

Short report: Summary of submissions

**New Zealand
Disability Strategy
2026 - 2030**

December 2025

Introduction

The Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha (the Ministry), consulted on the draft New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 - 2030 ('the strategy') during August and September 2025. Qualitative and quantitative feedback was gathered through an accessible feedback form, email and video, and online and in person meetings.

About 900 people came to 47 hui organised by the Ministry and the community, and around 570 items of feedback were received. Over 130 organisations provided feedback.

The Ministry has produced a 60-page report summarising the themes and issues raised by submitters during this process. The full report is available at: whaikaha.govt.nz.

The purpose of this document is to provide a short, accessible summary of that full report.

Strategy overall

Submitters appreciated the intent of the strategy but lacked confidence that it will lead to meaningful change, particularly within five years. Submitters strongly supported including the Enabling Good Lives principles and approaches across all outcome areas. They saw this framework as one that works with disabled people, rather than for them.

Many submitters called for stronger governance, better collaboration between agencies, enforceable rights, independent monitoring, and leadership by disabled people.

Submitters saw transport as important, and wanted it included as a priority outcome area because of its impact on employment, education, and health. Financial hardship was identified as a major barrier, and many submitters questioned why Disability Support Services were not included in the strategy.

Feedback stressed the need to recognise the varied experiences of disabled people, including those with complex needs, children, older people, neurodivergent individuals, and whānau. Carers and community roles should also be acknowledged.

Submitters wanted plain language grounded in human rights and felt the strategy was government led rather than co-designed with disabled people. Submitters called for genuine co-design in implementation and monitoring, and public awareness campaigns to challenge negative attitudes.

Tāngata whaikaha Māori emphasised the need to support Māori-led solutions, whānau-centred approaches, and the need to ensure partnership under the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi).

Pacific submitters prioritised culturally centred approaches, building provider capability, and raising awareness of what supports were available to disabled people and their families.

The vision

The vision proposed in the draft strategy was: *New Zealand is an accessible and fair society for disabled people and their whānau, a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and take part in all aspects of life.*

There were high levels of agreement with the vision, but lower confidence that it will lead to meaningful change. Many submitters appreciated the intent of the vision, but felt it lacked clarity and inspiration. Some submitters wanted a more ambitious vision that would drive meaningful change.

The word 'equitable' were seen by some submitters as unclear and open to different interpretations. Some submitters suggested it should be replaced with 'fair and just'.

Some submitters felt words like 'lead' excluded people who need lifelong support, and they asked for practical examples and case studies to show how the vision applies to people with high and complex needs.

The principles

The draft strategy proposed seven principles: *Accessibility, Choice and control, Equity, cultural inclusion and intersectionality, Human rights, Participation and inclusion, Respect and dignity, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.*

Five of the proposed principles received strong support.

Less support was expressed for the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) as a principle. Feedback suggests this may be because submitters considered the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) should have greater prominence because of its status as a foundational document.

The principle combining equity, cultural inclusion and intersectionality was criticised by submitters as 'jargon', and open to different interpretations.

Many submitters also expected the Enabling Good Lives principles to be used instead of the principles in the draft strategy, noting that it is a well-established and trusted framework within the disabled community.

Some submitters felt there were too many principles, which created confusion and diluted focus. They wanted the principles to be aspirational and supported by clear mechanisms for implementation. Suggested principles included accountability, interagency partnership, and 'nothing about us without us'.

Education

There was strong support for the education outcome area, with high levels of agreement for the proposed goal, success statement, and across most actions,

but with slightly lower levels of support for action 2 (reduce wait times for learning support) and action 7 (support kaupapa Māori settings).

Submitters wanted systemic change to make learning support accessible and effective. Submitters also called for workforce development, disability awareness, universal design, and personalised planning in teacher training.

There were concerns about inequities for tangata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific learners and the need for culturally grounded approaches.

There was strong support for early intervention and concerns about workforce shortages. Submitters also called for better data on disabled learners and mandatory reporting of outcomes.

Barriers such as unlawful exclusions, bullying, and lack of accountability were highlighted as areas that people wanted to be addressed in the strategy.

Feedback was provided on the need to better plan and support transition points into school, between schools, and out of education and training for disabled children and young people.

Views on specialist schools and satellite classes were mixed, with some submitters seeing them as segregation whilst others noted the benefits of the approach. Submitters considered tertiary education was important, and they preferred an emphasis on lifelong learning opportunities.

Employment

There was a high level of support for the employment outcome area, including the goal and the description of success. All actions in the employment outcome also received high levels of support.

There was a strong call to prioritise choice and control in addition to participation and financial security. While many disabled people are highly motivated to work, submitters emphasised that employment is not a realistic or desirable goal for everyone. Success looks different across the population and part-time work, volunteering, and community involvement are just as meaningful as paid employment.

Submitters identified the following barriers to employment - discriminatory attitudes, inaccessible recruitment processes, and a lack of transport. Concerns were raised about laws such as the 90-day trial period and minimum wage exemption, and the impact this has on disabled people's employment opportunities.

Submitters recommended educating employers on accessible and inclusive recruitment practices and supports, improving access to New Zealand Sign Language in recruitment and employment access, enforceable standards for accessible employment, and legislative reform. Submitters called for inclusive employment services, better transitions from school to work, and Government

leadership in modelling inclusive practices. Submitters also wanted robust data on employment outcomes and workplace accessibility.

Health

There was strong support for the health outcome, with high levels of agreement for the goal, success statement, and all five actions. However, submitters said that the health system was hard to navigate, with long delays and fragmented services. Submitters called for fair access regardless of disability, better coordination, and culturally safe care.

Workforce shortages and lack of disability competence were major concerns and there was strong support for actions focused on improving the capability of the health workforce.

Submitters also strongly supported a proactive approach to habilitation and rehabilitation services across the health system. They also wanted mental health services for disabled people to be included in the strategy.

Housing

There was strong support for the housing outcome area, including high levels of agreement with the goal, success statement, and four of the five actions. Action 6 (to develop voluntary guidelines for residential dwellings) received the lowest level of supports as submitters felt voluntary guidelines were not enough, and called for enforceable accessibility standards.

There is urgent need for more affordable, accessible housing given the severe shortage in our housing stocks. Concerns were raised about inequities in housing support and regional disparities for disabled people.

Submitters called for more social housing, accessible emergency housing, and improved housing modification systems. They also stressed the importance of choice and control in living arrangements, and support for Māori-led housing initiatives.

Justice

There was strong support for the justice outcome area, including high levels of agreement with the goal and description of success. All actions in the justice outcome area also received high levels of support.

Submitters expressed strong support for a safeguarding framework with independent oversight and accountability. Submitters called for early intervention to prevent disabled children and young people entering care and youth justice systems. Workforce training on disability awareness and cultural safety was seen as critical to upholding the rights of disabled people in the justice system.

Accessibility issues across police, courts, and corrections were highlighted as key areas of concern. Submitters wanted plain language, better availability of New Zealand Sign Language interpretation, and peer-led support services, such as navigators, to help guide disabled people through justice processes.

Submitters expressed concern that the strategy lacks a clear commitment to prevention and rights-based responses with non-punitive responses. Concerns were also raised about vague wording and a lack of urgency for some actions.

Monitoring and measuring progress

Submitters supported robust data collection to monitor progress and drive systemic change. They called for disaggregated data by disability type, ethnicity, age, gender, and region. However, submitters raised concerns about privacy and misuse of data, and Māori submitters emphasised the need to ensure Māori data sovereignty is upheld.

Submitters emphasised that data must be usable and actionable, not just collected. Suggestions made included accessibility passports, interactive dashboards, and navigator apps. Many called for an independent body or commissioner to monitor implementation.

Conclusion

Feedback underscored the importance of a strategy that is culturally responsive and addresses the needs of a diverse disability population. Submitters called for a strategy where the Enabling Good Lives Principles are included, and its approaches are adopted as part of implementing actions in all outcome areas of the strategy. They wanted rights to be protected, poverty issues for disabled people tackled at a system level, and sustained commitment and resourcing across governments to ensure the strategy delivers lasting change for all disabled people and their whānau.

Impact of submissions on the final strategy and next steps

The submissions received as part of this consultation process informed the development of the final New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026 – 2030. This includes amendments to goals, descriptions of success, cases for change, actions, and adding emphasis and explanatory information.

The submissions received will also help inform implementation and monitoring of the strategy. The Ministry will develop an implementation plan for the strategy in early 2026.



Disabled people thriving in New Zealand