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

Briefing

Date:	19 June 2025
For:	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues
File reference:	REP/WHK/25/6/044
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Updating the Vision and Principles in the New Zealand Disability Strategy

Purpose

To provide advice on potential visions and principles for the refreshed Disability Strategy.

Executive summary

The 2016 – 2026 New Zealand Disability Strategy includes a vision, principles, and approaches to underpin the implementation of the strategy. These are attached as **Appendix 1** for ease of reference.

As part of the refresh process, the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha (the Ministry) has been working with the disability community over the past two months to update these elements of the strategy.

While we've attended these discussions, we contracted external advisors to gather and analyse the feedback to ensure that the updating process had a degree of independence from the Ministry. It is particularly important that these elements of the strategy are owned by the disability community.

The external advisors – Te Amokura Consultants Ltd – have supported and summarised 11 engagements with disabled community groups – some pan-disability groups, and some tāngata whaikaha Māori groups. They have drawn on these discussions to recommend options for the vision statement and principles for the refreshed strategy.

Vision statement

Two options for the vision have been presented. The key difference between these relates to human rights. In the first option, the realisation of disabled people's rights is implied but not explicit:

Vision Statement Option One:

"Aotearoa New Zealand is an accessible and equitable society for disabled people and their whānau – a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life."

In option two, the need for the rights of disabled people and whānau to be upheld is explicitly referenced:

Vision Statement Option Two:

"Aotearoa New Zealand is an accessible and equitable society where the rights of disabled people and their whānau are upheld – a place where they thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life."

We recommend that both options are put forward for feedback as part of consultation on the draft strategy.

Principles

The independent advisors have drawn on the feedback to recommend eight updated principles to underpin the strategy, focused on the following areas:

<i>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</i>	This principle recognises the mana and status of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
<i>Human Rights</i>	This principle firmly anchors the Strategy in international human rights frameworks.
<i>Participation and Inclusion</i>	This principle recognises that disabled people have the right to be active members of their communities and cultures in all aspects of life.
<i>Accessibility</i>	Accessibility is fundamental to participation and inclusion.
<i>Equity and Cultural Inclusion</i>	This principle merges concepts of equity, non-discrimination, and cultural inclusion.
<i>Intersectionality</i>	This principle recognizes that many disabled individuals have multiple identities that can exacerbate discrimination or lead to distinct experiences.
<i>Respect and Dignity</i>	This principle confronts the negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination that many disabled people encounter.
<i>Choice and Control</i>	This principle recognises that decisions about disabled people's lives have often been made by others.

We recommend that these are presented as options to choose from, to develop a shorter list of principles to guide those who are implementing the strategy.

Approaches

There was no clear consensus from the engagements on preferred approaches to implement the strategy, although the discussions did provide some critique of the existing approaches, and suggestions for how the strategy could be implemented.

Rather than recommend specific approaches for the refreshed strategy, the advisors have recommended that the Ministry carefully consider key themes from the discussion in the development of the final strategy:

Following your feedback, we will include potential vision statements and principles in the draft strategy we are developing for consultation. We are aiming for Ministerial approval to consult on a draft strategy by the end of July.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| a) Note the themes that were identified in engagements to update the vision and principles for the disability strategy. | Noted |
| b) Provide any feedback on the draft vision and principles set out in this report. | Yes / No |

Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Disability Issues
Date



Ben O'Meara
Deputy Chief Executive, Policy and Insights
Date 19 June 2025

Actions for private secretaries:

Updating the Vision and Principles in the New Zealand Disability Strategy

Background

1. The current NZ Disability Strategy contains a high-level vision, and a set of principles and approaches that underpin the vision.
2. When you sought Cabinet's agreement to the approach to the refresh of the Strategy, you indicated that the Ministry would work with key groups within the disability community including Disabled People's Organisations to refresh the current vision and principles. You also noted that this vision and principles will set expectations to guide all work, both government and non-government, to better meet the needs of disabled people, particularly relating to accessibility (SOU-25-SUB-0017, para 26 refers).
3. We have been working with the disability community over the past two months to update these elements of the strategy. This work has progressed alongside the work of the priority outcome area working groups.
4. While the Ministry has attended all of these discussions, we contracted external advisors to gather and analyse feedback from these discussions to ensure that the updating process had a degree of independence from the Ministry. It is particularly important that these elements of the strategy are owned by the disability community.

Summary of themes from the engagements

5. The engagements revealed a variety of perspectives on where New Zealand should focus its efforts during the 2026–2030 period. Some overarching key themes from the engagements were:
 - **An urgent call to action:** There was a consensus among participants that a solid disability strategy is essential, as long as it is accompanied by concrete actions to bring it to life. Many participants continue to face barriers in accessing their fundamental human rights right now; therefore, they were particularly interested in what the government could do immediately to help eliminate these accessibility barriers. This urgency does not diminish the importance of future planning; rather, it serves as a critical reminder of the immediate nature of this work.
 - **Mistrust of government:** Participants highlighted that there have always been tensions between disabled individuals and government decisions. However, this is especially contentious now due to recent changes in disability funding and a what is perceived as a lack of attention to disability issues in recent years. Navigating this mistrust will be an ongoing challenge

for the Ministry, underscoring the importance of developing a strategy that is directly informed by disabled communities.

- **Systemic challenges:** Barriers faced by disabled individuals are multi-layered and complex, stemming from deeply entrenched systemic issues. The Ministry, along with the entire government, must consider how existing systems—such as healthcare and education—have been designed in ways that limit accessibility. By focusing on these systems, the government can work toward long-term, sustainable solutions that ensure accessibility for all.

6. Our independent advisors, Te Amokura Consultants, supported and summarised 11 engagements with diverse groups within the disabled community. Six were pan-disability groups, and five were tāngata whaikaha Māori groups.

Pan-Disability Groups	Tāngata Whaikaha Māori
• Parent/Family/Whānau Network and Carers Alliance • Whaikaha Strategic Advisory Group • National Enabling Good Lives Leadership Group • I.Lead • Disabled People’s Organisations Coalition • Faiva Ora	• Kāpō Māori Aotearoa • Te Rōpū Kaitiaki (Turi Māori) • Te Rōpū Waiora • Te Ao Mārama o Aotearoa Trust (TAMA) • Whānau Ora Interface Group

7. Structured workshops were held, capturing contributions through experienced note-takers. The advisers then applied a methodology of coding, theme extraction, quote selection and thematic grouping to identify key themes and develop their advice.

Updating the Vision

8. The vision in the current Disability Strategy is:

New Zealand is a non-disabling society - a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and all of New Zealand works together to make this happen.

Theme One: Simple, clear language

9. The NZDS vision uses language that is not widely understood, particularly the term “non-disabling.” It was acknowledged that this term comes from the social model of disability; however, the term was not widely used. Some participants rejected the term entirely, stating that their disability is an important part of

their identity, while others felt the term created a division between disabled and non-disabled people.

10. The phrasing of “goals and aspirations” was also problematic. It was not always clear to participants what “goals and aspirations” referred to, and many felt this wording was ‘fluffy’ or too vague.

Theme Two: Accessibility and inclusion

11. Participants suggested that the new vision include reference to accessibility. Accessibility barriers were discussed in every engagement. People considered that accessibility is a fundamental issue that impacts disabled people in a multitude of ways and must therefore sit at the forefront of the strategy.
12. Inclusion was also discussed frequently throughout the engagements, usually alongside accessibility as the two concepts go hand-in-hand (i.e. if something is accessible to a disabled person, they are then able to be fully included).

Theme Three: Equality vs Equity

13. Most participants expressed that they would prefer that any reference to equality be changed to equity or fairness, as an equity approach takes into account the unique needs of disabled people.
14. Not only does an equity lens recognise that disabled people have unique needs compared to non-disabled people, but also recognises that there are multiple and different needs within the disabled community.

Theme Four: Tāngata whaikaha Māori

15. Tāngata whaikaha Māori did not see themselves reflected in the existing vision as there is no reference to Māori, or to things which are fundamental for Māori like whānau. Reflecting tāngata whaikaha Māori in the vision does not necessarily mean the addition of phrases like ‘disabled people including Māori,’ but instead reflecting, in some way, what is important to tāngata whaikaha Māori. This could be through use of te reo Māori or recognition of the role of whānau and iwi in the lives of tāngata whaikaha Māori.
16. As mentioned in the summary themes above, disabled people generally are experiencing a mistrust in government; and this was especially relevant to tāngata whaikaha Māori, who expressed their disappointment with government decisions related to Māori in recent years.

