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 **Whaikaha**
Ministry of Disabled People



Part 2: Background to the strategy

**Draft for consultation: New Zealand Disability Strategy
2026-2030**

Adapted in 2025 by Accessible Formats Service,
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Transcriber's Notes: The logo at the top of the page is
Whaikaha—Ministry of Disabled People.

The visual details of the logo are described in the alt text.

To support accessibility, link is labelled with the
corresponding webpage heading, followed by shortened
URLs.

Part 2: Background to the strategy

August 2025

This is part 2 of the draft New Zealand Disability Strategy. It is the background to the strategy.

The other parts of the strategy are:

- Part 1: Introduction to the strategy
- Part 3: Vision and principles for the strategy
- Part 4: Priority outcome areas and actions for the strategy

Parts 3 and 4 of the strategy are the parts where people are invited to give feedback.

You can read, watch or listen to only the parts of the strategy that you want to.

You can find all parts of the strategy in alternate formats on our website under the heading "Read the draft strategy 2026-2030" visit [Refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy whaikaha.govt](https://shorturl.at/18ALN) [short url: <https://shorturl.at/18ALN>]

Background to this strategy

This is the third New Zealand Disability Strategy. It has been developed by the Ministry of Disabled People—Whaikaha (the Ministry), working with other government agencies, disabled people and the disability community. This strategy builds on the first two strategies and the work of everyone who contributed to them. It also builds on work in recent years to improve data about disability.

This strategy sets out the Government's commitment to disabled people and their whānau. However, it is a strategy that everyone can contribute to. All New Zealanders have a role in making New Zealand accessible and equitable, including local government, businesses, iwi and hapū Māori and the community.

Disability Support Services (DSS), funded by the Ministry of Social Development, play a critical role in the lives of over 50,000 disabled people. Some of the housing and justice actions in this strategy relate to DSS. However, DSS is not a specific focus of this strategy, because separate work is underway to stabilise and strengthen

DSS, to ensure it delivers the right support, in the right way, to those who most need it.

Language used in this strategy

There is no one way of defining disability or talking about disabled people. For some people, the term "disabled person" is a source of pride and identity. Other people prefer "person with a disability" because they want to be recognised as a person first, before their disability.

This strategy uses the language "disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and their whānau".¹

The strategy draws on the understanding of disabled people in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The UNCRPD says disabled people "include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. The idea that disability is not caused only by people's impairments, but by the barriers created when

¹ Not everyone uses the word "disabled". For example, Deaf people and Turi Māori may not think of themselves as disabled. This strategy includes all people who have an impairment, whether or not they use the word "disabled".

society is not accessible, is called the "social model" of disability.

Disabled people have many different parts to their identities, like their ethnicity, gender, and age. The different parts of people's identities can give them unique perspectives, and can sometimes lead to compounding disadvantage. This strategy uses "disabled people" to include disabled people with diverse identities.

In this strategy, "tāngata whaikaha Māori" is used to describe Māori people with a disability. Using this language recognises that most Māori disabled people identify as Māori first. "Tāngata whaikaha Māori" means Māori people who are determined to do well and who focus on their abilities.

Whānau are recognised in this strategy. Whānau are a source of strength, support and identity for disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori. Whānau is a concept that includes extended family members and others embraced by an individual or collective as their whānau.

Some disabled people are supported by carers. The Government has a separate *Carers' Strategy*, launched in 2008. It describes carers as people who care for friends, family, whānau and āiga with a disability, health condition or illness; and who need help with everyday living. A new Action Plan is being developed to support the Carer's Strategy.

Disabled people in New Zealand are diverse

The 2023 Household Disability Survey, run by Stats NZ, estimated the number of disabled people in the New Zealand household population and found out information about their lives.

The survey found that about 1 in 6 New Zealanders is disabled. This is about 851,000 people, or 17 percent of New Zealanders. It includes about 753,000 adults (18 percent of adults aged 15 years and over) and 98,000 children (10 percent of children aged 0-14 years).

The survey also found that some population groups had higher disability rates than others.

- Overall, females had a higher disability rate than males (18 percent of females compared with 15 percent of males).
- However, for children, boys had a higher disability rate than girls (12 percent of boys compared with 8 percent of girls).
- LGBTIQ+ (Rainbow) people had a higher disability rate than non-LGBTIQ+ people (29 percent of LGBTIQ+ people compared with 17 percent of non-LGBTIQ+ people).
- Older people aged 65 years and over had a higher disability rate than younger adults (35 percent

compared with 12 percent of adults aged 15 to 44 years and 17 percent of adults aged 45 to 64 years).

Different ethnicities also had different disability rates. Māori had a disability rate of 21 percent, Pacific people 16 percent, and Asian people 9 percent.

When these rates were adjusted for age, to take into account the fact that disabled people are more likely to be older, and that some ethnic groups have younger populations, the disability rates for these ethnicities increase. Age-adjusted rates were 24 percent for Māori, 21 percent for Pacific peoples and 13 percent for Asian people.

Some outcomes have improved for disabled people

Comparing results from the 2023 Census with the 2018 Census shows that some outcomes have improved for disabled people.

Some of these improved outcomes can be seen in education. The 2023 Census showed that disabled people aged 15 years and over were:

- less likely to have no qualification (34 percent in 2023, down from 42 percent in 2018)
- more likely to have a bachelor's degree or above (13 percent in 2023, up from 10 percent in 2018).

The 2023 Census also showed that tāngata whaikaha Māori aged 15 years and over were:

- less likely to have no qualification (38 percent in 2023, down from 47 percent in 2018)
- more likely to have a bachelor's degree or above (10 percent in 2023, up from 8 percent in 2018).

Disabled children aged 5-14 years were more likely to be studying in 2023 (90 percent) than 2018 (87 percent). This included increases in study participation rates for:

- tāngata whaikaha Māori children (89 percent, up from 86 percent in 2018)
- Pacific disabled children (85 percent, up from 78 percent in 2018).

The 2023 Census also showed some improvement in employment outcomes for disabled people. Disabled people aged 15-64 years were more likely to be employed in 2023 (52 percent) than in 2018 (46 percent). This included increases in employment rates for:

- tāngata whaikaha Māori (46 percent, up from 40 percent in 2018)
- Pacific disabled people (48 percent, up from 43 percent in 2018).

The 2023 Census also showed there have been some small improvements in housing quality for disabled people.

- In 2023, 27 percent of disabled people lived in a home that was sometimes or always damp, down from 29 percent in 2018.
- In 2023, 22 percent of disabled people lived in a home that was sometimes or always mouldy, down from 24 percent in 2018.

Barriers persist for disabled people and their whānau

Although some outcomes are improving, disabled people continue to face barriers. These barriers are often worse for tāngata whaikaha Māori.

The 2023 Household Disability Survey found that disabled people were less likely than non-disabled people to be doing well across many areas of their lives. These areas included employment, health, life satisfaction and income.

The survey also found that whānau and carers of disabled children continue to face barriers. When compared with carers of non-disabled children, carers of disabled children were:

- more than twice as likely to feel stressed all or most of the time (46 percent compared with 19 percent)
- much more likely to find it hard to find someone to look after their child (42 percent compared with 24 percent)

- much less likely to say they had about the right amount of free time for their own leisure activities (27 percent compared with 48 percent)
- less likely to have a paid job (65 percent compared with 79 percent).

Despite facing barriers, disabled people make a vital contribution to New Zealand, socially, culturally and economically.

With barriers removed, disabled people can achieve more of the things that are important to them, and their contribution will only grow. For example, the 2023 Household Disability Survey showed that 72 percent of disabled people aged 15 to 64 years who did not have a job would like one, and identified the kinds of supports that would help them find work. Recent modelling from the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research shows that significant economic benefits would result from supporting greater educational achievement and higher rates of employment for disabled people.

You will find more data showing how disabled people are doing later on in this strategy.

How this strategy was developed

This strategy is different from the previous strategy because it will cover a 5-year period from 2026 to 2030, instead of a 10-year period. The 5-year period is intended

to focus government agencies on tangible actions that benefit disabled people.

This draft of the strategy was developed between December 2024 and July 2025.

The vision and principles of the strategy were developed through 11 workshops with disability groups. Six of the workshops were with disability groups, and 5 were with tāngata whaikaha Māori groups.

The 5 priority outcome areas for the strategy were agreed by Cabinet. These are education, employment, health, housing and justice.

Each priority outcome area was further developed by a working group. Working groups were made up of disability community members, who were selected using an open expression of interest process, as well as sector experts, and officials from relevant government agencies. The job of working groups was to develop a goal, a description and actions for their priority outcome area.

The Ministerial Disability Leadership Group (MDLG) and the Minister of Justice considered the work of the working groups, and decided which goals, descriptions and actions would appear in this strategy, and their final wording. The MDLG is chaired by the Minister for Disability Issues and made up of Ministers whose portfolios cover issues that are important to disabled people.

The strategy is now being consulted on with the New Zealand public. Once consultation is finished, Cabinet will agree the final version of the strategy. The strategy will then be launched in December 2025.

This strategy contributes to other important work

Giving effect to the Treaty of Waitangi—Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The Treaty of Waitangi establishes the relationship between Māori and the Crown, recognising the unique position of Māori as tāngata whenua.

This strategy helps Government meet its obligations under the Treaty by setting direction and creating pathways for leadership, protection and promotion of wellbeing for tāngata whaikaha Māori. This will help tāngata whaikaha Māori and their whānau to thrive.

Building on recent improvements to data collection by Government will be important so that quality data is available for monitoring and reporting of outcomes for tāngata whaikaha Māori under the five priority outcome areas.

Giving effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This strategy will help New Zealand meet its international obligations, including its obligations under the UNCRPD. New Zealand ratified the UNCRPD in 2008.

New Zealand is periodically examined on how we are progressing towards our UNCRPD obligations. Our next examination will be in 2034. This strategy, and how it is monitored, will help us meet our obligations and support our examination.

Contributing to the Government Targets

The Government Targets are 9 targets the Government has set to improve the results that public services are achieving. The Government Targets focus on health, education, law and order, work, housing and the environment. They are intended to be achieved by 2030.²

By improving outcomes for disabled people, this strategy will also contribute to achieving the Government Targets.

² Information about the Government Targets can be found on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website.

This strategy includes actions to be delivered by 2030

Previously, the New Zealand Disability Strategy was supported by a Disability Action Plan, which set out the actions government agencies had committed to, to deliver the strategy.

This New Zealand Disability Strategy is different because it includes actions to be delivered over the next 5 years. It builds on other important work and has been informed by disabled people, *tāngata whaikaha* Māori and their *whānau*, Pacific disabled people and *aiga* (family/families).

Whāia Te Ao Mārama, the Māori Disability Action Plan was developed in a partnership between the Ministry of Health and *tāngata whaikaha* Māori, with the oversight and endorsement of Te Ao Mārama: the Māori Disability Advisory Group. There have been two plans spanning 2012-2017 and 2018-2022. *Whāia Te Ao Mārama* 2018-2022 set out a vision that "*tāngata whaikaha* pursue a good life with support". It outlined what the Ministry of Health committed to do from 2018 to 2022, and set out examples of actions *tāngata whaikaha*, *whānau*, health and disability providers, *iwi* and other organisations can take to achieve the vision.

More recently, a Pacific disability approach has been developed through consultation and engagement with

Pacific disabled people, aiga and the Pacific disability community. *Atoatoali'o—National Pacific Disability Approach* provides a framework for the wellbeing of Pacific disabled people. It sets out what the Pacific disabled community would like to achieve and the actions it would like to see, including actions from government agencies.

By including actions as a core part of this strategy, we are strengthening the impact it will have over the next 5 years. The strategy itself will drive tangible change without needing further action plans, making it easier to monitor and report on progress.

End of Part 2: Background to the strategy