

In Confidence

Office of the Minister for Disability Issues

Social Outcomes Committee

Approval of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks approval of the final New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030 following public consultation. It also responds to Cabinet's invitation to report back on progress towards the recommendations from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee, including those considered in the development of the refreshed Strategy [SOU-24-MIN-0155].

Relation to government priorities

- 2 The refreshed New Zealand Disability Strategy supports our priorities as a Government. The actions in the priority outcome areas will improve the lives of disabled people, help us achieve our Government Targets across education, employment, health, housing, and justice, as well as contribute to our economic growth priorities. Advancing these priorities will also deliver benefits for senior citizens with disabilities; particularly actions in housing and health.

Executive Summary

- 3 In March 2025, Cabinet agreed to the approach to develop a refreshed five-year New Zealand Disability Strategy (the Strategy) with five priority outcome areas – education, employment, health, housing and justice. Cabinet also authorised the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group and the Minister of Justice to approve the draft Strategy for public consultation [SOU-25-MIN-0017].
- 4 A draft Strategy was developed through engagement with disability community groups, and Working Groups of officials, disability community representatives and sector experts who proposed goals, what success looks like, and actions for the five outcome areas.
- 5 The Ministerial Disability Leadership Group (MDLG) and the Minister of Justice considered the advice of Working Groups, and officials developed a final Strategy which was approved for public consultation in August - September 2025. Public consultation received strong engagement from the disability community. While largely supporting the goals and actions, many submitters also called for the Strategy to address more of the barriers to disabled people's participation in society.
- 6 I am now seeking Cabinet agreement to the final Strategy attached at **Appendix 1**, for release in early December 2025. The new Strategy outlines a clear vision, principles and actions across the five outcome areas to improve the lives of disabled people, who consistently experience poorer outcomes across publicly funded services.

- 7 The Strategy's actions focus on practical changes that will make a meaningful difference and can be progressed over the next five years within current priorities and resources. The actions also make progress against many of the recommendations from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Committee in 2022 which Cabinet agreed would be considered during the development of the Strategy [SOU-24-MIN-0155]. The updated Government response to the UNCRPD recommendations is attached at **Appendix 3**.
- 8 In 2026, the Ministry of Disabled People will work with other agencies to develop an implementation plan to deliver the Strategy's actions over five years. The MDLG and portfolio Ministers will oversee the Strategy's implementation, which will be supported by a clear monitoring and reporting framework to measure progress.
- 9 I propose to report-back to Cabinet in March 2027 on next steps to implement the new Strategy, and on progress towards the UNCRPD recommendations.

Background

- 10 The New Zealand Disability Strategy (the Strategy) sets out the priorities for government to improve the lives of the 851,000 disabled people in New Zealand. The current Strategy (2016–2026) expires in 2026.
- 11 As Minister for Disability Issues, I have an obligation under the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 to determine the New Zealand Disability Strategy. I must also report annually on progress in implementing the Strategy, and make publicly available and present a copy of the Strategy or annual report to the House of Representatives.
- 12 In March 2025, Cabinet agreed to the approach to develop a new five-year Strategy 2026-2030, to be released in December 2025 [SOU-25-MIN-0017] and:
- 12.1 authorised the Minister for Disability Issues to develop the new Strategy with a vision and principles to guide all work for disabled people, and with the outcome areas of education, employment, health, housing and justice;
 - 12.2 approved the approach to engagement and consultation during 2025, including the establishment of Working Groups made up of officials, disability community representatives and sector/industry members to develop actions under the five priority outcome areas;
 - 12.3 authorised the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group and the Minister of Justice to approve the draft Strategy for public consultation later in 2025;
 - 12.4 invited the Minister to report-back to SOU by November 2025 to seek agreement to the final Strategy.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030 focuses on key actions to deliver tangible change for disabled people

- 13 We know that disabled people continue to face significant barriers in society, and this leads to challenges in achieving parity of outcomes with other New Zealanders. I have heard the frustration of many disabled people with previous aspirational strategies which have not been backed by changes that made a real difference for people. I have

taken a different approach to the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030 (the Strategy) to include actions that will shift the dial over the course of the next 5 years.

