



Cabinet paper – Release of the New Zealand Sign Language Strategy



Published: February 2026

Before you start



This is a long document.



It can be hard for some people to read a document this long.



Some things you can do to make it easier are:

- read it a few pages at a time
- set aside some quiet time to look at it
- have someone read it with you to support you to understand it.



What you will find in here

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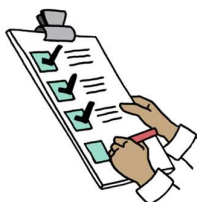
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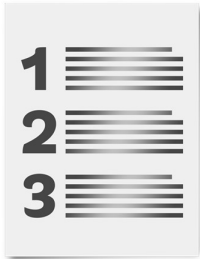


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About this Easy Read



This Easy Read is a **summary** of a **Cabinet paper**.



A **summary**:

- is shorter than the Cabinet paper
- tells you the main ideas.



A **Cabinet paper** is a document:

- from a **minister**
- asking **Cabinet** to agree to something.



A **minister** is an important person who works in the Government.

They are in charge of something the Government does like:

- education
- transport.



Cabinet is a group of the most important ministers.

They make important decisions together.



This Cabinet paper is from the **Minister for Disability Issues**.



The **Minister for Disability Issues** is the person the Government has put in charge of making things better for disabled people.



The Minister for Disability Issues is Louise Upston.



This summary is from the **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha**.

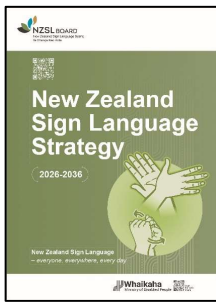


The **Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha** works to make changes for disabled people so their lives are better.

The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha makes things better for disabled people by working with:

- the Government
- the community
- businesses.

In this Easy Read we call the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha **Whaikaha** for short.



This Cabinet paper asks for the **release** of the **New Zealand Sign Language Strategy** by the:

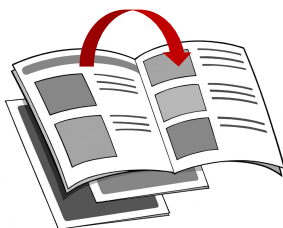
- Minister for Disability Issues
- **New Zealand Sign Language Board.**



Here **release** means making the **New Zealand Sign Language Strategy** public so everyone can read it.



The **New Zealand Sign Language Strategy** is about making sure more people can use New Zealand Sign Language.



We tell you more about this strategy on **pages 14 to 16.**



In this Easy Read we call the New Zealand Sign Language Strategy the **NZSL Strategy**.



Here a **strategy** is a set of long term plans that are made to reach a **goal**.



A **goal** is something we want to make happen.



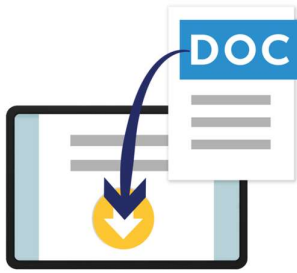
In this Easy Read we call New Zealand Sign Language **NZSL** for short.



The **New Zealand Sign Language Board** is a group of people who:

- have lived experience of using NZSL
- know a lot about NZSL
- give advice about NZSL to the:
 - Government
 - community.

In this Easy Read we call the New Zealand Sign Language Board the **NZSL Board** for short.



You can find the full Cabinet paper at:

<https://tinyurl.com/3n8z5dc8>



The full Cabinet paper is on that website under the heading:

New Zealand Sign Language Strategy – approval to release.



The full Cabinet paper is **not** in Easy Read.



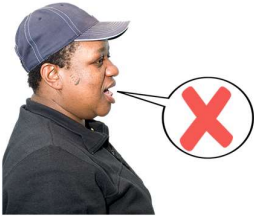
You can find more information about the NZSL Strategy 2026 – 2036 at this **website**:

<https://shorturl.at/ZBkcW>

About NZSL



Many Deaf people use NZSL as their main language.



NZSL users can also be people who:

- are hard of hearing
- cannot speak
- use NZSL to communicate.



For some people NZSL is the only language they use.



In 2006 a law called the New Zealand Sign Language Act made NZSL an **official language** of New Zealand.



Being an **official language** means that:

- NZSL is protected by the Government
- people are supported to use NZSL
- NZSL can be used in places like the courts.



Many Deaf people and NZSL users still find it hard to use NZSL in the **community**.



Here the **community** means all the places you go outside your home like:

- your job
- the library
- the supermarket.



Not being able to use NZSL in the community makes it harder for NZSL users to:

- get the services they need
- get jobs
- take part in community life
- have a good life.



About the NZSL Strategy



The new NZSL Strategy will guide the work the NZSL Board does from 2026 to 2036.



The NZSL Strategy has a **vision**.

Here a **vision** is what we hope will happen with NZSL in the future.



The vision in the NZSL Strategy is having NZSL:

- for everyone
- everywhere
- every day.





