



Scan for
NZSL name



Visual description: A purple Whaikaha logo with a QR scan for the NZSL name.



Briefing

Date:	23 October 2025
For:	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues
File reference:	REP/WHK/25/10/072
Security level:	In confidence

Approval to lodge New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy and Cabinet paper

Purpose

This briefing seeks approval to lodge the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy and covering Cabinet paper.

As the designed NZSL Strategy is not yet available, we provide you with a preliminary concept design of the strategy, along with the existing word version

To be considered by Cabinet Social Outcomes (SOU) Committee on Wednesday 5 November, the Cabinet paper and NZSL Strategy need to be lodged by 10am on Thursday 30 October.

Executive summary

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), an official language of New Zealand, is the preferred (and sometimes only) language of Deaf people and some non-speaking people in New Zealand. However, NZSL is more than just a language. It is important for Deaf people and NZSL users for communication, connection, and inclusion.

As no feedback was received during Ministerial consultation, the Cabinet paper has not changed from the version provided previously.

The NZSL Strategy is currently being professionally designed. A preliminary concept design is attached, which has been approved by the NZSL Board (the Board).

Our preference would be to lodge the final designed version of the NZSL Strategy rather than the attached word version. The attached word version also differs from

previous versions as it was modified to improve accessibility to support the development of the NZSL and Alternate Format versions.

Implementing the NZSL Strategy

Following the official release of the NZSL Strategy, we will work with agencies and departments to implement the strategy. This includes the annual reporting requirements on government agencies, and the requirement for departments to develop NZSL capability plans.

We will also work with the Board and agencies to develop the initial NZSL Action Plan for release in April 2026, and the initial indicator framework for release in November 2026.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** the NZSL Strategy is currently being designed, and the design concept is attached
- b) **Approve** the NZSL Strategy for lodgement
- c) **Approve** the attached Cabinet paper for lodgement
- d) **Note** that the Cabinet paper and NZSL Strategy need to be lodged by 10am Thursday 30 October to be considered by Cabinet Social Outcome (SOU) Committee on Wednesday 5 November
- e) **Note** that you will receive an aide-mémoire to support you at Cabinet SOU Committee
- f) **Indicate** if you would like to discuss the attached documents at the next Officials meeting on 4 November.

Noted

Yes / No

Yes / No

Noted

Noted

Yes / No



Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Disability Issues

Date

20251028



Rebecca Elvy

Deputy Chief Executive, Outreach and Innovation

Date 23-October-2025

Actions for private secretaries:

Approval to lodge New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy and Cabinet paper

Background

- 1 New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is an official language of New Zealand. It is also essential as it is the preferred, and sometimes only language used by Deaf people, and some non-speaking people in New Zealand.
- 2 Despite this, Deaf people and NZSL users still struggle to access and use NZSL in everyday interactions. These challenges impact on the ability of Deaf people and NZSL users, to fully participate in society, and negatively impacts on their education, employment, health, and mental health outcomes.
- 3 The NZSL Strategy is intended to set in motion the changes needed to support and enable Deaf people and NZSL users to fully participate in society using NZSL. It also sets out expectations that government agencies will be more responsive to the NZSL needs of Deaf people and NZSL users.

Lodging versions of the papers

- 4 As no feedback was received during Ministerial consultation, the attached Cabinet paper is the same as provided previously, and this is the version we seek approval to lodge.
- 5 The NZSL Strategy is currently being professionally designed, and a preliminary design concept is attached. The design concept reflects the Board's design ambitions, while the colour is influenced by the Board's core colours and follows the use of blue in the first NZSL strategy.
- 6 Our preference would be to lodge the final designed version of the NZSL Strategy, rather than the attached word version and we seek your approval to lodge the final designed version if available. Please note that the attached word version has been modified from the previous version to make it more accessible for the development of the NZSL and Alternate Format versions.
- 7 The proposed design elements will be reflected in the NZSL and Alternate Format versions of the strategy to create connection between the different versions.

Launching the NZSL Strategy

- 8 The proposed launch event for the NZSL Strategy is 5.30pm on Monday, 17 November 2025. We will provide you with more information about the launch event.

Implementing the NZSL Strategy

Developing the initial NZSL Action Plan

- 9 Agencies have indicated interest in being involved in the development of the initial NZSL Action Plan. Once the NZSL Strategy has been released, officials will work with the Board and relevant agencies to develop the NZSL Action Plan.
- 10 The aim is to release the initial Action Plan in April 2026, coinciding with the 20th anniversary celebrations of NZSL becoming an official language.

Supporting agency and departmental reporting requirements

- 11 We will support agencies with the new requirement to include information in their annual reports on NZSL use / information availability. This will involve the development of guidance on what to include as part of this reporting.
- 12 We will also work with government departments on the new requirement to develop NZSL capability plans. The capability plans aim to support departments to be more responsive to Deaf people and NZSL users, in line with the principles in the NZSL Act 2006.
- 13 We expect that departments will start at different points and that capacity plans will therefore differ between departments. We will develop guidance for departments, including ideas they could consider as part of their capability plans. We will also look at how we can bring departments together to share good practice and activity ideas.

Developing an initial NZSL indicator framework

- 14 There are significant NZSL data and knowledge gaps, which impacts on the ability of agencies and departments to meet the needs of Deaf people and NZSL users. At the same time, some agencies may have data that could be used to form the basis for an initial indicator framework.
- 15 We will work with agencies to develop an initial NZSL indicator framework by November 2026. In particular, we will work with Stats NZ, which is developing a Disability Data Framework (part of the government's response to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – UNCRPD). That framework is likely to provide some data that will support the development of the NZSL indicator framework.
- 16 We are aware that developing an NZSL indicator framework may give rise to privacy risks pending the level of data disaggregation undertaken. This will be addressed as part of the development of the NZSL indicator framework, including any engagement required with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

Implications, risks, and issues

- 17 During agency consultation, some agencies raised concern about the impact of the NZSL Strategy and reporting obligations. While we recognise that agencies (including the Ministry) are operating under tight fiscal environments, it is important that agencies meet the needs of Deaf people and NZSL users.
- 18 The public sector priority area is also aimed at asking hard questions about what government agencies are doing to:
 - 18.1 ensure NZSL survives and thrives
 - 18.2 improve NZSL access and outcomes for Deaf people and NZSL users.
- 19 We will work closely with departments and agencies on the proposed reporting requirements, development of the initial NZSL action plan and indicator framework. Where issues cannot be mitigated through existing processes, we will look at what additional supports (including Budget funding) may be needed and bring these to you for consideration.

Next steps

- 20 The attached Cabinet paper, and NZSL Strategy would need to be lodged by 10am on Thursday 30 October if it is to be considered by Cabinet Social Outcomes (SOU) Committee on Wednesday, 5 November.
- 21 We will shortly provide you with an aide-mémoire to support your attendance at Cabinet SOU Committee.
- 22 We will also provide you with more information about the official launch event, currently planned for 5.30pm on Monday, 17 November 2025.

End

Author: Kara Hudson, Principal Advisor, Outreach and Innovation

Responsible manager: Rebecca Elvy, Deputy Chief Executive, Outreach and Innovation

Separate Attachments

- Design concept for the NZSL Strategy
- NZSL Strategy: New Zealand Sign Language – everyone, everywhere, every day
- Cabinet paper: New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy – Approval to release