

ACC chair says scheme in great state

New Zealand's world-beating ACC scheme is in great shape, with rising customer and public satisfaction levels, as well as being on track to become self-funding by 2014, says chair Ross Wilson, who took on the job at the end of last year.

Despite the good news, uncertainty surrounds the scheme's future. Last year, National confirmed its policy to "open the scheme to competition", in effect a partial privatisation.

The party has since promised a moratorium on privatisation in any first term, but is staying silent on what exactly this means for ACC.

It is understood that Australian insurance companies are interested in taking over the most profitable parts of the scheme, leaving the state to fund the rest.

In the meantime, an independent report commissioned by the ACC board has found the scheme, with its current government monopoly, performs as well or better than most other comparable structures worldwide.

Research by PriceWaterhouseCooper found that workers and employers paid cheaper premiums and received better cover. For example, in New Zealand, workers pay on average 78 cents in every \$100 toward their compensation scheme, but in Australia the figure is \$2 per \$100.

Children, older people and sports people, who are often excluded from private schemes, are also covered by ACC.

Ross, formerly head of the Council of Trade Unions, had been deputy chair of ACC in the late 1980s.

"It's a far better organisation than it was in the 1980s. From a governance point of view, the systems are particularly good – the way claims are filed and the speed at which they're handled. It's a more efficient and focused organisation," he says.

Several new initiatives, driven by chief executive Dr Jan White who's been in the job just over two years, are also exciting, he says. These include a new rehabilitation framework, a more effective injury prevention strategy, and a special claims unit for serious and long term injury.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the release of the Woodhouse Report, which founded today's ACC scheme. A symposium on ACC, attended by Sir Owen Woodhouse, has been held by Auckland University's law faculty. Symposium proceedings are to be published.

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