Theme Five: Recognition of support networks

17. The existing vision speaks about disabled people, however participants expressed they would like to see recognition of whānau, family, communities, and other networks that support disabled people. These support networks are integral to the lives of so many disabled people and therefore are deeply implicated in the outcomes of the NZDS.

Theme Six: Sustainability and future-thinking

18. Some participants noted their frustration of having to be consulted multiple times on government documents and strategies and suggested that a more future-focused vision that is sustainable might help mitigate the need for frequent consultation.
19. Participants also raised the fact that, with a growing population, the number of disabled people will grow, and the needs of disabled people are likely to become more complex. The vision and strategy must consider how the government will respond to changes in disability needs over time.

Options for a new Vision Statement

20. Based on the example vision statements received from participants, and the themes in this report, our independent advisors have presented the following options for a future vision statement.
21. They note that they have endeavoured to use language that captures as many ideas as possible, but that can still be easily understood. For example, they considered that the idea of inclusion is implicit in the words 'accessibility' and 'equitable', and therefore chose not to use the word "inclusion", in order to avoid using more words than necessary.

Vision Statement Option One:

"Aotearoa New Zealand is an accessible and equitable society for disabled people and their whānau – a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life."

22. This option is intentionally high-level but includes the key themes which arose from the engagements.

Vision Statement Option Two:

"Aotearoa New Zealand is an accessible and equitable society where the rights of disabled people and their whānau are upheld – a place where they thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life."

23. This option specifically references the need to uphold the rights of disabled people, which was a common theme in the engagements. While this idea is implicit in the first option, this second option would more explicitly reference the rights of disabled people.

Updating the Principles

24. The principles in the current strategy are:

Principle	Explanation
The Principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty establishes the relationship between Māori and the Crown, recognising the unique position of Māori as tāngata whenua and ensuring partnership, participation and protection for disabled Māori.
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	The Convention provides a framework to promote, protect and ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms for all disabled people.
Ensuring disabled people are involved in decision-making that impacts them	Decisions on issues that impact disabled people are made with their active involvement, recognising their unique lived experience and expertise.

Theme One: Te Tiriti o Waitangi

25. The engagements confirmed that Te Tiriti o Waitangi should remain an integral part of the NZDS – participants in every engagement stressed the importance of Te Tiriti in the strategy. However, many participants shared that currently Te Tiriti is not given the mana (prestige) that it deserves by sitting as one of the three principles.
26. Participants suggested that we consider reframing Te Tiriti to make the connection between Te Tiriti and disabled people clearer. They recommended focusing on the articles of Te Tiriti rather than just the principles to highlight important concepts such as 'autonomy' (Article 1), 'good faith and fairness' (Article 2), and 'equity and mutual respect' (Article 3).

Theme Two: The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Enabling Good Lives

27. People acknowledged that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides an international framework. However, participants emphasised the need to contextualise it for New Zealand.
28. Participants felt that the principles from the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) framework should also be included, with key considerations such as self-determination, participation, equity, non-discrimination, inclusion, and holistic well-being (including spirituality).

Theme Three: Leadership and Decision-Making

29. One of the strongest themes across every engagement was the vital importance of leadership by disabled people. Participants expressed disappointment that 'Leadership' had been removed as an outcome area in the upcoming strategy.

Theme Four: Intersectionality

30. The concept of intersectionality must be central to the NZDS, recognising that disabled people hold multiple identities that can compound discrimination or create unique experiences.

Theme Five: Accessibility

31. Accessibility is a significant challenge for disabled people as it directly impacts their ability to participate fully in society, including education, employment, housing and social services.

Theme Six: Human Rights

32. The UNCRPD, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be included in the principles of the NZDS.

Theme Seven: Whānau, Aiga, and Community Support

33. Families, Whānau, Aiga, and communities play an essential role in supporting disabled people and should be included in solutions.

Theme Eight: Data Collection

34. Data collection and analysis represent a significant opportunity to better understand and address the needs of disabled people.