A draft Strategy was developed through engagement with disability groups and Working Groups for public consultation in August - September

- 14 Between April and June 2025, the Working Groups developed proposals for the five outcome areas of the Strategy – education, health, employment, housing and justice. Each outcome area includes a goal, description of success, case for change, and actions. The Strategy’s draft vision and principles were developed through 11 workshops with disability community groups and tāngata whaikaha Māori (Māori disabled people).
- 15 The Ministerial Disability Leadership Group (MDLG) and the Minister of Justice considered the recommendations from Working Groups, and officials developed a final draft Strategy which was agreed for public consultation in August 2025.
- 16 The Ministry of Disabled People consulted on the draft Strategy over about 6 weeks between 19 August and 28 September. Public consultation included a range of methods and accessible formats to support participation. An accessible survey asked respondents to rate proposals in the draft Strategy on a 5-point scale based on their level of agreement, and submitters could also provide qualitative feedback.
- 17 In total, around 560 responses and submissions were received through the survey and via email, and around 900 participants attended a total of 47 online and in-person consultation sessions.

Public consultation feedback showed support for the intent of the draft Strategy and the proposed actions, and challenged government to address a wider range of issues

- 18 Public consultation feedback showed support for the intent of the Strategy, with quantitative feedback ratings received through the survey showing a high level of agreement with the draft Strategy’s vision, principles, outcome areas and actions.
- 19 However, many submitters were of the view that the draft Strategy did not go far enough and should have considered a wider range of barriers that disabled people face in society, such as the need for accessible and affordable transport. Many submitters were sceptical about whether the Strategy’s outcomes can be achieved.
- 20 The strongest theme of feedback was the desire to see the Strategy acknowledge and reflect the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) principles as these were designed by and for the disability community and emphasise self-determination. The final Strategy recognises the importance of EGL principles as a foundation for positive change.
- 21 Across the five outcome areas, many respondents expressed support for the goals and actions, but also raised concerns about gaps and the need for actions to be more ambitious. Respondents raised systemic barriers such as discrimination and accessibility challenges, and the need for better resourcing, accountability and fundamental changes to systems and services to address complexity and access.
- 22 Māori and tāngata whaikaha Māori submitters had similar concerns about whether the Strategy would lead to meaningful change. Their feedback also focused on the need for

Māori-led solutions and partnering with Māori in implementation, and the importance of whānau at the centre, rather than a focus on individuals.

- 23 Pacific communities highlighted the importance of culturally centred approaches, the need to raise awareness among Pacific families about what supports are available, and to build the capacity and capability of Pacific service providers.
- 24 A summary of key public feedback themes is attached at **Appendix 2**. The Ministry of Disabled People will release a full summary of submissions once the final Strategy is released.
- 25 The final Strategy incorporates changes in response to public feedback wherever possible and aligned with the Government's priorities and policies. Any significant changes to outcome areas were approved by the MDLG.
- 26 I acknowledge that the Strategy does not address every challenge or barrier for disabled people. There is also work outside of the Strategy that will make progress for disabled people, including MSD's programme to strengthen Disability Support Services, the Ministry of Disabled People's work to address accessibility barriers, and the Ministry of Transport's work to stabilise costs and strengthen the Total Mobility Scheme with support from the Ministry of Disabled People.

The final Strategy for Cabinet approval includes a vision, principles, goals, and actions to improve access and participation for disabled people

- 27 I am seeking Cabinet approval of the final Strategy attached at **Appendix 1** to this paper, which I propose to release publicly on 2 December 2025. The Strategy includes an overarching vision and principles which will guide all work for disabled people, as agreed by Cabinet in March 2025 [SOU-25-MIN-0017]. This sets clear expectations across government services, and can assist local government and non-government organisations to be accessible and effective for disabled people.
- 28 The recommended vision of the Strategy following public consultation, is: *'New Zealand is an equitable and accessible place for all disabled people and their whānau – where disabled people thrive, contribute, and choose the lives they want to lead'*.
- 29 Dedicated and consistent effort will be required to achieve this long-term vision across government services and society. The vision is supported by principles to guide the Strategy's implementation and wider government efforts, updated to reflect consultation feedback. The final principles proposed for the Strategy are: *Accessibility, Self-determination, Upholding equity, culture and identity, Participation and inclusion, and Respect and dignity*.
- 30 The Strategy also acknowledges the Treaty of Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) as important foundations. The Strategy will help government meet its obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi and support the progressive realisation of the rights and aspirations of disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori.

