**Briefing for 2020 Candidates**

**Important issues for people with access needs**

**Including disabled people, seniors, carers of young children, the temporarily injured, migrants and people for whom English is a second language and their friends and family**

The Access Alliance is a movement comprised of ten founding member organisations from the disability sector, working with a range of supporting organisations, business champions, and nearly 7000 individual supporters, representing and advocating for people with access needs. Collectively the Alliance represents disabled people, seniors, carers of young children, the temporarily injured, migrants and people for whom English is a second language.

In the lead up to the general election, the Access Alliance is asking all members of parliament and candidates standing for election, to call for accessibility legislation, so that no one is left behind in the post-COVID rebuild and recovery.

Be resolute in your commitment to support a future bill that removes barriers for disabled people and people with access needs in New Zealand, whilst increasing education and employment opportunities for disabled people, creating new markets, and growing the economy.

Take the opportunity to improve the quality of life, not only for the hundreds of thousands of disabled Kiwis currently disadvantaged by barriers, but for all New Zealanders.

We are pleased to provide this paper to brief you on issues faced by people who have access needs.

## Accessibility During a Crisis

Successive governments have struggled to resolve the issue of enforcing accessibility standards. The Access Alliance has evidence that accessibility legislation coupled with education and support for organisations is the pathway to creating and realising a fully accessible Aotearoa New Zealand over time.

As we rebuild Aotearoa New Zealand in the post COVID-19 world, the Access Alliance firmly believes that accessibility legislation will be the game changer, not only for disabled people, whānau and other people living in Aotearoa New Zealand with access needs, but for Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole.

The Access Alliance position is that there is only one way forward. That is to introduce accessibility legislation by the end of 2021, and to ensure the Bill makes its way swiftly through the House.

Crisis responses and recoveries process must integrate the needs and concerns of disabled people and other group with access needs. Accessibility needs to be high on the agenda at all times so communities are more resilient and prepared. All evacuation planning, emergency planning and communication must be inclusive and accessible.

## Access to Public Information During a Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic raised the importance of making alternative formats available. Government must ensure that people with access needs, and their whānau are not left behind before, or during disaster recovery. All alternative formats should be provided.

We live in an increasingly digital world. Inaccessible websites and apps in a digital world further leave people behind. All digital, and online information or apps must include accessibility features in their design.

Accessibility is not just about the width of the door – it’s about information and communication, customer service, and accessible education and employment system, and universal design of public facilities, goods and services including in the digital space.

## Universally Designed Infrastructure

Lack of consideration of accessibility in infrastructure projects has resulted in lack of accessibility in New Zealand build environment and public and private spaces.

The Building Code, which is contained in the Building Act, does not demand private residential developments be designed in ways that provide access and usability for disabled people or people with access needs.As a result, public housing construction does not incorporate universal design principles to future proof and optimise access for all types of dwellers, at all stages of their lives.

We must ensure that all public buildings and spaces are universally designed. Accommodation, and entertainment facilities, including hotels, motels, conference centres, sports facilities and theatres, must be accessible.

Accessibility legislation will set the mandate for accessible infrastructure so everyone can enjoy Aotearoa New Zealand’s facilities.

## Access to Meaningful Participation in the New Zealand Economy

The unemployment rate for disabled people in 2017 was more than double the unemployment rate for non-disabled people. Disabled people tended to remain unemployed for longer resulting in a cycle of poverty.

Implementing accessibility legislation is the most strategic way to open pathways for people with access needs into employment and towards contributing to the wider community.

Just like everyone else, people with access needs deserve opportunities to develop new skills at all stages of life. It is government’s role to drive this systemic change.

## Access to Equitable Participation in Society

The choices about how and where a person with access needs can participate in society are limited by available funding and supports.

Implementing accessibility legislation will mean that people with access needs can participate in social groups, sports clubs, public events, concerts, festivals, theatrical productions, art galleries, museums, recreation or hobby groups, community classes, tourist destinations and activities just like everyone else.

People with access needs have limited access to free to air, on demand platforms, and other streaming platforms. Accessibility legislation will set the mandate for broadcasters to make all their news and other entertainment content accessible. This will bring New Zealand into line with other countries.

## Access to New Zealand’s Democratic Systems

People with access needs also want to be a part of Aotearoa New Zealand democratic systems. However, they still face major challenges participating in Aotearoa New Zealand’s democratic process. There is still no mechanism for people with some access needs to vote independently.

Implementing accessibility legislation will ensure that meetings and forums are accessible, and information and the news are available in alternative formats.

The Election Access Fund Act 2020 received royal assent on 16 March 2020 but disabled voters still cannot access the democratic process. This established an Election Access Fund to cover disability-related costs of standing in a general election, by not-for-profit bodies to cover costs of making election education events and materials accessible, and by registered political parties to support access needs of any members to allow them to participate within the party.

## Accessing the right to autonomy and dignity when receiving health or disability service

Currently, despite the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights, people with access needs have to fight, one at a time, for their right to access health care with dignity. This is exhausting and unfair. Implementing accessibility legislation with standards around accessible healthcare will ensure that people with access needs have control and can access health services with dignity.

## Access to Education and Training at all Stages of Life

Education is vital to living an independent life. It is important for our education system and all pre-schools, schools and tertiary education facilities to be universally designed so that all learners have access to high-quality education to achieve their full potential.

The New Zealand education curriculum needs to include mandatory learning opportunities for all learners on disability rights, disability identity and diversity, so people are aware and understanding when associating with disabled people and other people with access needs.

Implementing accessibility legislation will ensure that education facilities are accessible to all. Education settings and their surroundings need reasonable accommodation to safely welcome all parents, carers, grandparents, whānau and community members so they are able to participate fully.

## Accessibility Legislation

All of us will have permanent or temporary access needs at some point in our lives, especially as we get older or as we care for loved ones. We want to live in an accessible Aotearoa New Zealand where we all have the same opportunities and choices. Improving accessibility will make it easier for kiwis with access needs to have a good life.

Implementing accessibility legislation within the Rebuilding Together Budget is the most strategic way to enable this - it is our pathway to ensure all of us can participate in and contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand’s recovery.

Accessibility legislation would unlock the potential of people with access needs who are currently excluded from education, employment and participation in society. It would create mandatory and enforceable standards for accessibility.