The results were in a reasonably tight band, which is very pleasing. Three organisations achieved a pass rate, including ACC. This provides a positive platform to move forward and promote the audit tool with other employers. All of the employers had areas they scored particularly well in and similarly had areas that have been noted for improvement.”

Having gone through the audit process, Wilson has tips for other organizations undergoing a measure of the effectiveness of their disability management programs.



Alan Clayton, IDMSC Representative, presents ACC with their “IDMSC Certified” certificate on April 18 in Wellington. ACC is the first New Zealand organization to receive the certification. Also pictured are members of ACC’s Executive Leadership Team who have leadership roles in the programme implementation. L-R: Denise Cosgrove, ACC General Manager, People and Business Services; Graeme Osborne, ACC General Manager, Information Management; Jan White, ACC Chief Executive; Alan Clayton, IDMSC Representative; Keith McLea, ACC General Manager, Levy and Scheme Management.

“Having the opportunity to carry out a briefing prior to the audit provides an opportunity for the parties to understand the process, what information is going to be required and to ensure there is appropriate commitment. ACC found that the staff working at the level of health and safety or wellness managers within organisations generally understood the requirements. However, during the pilot audits, it was very useful that ACC’s senior management – Jan White and Keith McLea – on different occasions engaged directly with the senior management of some employers to help them understand the business benefits of undertaking the audit.”

On the other hand, Wilson continues, “Similarly, building a relationship with union officials also prepares the groundwork. For example, ACC has not relied heavily on the use of staff surveys in its usual audits so it was important for unions to understand the rationale for these and how the information gathered helps inform the outcome.”

While ACC is New Zealand’s first employer to become IDMSC Certified, the organisation is not resting on its laurels. “There are still areas for improvement and following on from the recommendations in our CBDMA audit report, we have a number of initiatives underway”, Wilson says. “We are fairly strong in injury management and we will now be looking to broaden this further to enhance our illness management as well. We’ve looked at the Ford, Germany model, and we have just established a Return-to-Work Committee to review unplanned staff absences of over 30 cumulative days in any given year.

“Finally, we’ll also be making enhancements to our safety and well-being reporting so that we have a better idea of both the direct and indirect costs to the Corporation arising from all unplanned absences”.