

Plain language summary

Cabinet paper: Public Consultation – Draft New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy

Disclaimer: This summary is produced by Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People.

This is a summary of a Cabinet paper from the Minister for Disability Issues. The paper asks Cabinet to allow the New Zealand Sign Language Board (the Board) to share a draft New Zealand Sign Language Strategy (NZSL Strategy) with New Zealanders and get their advice and opinions on it (to consult).

You can see the full paper and other alternate formats at www.whaikaha.govt.nz/releases (see Consultation on the New Zealand Sign Language Strategy).

Information on the NZSL Strategy consultation can be found on www.nzsl.govt.nz.

Summary

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is the preferred language of many Deaf people.

The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 (NZSL Act) made NZSL one of New Zealand's official languages. Despite this, the Deaf community still have problems accessing services and community spaces using NZSL. This impacts on Deaf people's quality of life and means they cannot fully participate in society.

The Board plans to release a new NZSL Strategy for 2025 – 2030 but wants to know what Deaf people, and other New Zealanders, think of the Strategy first.

Information about the draft strategy

The NZSL Strategy has a simple vision – **“New Zealand Sign Language everywhere, every day”** – which sets out a goal to integrate NZSL into everyday life for both Deaf and hearing people.

The NZSL Strategy adopts two ways to achieve this goal:

- **Revitalisation**, actions aimed at ensuring that NZSL survives for the Deaf and hard of hearing community
- **Integration**, actions aimed at ensuring the language is used in everyday contexts by the general population (including

government agencies), who can support NZSL to thrive.

Under these two approaches, the NZSL Strategy sets out five priority areas:

- Support and enable deaf and hard of hearing children / tamariki and their families and whānau to learn and use NZSL
- Get better data so government knows more information about NZSL users' lives (including Turi Māori)
- Enhance the status, capability, and capacity of NZSL learning and use in New Zealand
- Improve attitude, acquisition, and use of NZSL across public service
- Enhance the status of Turi / Deafhood and celebrate NZSL across society and cultures.

Information about the public consultation

The paper recommends consultation on the draft NZSL Strategy begins on 22 April 2025 and closes on 2 June 2025.

The consultation process will be open to everyone. However, the Deaf community will have multiple opportunities to share their views, including by using NZSL.

There will be specific events and communications asking the Deaf community, Turi Māori and Deaf sector stakeholders for their feedback.

What will happen after the public consultation

After the consultation, people who work at the Ministry of Disabled People will develop action plans. They will also find data and information so that the impact of actions can be measured.

Currently, the public sector is not doing everything it needs to under the NZSL Act. Government agencies need to develop NZSL capability plans, aimed at meeting the needs of the Deaf community using NZSL. Government agencies would also report on progress on NZSL use or service availability in their organisations in their annual reports.

The NZSL Board will update the Minister on progress on delivering the NZSL Strategy as part of its annual report. The Minister will also report back to Cabinet on a yearly basis on progress on delivering the NZSL Strategy.

The Ministry of Disabled People is also working with the Board to plan how New Zealand can

celebrate the 20th anniversary of the NZSL Act in 2026.

Other matters in the Cabinet paper

In 2023, Cabinet agreed to change the NZSL Act to strengthen the Board's governance role. The former Minister for Disability Issues decided not to go ahead with the amendments. The paper asked Cabinet to stop the amendments.

Instead of law changes, the Ministry of Disabled People's officials have taken steps to build the governance expertise of the Board and have established a Turi Māori advisory group to support the Board. The refresh of the NZSL Strategy also reflects work to improve the uptake and use of NZSL.

In December 2024, Alternate Formats moved to the Ministry of Disabled People from the Ministry of Social Development. The Ministry of Disabled People is looking at how to support the service and improve how it works. This will involve the Ministry's officials working with and supporting providers to improve their ability to meet the needs of government agencies.

Recommendations

The Minister for Disability Issues asked for Cabinet to:

- agree to a six-week consultation process for the draft NZSL Strategy, beginning on 22 April 2025
- approve the draft NZSL Strategy for release as part of the consultation process
- note the Minister for Disability Issues will report back following the public consultation, seeking approval for the Board to release the final NZSL Strategy
- note that following release of the final NZSL Strategy, officials from the Ministry of Disabled People will work with other agencies to develop action plans for the NZSL Strategy and to develop NZSL-related indicators
- agree that government agencies will report on NZSL use or service available as part of their annual reports
- agree that the Minister for Disability Issues will report back to Cabinet on a yearly basis on progress on delivering the NZSL Strategy

- agree to withdraw the decisions to amend the NZSL Act made in 2023
- note that the Ministry of Disabled People is looking at how to stabilise and improve the Alternate Formats service.

End of Public Consultation – Draft New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy