

Major and systemic motor vehicle assessment delays by Suncorp Group: VACC

29 February – Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) body repair members claim the Suncorp Group of companies delay assessing customers' accident damaged motor vehicles by up to five months.

This not only causes a significant cash-flow problem for small business owners and inconveniences motorists, but it seems Suncorp chooses when customers and repairers jump the vehicle assessment queue. Smash repair businesses report Suncorp motor vehicle assessors refuse to attend and complete assessments and opt for over-the-phone intimidation tactics to force repairers to accept repair costs prior to sighting the insurer's assessment.

"On average, an accident damaged motor vehicle should take no longer than five working days for an insurer to assess once a repairer provides an estimate. Suncorp Group takes anywhere from three weeks to five months to return an assessment and, in the meantime, the customer and repairer are in limbo," said VACC CEO Geoff Gwilym.

The Australian Financial Complaints Authority recently reported insurance claim handling delays was the top issue across all complaints, with a recorded increase of 76 per cent. Worse still, this does not account for the internal complaints customers lodge to their insurer.

General insurance complaints rose 50 per cent to 27,924 in 2022-23.

"Many insurance companies don't meet their legal obligations when customers most need their support," said Mr Gwilym.

"VACC is aware of cases where Suncorp Group companies tell their customers that assessments are six to eight weeks away, but they can forego an assessment wait time if the customer attends a Suncorp repairer."

Recently, GIO told a customer that if they wished to use a particular repairer, the assessment wouldn't happen for two months. However, if they choose a GIO repairer, the assessment and repair would occur immediately.

"Suncorp must address their systemic failures and operate fairly and transparently with customers and repairers. It's unfair to consumers and bad for business. Suncorp Group needs to improve," said Mr Gwilym.

"Making customers wait five months for a vehicle assessment and authorisation is unacceptable. If staffing is an issue for insurance companies, then the simple message is 'fix it'. Either hire and train more motor vehicle assessors or use external independent assessing firms."

ENDS

The Suncorp Group includes AAMI, GIO, Shannons, Bingle, APIA and Vero.

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Founded in 1918, the Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce (VACC) represents over 5000 businesses in Victoria and Tasmania who employ more than 50,000 people. Member businesses range from new and used vehicle dealers, repairers, vehicle servicing, parts and component wholesale/retail and distribution and aftermarket manufacture, tyre dealers and automotive dismantlers and recyclers. VACC develops the future workforce, employing 500 apprentices and trainees through its group apprenticeship scheme, and maintains memberships with the Motor Trades Association of Australia and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and contributes to the national policy debate through these leading industry associations.