

Accessible Aotearoa

Describing New Zealand as the most accessible country in the world

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we like to think we live in a classless and fair society. We take pride in having a can-do attitude where working hard translates into getting ahead. We know, of course, that the reality is somewhat different for many of us. Our society was designed and built for just a portion of our population. In this, we have privileged some and excluded many.

Almost a quarter (24%) of New Zealand citizens identify as having some form of disability. People aged 65 or over are much more likely to be disabled (59%) than adults under 65 years (21%) or children under 15 years (11%). In 2017, there were around 11,000 serious injuries. With population growth and people living longer many of these figures are increasing. Barriers prevent many people from participating fully and equally in society. This exclusion also has a negative impact on people's family and friends.

Accessibility means people can live independently and participate fully in all areas of life with dignity. It means all people can access the physical environment, transportation, and facilities and services open or provided to the public. Accessibility also applies to information and communications, including technology and systems. In 2008, New Zealand signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD]. Article 9 of this Convention clarifies the principle of accessibility. You can read more about the UNCRPD on the United Nations website. Details are provided at the end of this paper.

Making Aotearoa FULLY accessible for all New Zealanders means...

All New Zealanders understand that universal design is design for inclusivity and independence

New Zealand environments can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people. The universal design approach recognises human diversity and designs for life scenarios, such as pregnancy, childhood, injury, disability and old age. By designing for human diversity, we can create things that will be easier for all people to use.

Our Homes are universally designed and accessible

Our houses meet our individual needs from the cradle to the grave whether a family member is born with a disability, has an accident or has elderly parents move in. All houses, whether owner occupied or rental dwellings, have entries, bathrooms, doorways and spaces designed for easy access into, out of and around the home. All family members can live with dignity in their homes and participate and communicate in their family/whānau gatherings and special occasions.

Our public buildings and spaces are universally designed and do the job they are supposed to do

There are accessible routes in all public transport systems, open spaces are accessible and all pedestrian routes are accessible so people can get to where they want and need to go. There are accessible playgrounds and civic events are fully accessible. Buildings and public spaces are fully accessible. Accommodation options, like hotels and motels, are accessible and building standards that meet the current and future needs of our society are mandatory and actively enforced. Information about civic events, accommodation options and transport options is fully accessible so that everyone can get the information they need, when they need it, to fully participate.

Our education system is universally designed

All pre-schools, schools and tertiary education buildings are universally designed. Our education system is designed for all learners and provides individual accommodations that ensure all children access a high quality education to achieve their full potential. Our education curriculums provide mandatory learning opportunities for all learners (pre-school through to tertiary) on disability and diversity, disability rights and disability identity. All extra-curricular activities are accessible to all learners. All parents, carers, grandparents and community members are welcomed into our education centres and able to fully participate.

Our employers and businesses are accessible and inclusive

Workplaces are accessible and reasonable accommodations are provided enabling all employees to do their jobs and fully participate in the workforce. All workplaces are safe and value diversity. Opportunities to develop new skills are made available to all staff and any necessary individual accommodations are provided. Employers and businesses understand the social and economic benefits of diversity and inclusion.

Our recreation activities, social groups and civic events are accessible and inclusive

All people can participate in and access sports clubs and events; public events; festivals; theatre; art galleries; museums; recreation or hobby groups, community classes, tourist destinations and activities. All public buildings and places and public information are accessible and individual accommodations are provided when requested.

Services and individual accommodations are provided wherever requested

All Services and accommodations are individualised and promote wellbeing. Accessing services and accommodations is simple and easy to navigate, and they are provided promptly.

Our media is accessible, inclusive and respectful of all people

The media, communication and technology industries are inclusive. They are educated about people's accessibility needs. Their staff members use respectful, non-discriminating language when reporting about people and barriers. Information is provided in accessible audio, visual and written formats. New Zealand Sign Language and captions are mandatory for all news and political broadcasts. All free to air media and on-demand platforms have mandatory captions and audio description.

Our Government and political life are accessible and inclusive

New Zealand Government, official places, processes and information are accessible and inclusive. All New Zealand citizens are full participants at all levels of government, such as standing for and voting in elections with dignity, confidence and independence; holding office, and performing public functions. Individual accommodations are provided when needed.

Everyone is an active participant in eradicating accessibility barriers, through positively affirming diversity in their daily lives.

A fully accessible Aotearoa benefits all New Zealanders

While this is admittedly a utopian view, it is also a vision of the future Aotearoa New Zealand could have. We are on the journey already and many of the descriptions we provide actually happen in pockets of our country. It is not a stretch of the imagination.

Effective legislation is the pathway to making our vision for a fully accessible Aotearoa New Zealand a reality

This paper was developed by the Access Alliance to reflect what fully accessible could mean for everyone living in New Zealand

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