A proposed New Set of Principles

35. Our independent advisors' recommendation for a new set of refreshed principles is:

<i>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</i>	This principle recognises the mana and status of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including its principles and articles, providing a foundation for the refreshed NZDS.
<i>Human Rights</i>	This principle firmly anchors the Strategy in international human rights frameworks, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
<i>Participation and Inclusion</i>	The principle of participation and inclusion recognises that disabled people have the right to be active members of their communities and cultures in all aspects of life.
<i>Accessibility</i>	Accessibility is fundamental to participation and inclusion. When environments and services are designed with

	accessibility in mind from the beginning, they benefit everyone, not just disabled people.
<i>Equity and Cultural Inclusion</i>	This principle merges concepts of equity, non-discrimination, and cultural inclusion. It acknowledges that disabled individuals belong to diverse whānau, communities, and cultures, each with its own unique values and practices.
<i>Intersectionality</i>	The intersectionality principle recognizes that disabled individuals possess multiple identities—such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status—that can exacerbate discrimination or lead to distinct experiences.
<i>Respect and Dignity</i>	The principle of respect and dignity confronts the negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination that many disabled people encounter. It emphasizes that everyone deserves to be treated with respect, regardless of their abilities, and acknowledges that societal attitudes can be as significant a barrier as physical accessibility issues.
<i>Choice and Control</i>	This principle recognises that decisions about disabled people's lives have often been made by others. It asserts that disabled individuals are the experts in their own lives and should have the same right to self-determination as everyone else.

Updating the Approaches

36. The approaches outlined in the current strategy are:

Approach	Explanation
Investing in our whole lives – a long-term approach	This reflects our lives, supporting people at every stage and age of their life.
Specific and mainstream services – a twin track approach (e.g. mainstream services first, with the backup of specialist services where required)	This approach is not about having to choose between the specific or mainstream option; rather it is about having the right access to the right high-quality support or services, at the right time and in the right place.

37. There was no clear consensus from the engagements on a preferred approach to implementing the strategy. Most participants provided critique on the existing approaches, which is useful in knowing what to avoid in future strategies.

Participants also provided general ideas as to how the strategy could be implemented and some important considerations for the Ministry.

38. For this reason, our advisors did not provide a recommendation for a specific approach. Instead, their recommendation is that the Ministry carefully consider the following themes as it develops the final strategy:
- Moving beyond the idea of 'mainstream' and 'Twin-Track' approach. The general sense from the engagements was that participants want a system in which they can easily receive the support they need, no matter which service they go to.
 - Monitoring and Accountability. Ensuring robust monitoring of the new strategy, with communication to the public to demonstrate that work is progressing.
 - Considering Different Models. People want future approaches that focus on the positive aspects of disabled people's lives rather than a deficit-based approach.
 - Workforce Capability. People considered that the Ministry should consider how it can support an uplift in workforce capability across a range of services.
 - Self-Determination. Any future approach must keep the voice of disabled people at the centre and allow for disabled people to make the decisions about their own lives.

Risks

39. We took a targeted approach to engagement with the disability community to support drafting of a proposed new vision and principles. There is a risk that people in the wider disability community will feel that they have not had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the draft vision and principles for the refreshed strategy. In addition, individuals who attended the workshops may feel that their contribution has not been reflected in the summary of key themes, or in the draft vision and principles.
40. These risks are mitigated by the upcoming public consultation on the draft vision and principles, with opportunities for all disabled people to provide feedback.
41. There is also a risk that the community will see the draft vision and principles as being of the Government's making, rather than owned by them. We mitigated this risk by engaging Te Amokura Consultants as independent advisors to analyse the feedback and advise on a vision and principles to reflect the key themes.

Next steps

42. We consider that Te Amokura have provided a clear and succinct analysis of the themes identified in the engagements to update the vision and principles. We now need to make a decision on whether to include one or two potential vision

statements in the draft strategy, for people to provide feedback on; and whether to present the potential principles as options from which to choose a shorter list or as a complete set of principles.