The actions in the five outcome areas will lay the groundwork and build momentum for further change longer-term

- 31 The Strategy's actions aim to make tangible changes in the lives of many disabled people and create momentum across the five outcome areas that government can build on over time to achieve much better outcomes for disabled people in the long-term. The actions focus on practical steps towards the goals and success statements in each outcome area that can be advanced over the next five years within current priorities and resources.
- 32 The actions in the outcome areas of the Strategy recognise accessibility as critical for disabled people to participate. Accessibility refers to whether disabled people can access facilities, services, the physical environment and information, on a dignified and equal basis with others. We must take consistent steps to address the accessibility barriers across the system which continue to hinder progress.
- 33 Other key enablers of inclusion for disabled people that are reflected across the Strategy's outcome areas are the need for robust data and evidence about how well services are working for disabled people, and the importance of capable workforces that understand and can respond to disabled people's needs.
- 34 Each action is achievable within the next five years, ensuring progress is visible and measurable. The intent of the actions across each outcome area is summarised here.
 - 34.1 **Health** actions aim to make the health system more equitable and accessible for disabled people by removing barriers across policies and services and embedding self-determination. They focus on developing a capable and disability-responsive health workforce, building opportunities for disabled people to take up health system roles, and improving the visibility of disabled people in national health data.
 - 34.2 **Education** actions aim to strengthen learning support and reduce wait times through Budget 2025 investment in early intervention services, improve teacher training, increase school accountability for disabled learners' progress, and support kaupapa Māori settings to meet the needs of disabled ākonga. They also seek to improve the availability of data on disabled learners and embed accountability in tertiary education.
 - 34.3 **Employment** actions aim to provide guidance for disabled people to pursue job pathways, build employer confidence, and undertake a review of employment supports to improve outcomes. New initiatives will be designed with disabled people and employers, including mentorship programmes, a resource repository of practical guidance and success stories, and ways to improve workplace design to support inclusion. An awareness campaign will also promote the value of disabled people in the workforce.
 - 34.4 **Housing** actions aim to define accessible homes, develop voluntary national accessibility guidelines for residential dwellings, and identify any barriers to accessible and affordable private market supply. They will improve the use of housing data to prioritise disabled people for suitable social housing and understand regional demand for new accessible builds. Work to review the social housing system, and improve housing modifications, is also signalled.

- 34.5 **Justice** actions will strengthen safeguards for disabled people in residential care and in detention, improve data on their experiences of crime, strengthen responses to family violence, and invest in early support to reduce youth justice involvement. Work will be done to improve the disability competence of the justice sector workforce. The Law Commission will review the Criminal Procedure (Mentally Impaired Persons) Act 2003, and family law and human rights legislation will also be reviewed to identify gaps and areas to strengthen, subject to work programmes.

The Strategy also responds to recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Committee from 2022

- 35 The Strategy is a key mechanism for government to determine priorities for the implementation and progressive realisation of the UNCRPD in New Zealand.
- 36 In December 2024, Cabinet considered the response to the 63 Concluding Observations (recommendations) made by the UNCRPD Committee in 2022. Cabinet agreed to progress 30 of the recommendations, and that a further 17 would be considered through the refresh of the Strategy. Cabinet invited me to report-back by December 2025 on progress [SOU-24-MIN-0155].
- 37 The Ministry of Disabled People has worked with relevant agencies to publish the UNCRPD recommendations and the Government's response to them on the *Human Rights Monitor*, an online human rights monitoring tool. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to transparency and progress for disabled people's rights.
- 38 The Strategy includes actions in the health, housing, and justice outcome areas that respond to 14 of the 17 UNCRPD recommendations that were considered during the Strategy refresh. The Ministry of Disabled People has also worked with agencies to identify other work that responds to these 17 recommendations. A further two will be progressed through work outside of the Strategy. In total, 16 of the 17 recommendations will be progressed through the Strategy and/or other work. More detail on this is provided in **Appendix 3**, and a summary of the updated response to the 63 recommendations is as follows:

Table one: Updated Government response to UNCRPD recommendations

Recommendations with actions for implementation	46
Recommendations with no actions currently proposed	17
Total	63

- 39 **Appendix 3** also includes progress updates from agencies on 19 of those recommendations which Cabinet agreed to progress, where some of the work undertaken was signalled for completion by the end of 2025.

