# Access Matters Briefing Note

Shared vision

We all want to live in a country where everyone belongs and has the same opportunity to take part in and contribute to society.

The Problem

Around one in four New Zealanders have a disability, meaning a quarter of the population is forced to deal with barriers to access on a daily basis. This includes people with physical, mental, cognitive and/or sensory impairments. Also, the aged and the young, pregnant women, and parents with young children, and people who are injured or in poor health, all find it harder to get around the community.

Nearly all of us will have permanent or temporary access needs some time in our lives, especially as we get older.

Access barriers make it more difficult for people with disabilities to:

● get into or move around public buildings, for example, if there are no ramps

● get around the community, for example, if pedestrian crossings don’t have audio signals

● use public transport if there is no space for wheelchairs or strollers, or easy ways to get onto or off buses and trains

● access and understand information (forms from government agencies, communications to ratepayers, library books etc.) that is not provided in accessible formats

● use websites or other digital facilities such as booking sites, online banking, ATMs, or EFTPOS facilities

● access health services, for instance where there are a lack of NZ Sign Language interpreters

● take part in community events or recreation

● enjoy movies, television or cultural activities, for example, if there is no audio-description or closed captioning

Although New Zealand has ratified the United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), we must work to honour it in practice. The Convention requires us to take “appropriate measures” to “develop, promulgate and check the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public, including those provided by private entities.”

At present, we rely on the:

● Human Rights Act 1993 which provides a mechanism for dealing with individual complaints about

● discrimination against people with disabilities but does not provide clear guidance to employers,

● service providers or others to ensure that they make their services and buildings accessible

● the NZ Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and Disability Action Plan 2014-18, which though they are useful instruments, lack a focus on mainstreaming accessible practices, do not apply to the private sector and are not enforceable through legislation

Solution

We want to live in an accessible Aotearoa where disabled and Deaf people have the same opportunities and choices as everyone else. Improving accessibility will make it easier for kiwis with disabilities to earn a living and have a good life. Accessibility legislation is the most strategic way to enable this.

We know from other countries such as Canada, that legislation makes a significant difference to whether a society is planned and designed for accessibility, and

where legislation creates mandatory and enforceable standards for accessibility.

A group of organisations from across the disability community have united to form the Access Alliance. The Access Alliance, along with individuals with access needs, local government and business representatives, call on all political parties to introduce robust and enforceable accessibility legislation. We call this legislation the Accessibility for New Zealanders Act.

We want the Accessibility for New Zealanders Act to:

● Cover people with any form of disability, as defined by the UNCRPD;

● Apply to both the public sector and larger privately-owned corporates; Set sector and industry-specific minimum accessibility standards, including timeframes for their implementation;

● Influence future disability policies and regulations;

● Ensure that the government educates affected parties on the changes, and contain mechanisms to ensure compliance is independently reviewed and that enforcement really incentivises compliance.

Accessibility legislation would unlock the potential of people with disabilities who are currently excluded from education, employment and participation in society by:

- making it easier for people to complete primary and secondary education, and take part in higher education

- making it more likely that people can secure jobs, and be able to easily travel to work, and move around within the workplace

- making it easier for people to take part in the economy by buying products and using goods and services

- enabling them to take part as volunteers, members of community groups, and in recreational activities

increasing the ability of people with disabilities to use public transport rather than being dependent on private or specialised transport

Also to the benefits to people with disabilities, society as a whole would prosper from greater inclusion and participation of people with disabilities. Locking people out of jobs reduces the talent pool for employers, making it hard for people with disabilities to move around the community or to access online services and products means businesses have few clients and customers, making it hard for people to study means society is denying itself the talents of potential professionals.

Economic modelling has estimated that removing the barriers to employment for people with disabilities could mean around 14, 000 people with disabilities would be able to move from welfare into employment. [1] This scenario would also add $1.45 billion to real gross domestic product.

Support for the campaign is growing. Public opinion polling in July 2017 found that 80% of New Zealanders agree that the law should specify minimum accessibility standards. These results suggest that most New Zealanders understand that at some point in our lives, we will all have access needs.

The Access Alliance also delivered an open letter to Minister for Disability Issues Carmel Sepuloni in February 2018 with 3275 citizens signing on to support introducing an Accessibility Act.

In the lead up to 2017’s General Election all parties accepted there was a need to do more to include people with disabilities and remove barriers to participation. In December 2018 Cabinet approved a policy work programme “Accelerating Progress Towards Accessibility in New Zealand” which committed to designing an approach to achieve an accessible New Zealand, including how legislation could help achieve this.

Actions

We call on you to:

● Let your party's disability spokesperson (and party leader if appropriate) know about this meeting and or show your support to them;

● Show your support on social media using the hashtag #AccessLaw2020

● Join the Parliamentary Champions for Accessibility Legislation group;

● Support introducing legislation as and when it is introduced;

● Emphasise that the best results come from developing this legislation in close consultation with many stakeholders, including government (Central and Local), business, iwi, and disabled people.

[1] Access Alliance: Valuing Access to Work by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), 2017, commissioned by the Blind Foundation for The Access Alliance