This will mean Deaf people and NZSL users can:

- know about NZSL
- use NZSL.



It also means hearing people and non-NZSL users can:

- know about NZSL
- use NZSL.



The new NZSL Strategy will support NZSL to:

- survive
- **thrive.**





Here **thrive** means that NZSL will be able to grow by being used by everyone.



The new NZSL Strategy will support:

- NZSL users
- and
- people who do not use NZSL.



About the public consultation



Here **consultation** means asking people what they think about something the Government is doing.



The NZSL Board and Whaikaha held public consultations to find out what people thought about the **draft** NZSL Strategy.



A **draft** is the first version of something like a document.



The NZSL Board wanted to find out what:

- Deaf people thought
- NZSL users thought
- other people thought.



Public consultation on the draft NZSL Strategy took 6 weeks from April to June 2025.



80 **submissions** were received from the people who took part in the public consultation.



Here **submissions** are when people told us what they thought about the draft NZSL Strategy.



19 of the 80 submissions were in NZSL.



65 of the submissions were from:

- individuals / 1 person

or

- whānau / families.





15 submissions were from organisations.



It was important to listen to the Deaf community about the NZSL Strategy.



26 meetings were held around the country to make sure the voices of NZSL users were listened to like:

- Turi Māori / Māori Deaf
- Pacific Deaf
- Deaf with disability / Deaf plus
- CODA / Children of Deaf Adults.



More than 300 people took part in the public consultation.



NZSL users were able to use NZSL to say what they thought about the draft NZSL Strategy.

What happened after consultation



People told us they wanted all NZSL users to be included in the NZSL Strategy.



The NZSL Strategy was changed to show this.



2 approaches

The draft strategy used 2 **approaches**.



Here **approaches** are the 2 main ways to support NZSL.



The first approach was aimed at NZSL users to support NZSL to survive into the **future**.



The **future** means time that is still to happen.



The second approach is about everyone else supporting NZSL to thrive.



After the public consultation these 2 approaches were named by the NZSL Board as:

- **energise**
- **integrate.**





Here **energise** is doing things to make sure:

- NZSL users are supported including those with NZSL as:
 - the first language they learned
 - the only language they know
 - the language they want to use
- NZSL keeps being used as a language in New Zealand
- people can learn NZSL earlier
- NZSL can be used in the future.



Integration is about people who do not use NZSL.

It looks at making sure NZSL is:

- a well known language
- used a lot
- known about by people who are not NZSL users.

Here integrate means making changes to support everyone to use some NZSL in their lives.

This also means making sure **government agencies** use NZSL.



Government agencies are different parts of the Government like:

- Whaikaha
- the Ministry of Education
- the Ministry of Health.

People supported the energise approach the most as it would make sure NZSL can be used in the future.

Not as many people supported the integration approach.

People were worried integration would mean NZSL users were not the **main focus** of the NZSL Strategy.

Here the **main focus** means the most important people to think about.



Other people thought integration would be good for NZSL as it would:

- let more people know about NZSL
- get more people to learn NZSL.



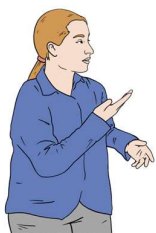
The NZSL Board thinks both approaches are important.



The NZSL Board thinks:

- energise is important so children can learn NZSL
- integration is important so people who do not use NZSL can support NZSL users.





5 priority areas

The NZSL Strategy has 5 **priority** areas of work:



1. Acquisition and Learning

2. Evidence and Data

3. Deaf and NZSL Workforce

4. Public Sector

5. Celebrating NZSL.



Here **priority** means the most important areas of work we need to do to:

- energise NZSL
- integrate NZSL.



The work in these 5 priority areas needs to start now.



These priority areas changed after the public consultation meetings.



Priority 1 – Acquisition and Learning

Here **acquisition** means to learn how to communicate using NZSL.



This priority is about supporting children to learn NZSL like children who:



- are Deaf
- are hard of hearing
- cannot speak.



It is also about supporting the whānau / families of these children to:

- learn NZSL
- use NZSL.



Priority 2 – Evidence and Data

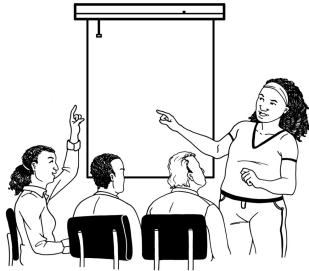
Get better **evidence** and **data** so the Government knows what life is like for people who use NZSL.



Here **evidence** is information about the experiences of NZSL users when they try to do things like get:

- the services they need
- information they need in NZSL.





Here **data** means numbers that tell the Government what life is like for people who use NZSL like:

- how many people in Aotearoa New Zealand use NZSL every day
- how many people in Aotearoa New Zealand are learning NZSL.



Priority 3 – Deaf and NZSL Workforce

This priority is about making sure that there are people working who can support:

- people learning NZSL
- use of NZSL.