Officials will develop an implementation plan to deliver the Strategy's actions by 2030, and a monitoring framework will measure progress

- 40 In 2026 the Ministry of Disabled People will develop an implementation plan to sequence and deliver the Strategy's actions over five years, in consultation with relevant agencies. The implementation plan will confirm government agency lead or

co-lead roles for actions within the outcome areas. Agencies responsible for actions will report to their portfolio Ministers, and will be asked to provide progress updates to the Ministry of Disabled People.

- 41 The MDLG will have a key role in overseeing the implementation of the Strategy and ensuring we make consistent progress. The Ministry of Disabled People will work with agencies to provide advice and reporting to the MDLG on the implementation of the Strategy's actions, and progress against the goals and outcomes.
- 42 The Ministry of Disabled People has developed a monitoring framework for the Strategy in consultation with disability community data advisory groups. The framework is made up of:
 - 42.1 four to five primary indicators for each outcome area to monitor progress towards the goal and outcomes;
 - 42.2 supporting measures to monitor progress towards the description of what success means in more detail; and
 - 42.3 a small number of overarching indicators to measure progress towards the vision and principles of the Strategy.
- 43 These indicators will be published in an interactive online dashboard. This will assess the impact of the Strategy on improving outcomes for disabled people, at a system level, over the medium to long-term.
- 44 There are gaps in the data available about the outcomes of disabled children and young people, particularly younger children. As part of implementing the Strategy, the Ministry of Disabled People will work with other agencies to improve data and better monitor outcomes for disabled children and young people.
- 45 I am required to produce an annual public report on progress in implementing the Strategy, and to provide this to the House of Representatives. The development of a clear plan to implement the Strategy's actions, alongside a strong monitoring framework to measure key indicators, will support this reporting.
- 46 I propose that I report-back to Cabinet by March 2027 with updates on:
 - 46.1 progress towards the UNCRPD recommendations; and
 - 46.2 progress to implement the Strategy and next steps to deliver remaining actions by 2030, in consultation with the MDLG.

Cost-of-living Implications

- 47 The proposals in this paper do not have direct cost-of-living implications. Disabled people are a group with high rates of persistent disadvantage and are more impacted by cost-of-living pressures. Progress through the Strategy could help to mitigate this.

Financial Implications

- 48 There are no direct financial implications arising from the proposals in this paper. The Strategy's actions have been developed so that they are achievable within current

resources and priorities given the tight fiscal environment. The completion of some actions may identify future work that, if progressed, would require additional resourcing, however any such implications would be subject to future decisions.

Legislative Implications

- 49 This paper does not have direct legislative implications. Two actions in the justice outcome area involve reviewing whether current legislation is effective and fit for purpose (Action 4, and Action 5 which is subject to work programmes). Any legislative recommendations arising from these actions would be considered through future Cabinet processes.

Impact Analysis

- 50 The regulatory impact analysis requirements do not apply to this paper.

Population Implications

- 51 The proposals in this paper are focused on improving outcomes for disabled people, who make up 17% of the population. Key groups within the disabled population are summarised below, based on data from the 2023 Disability Survey.
- 51.1 18% of people of **NZ European** ethnicity were identified as disabled.
 - 51.2 21% of the **Māori** population were identified as tāngata whaikaha Māori, and tend to have poorer material wellbeing and quality of life than other groups.
 - 51.3 16% of the **Pacific** population were identified as disabled, and also experience worse outcomes and more persistent disadvantage compared to others.
 - 51.4 9% of the **Asian** population were identified as disabled.
 - 51.5 18% of **women** were identified as disabled, compared to 15% of men. Women experience disability at higher rates than men at every age group from 15+ and are more likely to live longer and spend more years in poor health.
 - 51.6 10% of **children** under the age of 15 were disabled (learning difficulty was the most common impairment), and 14% of **Māori children** were disabled.
 - 51.7 35% of **older people** aged over 65 were disabled. They experience disability at higher rates and make up an increasing proportion of the disabled population.