43. Because the draft strategy is seeking to generate discussion and feedback, we consider that it makes most sense to include both options for the vision, for people to provide feedback on.
44. We recommend presenting the principles as options from which a shorter list could be developed. We are conscious that, when we ask government organisations, non-government organisations and businesses to implement the strategy, it will be easier for them to understand what they need to do if the list of principles is as short as possible. Having eight principles is probably too many to use as a list for people to analyse their ideas against¹.
45. We are seeking your feedback on this proposed approach before drafting the text on vision and principles for inclusion in the draft strategy.

End

Author / Responsible manager:

Ben O'Meara, Deputy Chief Executive, Policy & Insights

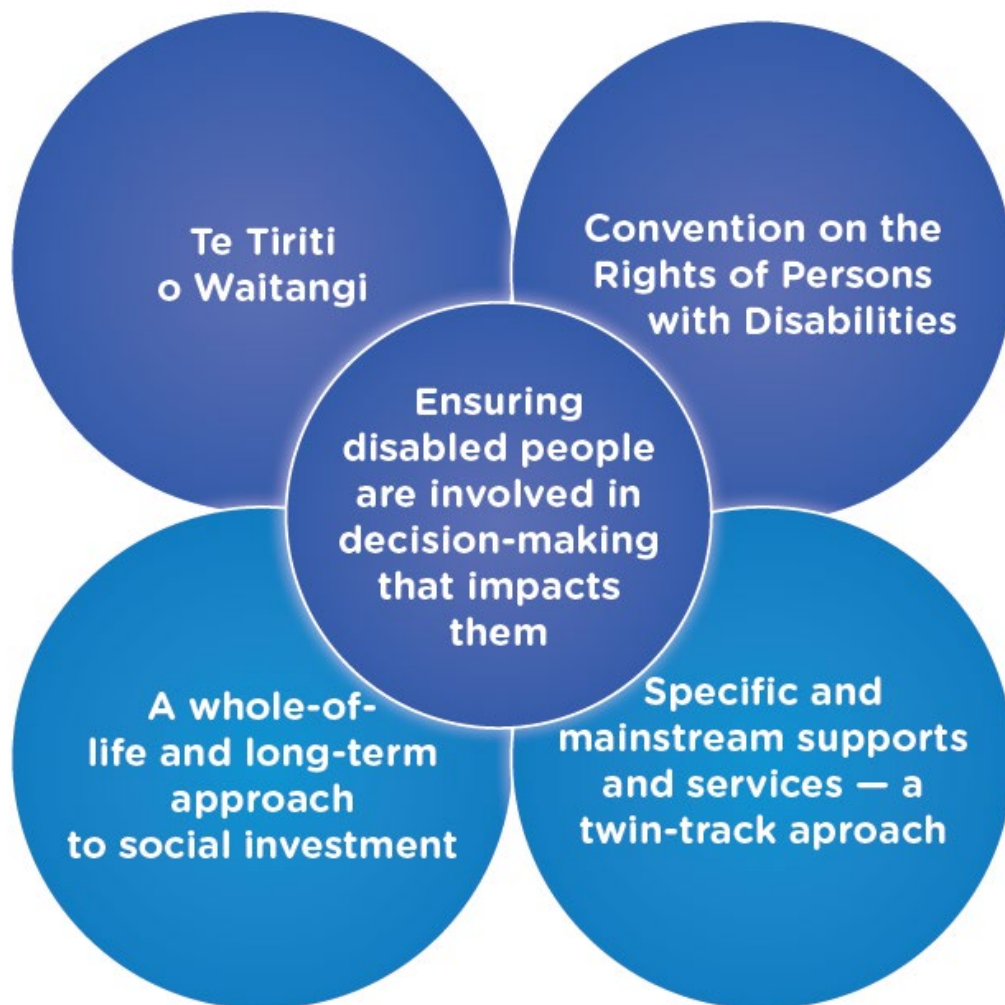
Appendix 1 - Vision, principles and approaches in the New Zealand Disability Strategy, 2016 – 2026

¹ By way of comparison, the 2016 – 2026 Strategy has five - three principles and two approaches.

Appendix 1 - Vision, principles and approaches in the New Zealand Disability Strategy, 2016 – 2026

New Zealand is a non-disabling society – a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and all of New Zealand works together to make this happen.

Principles



Approaches