Priority 4 – Public Sector

Make sure:

- government agencies think about what it means for NZSL users to be able to use their services
- staff at government agencies use NZSL more.



Priority 5 – Celebrating NZSL

Celebrate NZSL by supporting more New Zealanders to:

- know about NZSL
- use NZSL.



What success will look like



People told us success is when people can use NZSL like:

- Deaf people
- NZSL users
- whānau / families of Deaf people / NZSL users.



Success will also be about:

- New Zealanders thinking it is important NZSL is used in our country
- finding out how well the NZSL Strategy is being followed.





Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Timing

The NZSL Strategy will run for 10-years.



This will give people time to get most of the work done that is in the NZSL Strategy.



There are some problems that will take longer than 10 years to change.

Following the NZSL Strategy



Making plans to follow the NZSL Strategy

The first **action plan** will come out in April 2026.



Here an **action plan** sets out the work that the Government needs to do to:

- follow the NZSL Strategy
- support more people to use NZSL.



In April 2026 it will be 20 years since NZSL became an official language in New Zealand.

This action plan will be made by:

- Whaikaha
- and
- the NZSL Board.



Other organisations will support this work like:

- government agencies
- **stakeholders.**



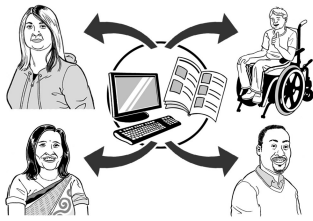
Stakeholders are organisations / people who use / support NZSL.



The action plan will guide people to do the work to support the NZSL Strategy.



Whaikaha will also work with government agencies to make a **framework** to find out if the NZSL Strategy is working for NZSL users.



Here a **framework** is a way to:

- use information collected about how NZSL is being used
- and
- find out what:
 - is working
 - is not working
 - needs to be done to support people to use NZSL.





Making NZSL capability plans

An **NZSL capability plan** says what a government agency is doing to support people who use NZSL like:

- having information in NZSL on their website
- teaching people who work for the government agency to use NZSL.

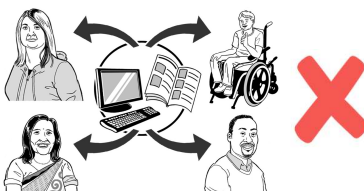


NZSL has not always been used in the right way by government agencies.



This can sometimes mean Deaf people and NZSL users are not able to access the things they need like:

- support
- information.





Government agencies will need to make NZSL capability plans to support:

- NZSL users to get the:
 - information they need
 - services they need
- staff to know about NZSL so they can support NZSL users.



Put information about NZSL in annual reports

Cabinet said government agencies will need to say things in their **annual reports** about:

- how they are using NZSL
- if NZSL users can get support from them in NZSL.





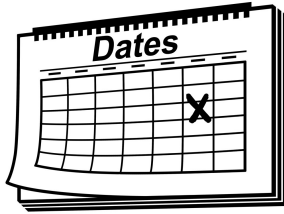
An **annual report** is a document that explains what an organisation has done that year.



This needs to be done to show that government agencies understand:

- that NZSL is an official language of New Zealand
- how important NZSL is to:
 - Deaf people
 - NZSL users.





Reporting on how well the NZSL Strategy is being followed

The NZSL Board will report to the Minister for Disability Issues every year about what has been done to follow the NZSL Strategy.



The Minister for Disability Issues will report to Cabinet every year about the NZSL Strategy.

Decisions made by Cabinet



On 5 November 2025 Cabinet made 5 important decisions.



1. Cabinet agreed the NZSL Strategy will be released to the public.



2. Cabinet told government departments and agencies to work with Whaikaha to make:

- NZSL action plans about how NZSL will be used
- an NZSL framework.





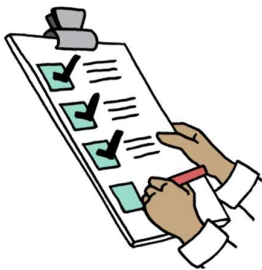
3. Cabinet said the Minister for Disability Issues will say yes to an initial / first NZSL action plan being released in April 2026.



4. Cabinet said yes to government departments having to make plans to support people using NZSL.



Each government department will have to:



- make a report about how they are using NZSL each year
- say how well they are following the NZSL Strategy
- say how well they are following their own capability plans.



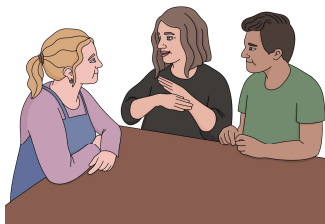


5. Cabinet said they agree that government agencies need to have information in their annual reports about:

- the use of NZSL

and

- how NZSL is used when supporting people to use their services.



Cabinet said the Minister for Disability Issues will report to Cabinet every year about the NZSL Strategy.



This information has been written by the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha.



It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



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