Human Rights

- 52 The proposals in this paper are consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.
- 53 The proposals will also contribute to our implementation of the UNCRPD by driving change in key outcome areas. New Zealand's Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM) for the implementation of the UNCRPD is made up of the Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition. The IMM's submission recommended that the Strategy be amended to:
- 53.1 commit to active engagement of disabled people through their representative organisations in the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. The IMM

considered that the process to develop the draft Strategy did not align with article 4.3 of the UNCRPD (to actively involve and closely consult with disabled people's representative organisations on matters that affect them), as disabled people were not involved in determining the five outcome areas;

53.2 show how the actions progress the UNCRPD Committee's recommendations;

53.3 be clear about how it will be monitored, and consider an online tracking tool.

54 The final Strategy includes a monitoring framework that will be published in an online dashboard, developed by the Ministry of Disabled People in consultation with groups that include disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori. The Ministry will consider how to involve disabled people's representative groups in implementation.

Use of external Resources

55 Some external resources were used to develop the draft Strategy prior to public consultation. Between April and June 2025, five Working Groups, including disabled representatives and sector experts, developed initial proposals for the outcome areas.

56 In addition, Te Amokura Consultants Ltd were contracted to engage with disability community groups to develop the proposed vision and principles of the Strategy by June 2025. This ensured that the process was more independent and the community could have more ownership over these elements of the Strategy.

Consultation

57 The following agencies were consulted on this paper: the Accident Compensation Corporation; Department of Corrections, Public Service Commission; Statistics New Zealand; and the Ministries of/for Business, Innovation and Employment; Children – Oranga Tamariki; Education; Ethnic Communities; Transport, Health; Housing and Urban Development; Kāinga Ora; Justice; Māori Development - Te Puni Kōkiri, Culture and Heritage; Pacific Peoples; Social Development; Women; and Youth Development, the Centre for Family Violence and Sexual Violence Prevention, the Treasury, the Office for Seniors, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

58 I am required under Schedule 1, Subpart 2 (7) of the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 to consult anyone that I consider appropriate when determining a new Strategy. I consider that the process to develop the draft Strategy and the public consultation undertaken in August – September 2025 fulfils this requirement.

59 The IMM was consulted on the updated response to the UNCRPD recommendations.

Communications

60 I plan to release the final New Zealand Disability Strategy on 2 December at a launch event that includes members of the disability community. I will also issue a press release announcing the Strategy, and the Ministry of Disabled People will ensure that information is available in alternate and accessible formats for disabled people.

Proactive Release

- 61 I intend to proactively release this paper within 30 business, with any appropriate redactions required under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister for Disability Issues recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that public consultation has been completed on a draft New Zealand Disability Strategy;
- 2 **approve** the final New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030 (the Strategy) attached at **Appendix 1** for release in early December 2025;
- 3 **authorise** the Minister for Disability Issues to approve any minor drafting changes to the Strategy prior to its release;
- 4 **agree** that the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group will oversee the implementation of the Strategy, and that the Ministry of Disabled People will work with other government agencies responsible for delivering the Strategy's actions;
- 5 **note** that the Minister for Disability Issues is required to report annually to the House of Representatives on progress in implementing the Strategy;
- 6 **note** that **Appendix 3**, attached, reports back to Cabinet as requested [SOU-24-MIN-0155] on progress towards implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Committee in 2022, including the recommendations considered in the development of the Strategy;
- 7 **invite** the Minister for Disability Issues to report-back to Cabinet by March 2027 on progress towards the UNCRPD recommendations;
- 8 **invite** the Minister for Disability Issues, in consultation with the Ministerial Disability Leadership Group, to report-back to Cabinet by March 2027 on progress to implement the Strategy's actions and next steps to deliver remaining actions by 2030.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Disability Issues