

Access Alliance 2021 Key Messaging

It's Time!

THE ACCESSIBILITY FOR NEW ZEALANDERS ACT: A CALL FOR THE INCLUSION OF ALL NEW ZEALANDERS

OUR SHARED VISION

We want to live in a country with a shared sense of belonging, where everyone has the same opportunity to take part in and contribute to society.

Together, Aotearoa New Zealand overcame COVID-19. Now, it is time for us to rebuild. We believe every New Zealander should be able to contribute to the recovery of our nation.

THE PROBLEM: AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND IS NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL NEW ZEALANDERS

Nearly all of us, at some stage during our lifetime, will face a disability or temporary injury and/or barriers that limit access to fundamental needs, especially as we get older.

Currently, around one in four New Zealanders are living with access needs. These aren't just physical disabilities, but mental, cognitive, and sensory impairments, neurodiversity (e.g. dyslexia), seniors, pregnant women, parents with young children, and people who are injured or in poor health.

The impact of COVID-19 has made the accessibility gaps for these New Zealanders even more apparent. People with access needs, including disabled people, seniors, Māori, migrants, people with English as a second language, those with temporary injuries or in poor health, were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and lockdown, especially when attempting to access essential goods and services.

This is a failure of successive governments to legislate safeguards and minimum standards for accessibility. Accessibility has not always been an integral part of the conversation during the early stages of local and national infrastructure design, which is becoming an increasingly problematic issue for people with access needs.

While most New Zealanders now conduct much of their lives within the digital space, a lack of digital accessibility has severely impacted the ability of those with access needs to obtain important information, as well as to shop, work, study, socialise and connect with the wider community.

Other access barriers make it more difficult for people with visible and invisible disabilities and with other access needs to:

- enter and move around public buildings, for example when there are no ramps
- move around the community, for example when pedestrian crossings don't have audio signals
- use public transport when there is no space for wheelchairs or strollers, or easy ways to get on or off buses and trains
- access and understand information, such as forms from government agencies, communications to ratepayers and library books, which are not provided in alternate formats
- use websites and other digital facilities, such as booking sites, online banking, ATMs, and EFTPOS facilities
- access health services, for example where there are a lack of NZ Sign Language (NZSL) or spoken language interpreters
- take part in community events and recreation
- enjoy movies, television and cultural activities, for example when there is no audio-description or closed captioning provided.

CURRENT ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES

New Zealand has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), but we still 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

- NZ Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and the Disability Action Plan 2019-23 which are useful instruments, but lack a focus on mainstreaming accessible practices, do not apply to the private sector, and are not enforceable through legislation.

THE SOLUTION: REBUILDING AN ACCESSIBLE FUTURE

We want to create an accessible Aotearoa New Zealand where people with access needs have the same opportunities and choices as everyone else. The opportunity has now arrived for embracing design for everyone to ensure that accessibility is considered in the beginning, for a more resilient, capable and positive Aotearoa New Zealand.

As the nation rebuilds after the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses can become stronger by holding their doors - both physical and digital - open for all customers and employees. We can work together to close all the gaps for New Zealanders with access needs, creating a stronger, more resilient Aotearoa New Zealand for us all.

As we have seen, having a law sets the expectations. The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act 2006 means NZSL interpreters are visible for Deaf NZSL users in all government broadcasts during any civil defense emergency such as the Christchurch earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. We now need a law that ensures access for all New Zealanders, all of the time.

We can learn from countries such as Canada. Their legislation makes a significant difference to the way Canadians include accessibility in planning and design, because legislation creates mandatory and enforceable standards for accessibility.

THE NEW ACCESSIBILITY LAW

[The Access Alliance](#) is a movement comprised of a growing number of organisations from the disability and neurodiversity sectors, working with a range of business champions, and nearly 7000 individual supporters, representing and advocating for legislation to enable people with access needs. We're all working together to get a new accessibility law for Aotearoa New Zealand introduced in 2021, and passed in 2022.

Every day, week and month that goes by without legislation, people with invisible and visible disabilities and other access needs are hindered in their participation in

society. Additionally, the absence of accessibility forces people with access needs to exhaust themselves advocating for basic needs such as being able to access a shower in their own home, transport themselves to work, attend local venues, and even being able to visit friends and family.

We want the new accessibility law to:

- Include people with any form of disability, as defined by the UNCRPD
- Include visible and invisible disabilities, such as people who are neurodiverse (e.g. dyslexic)
- Apply to both the public and private sectors
- Set sector and industry-specific accessibility standards, including timeframes for their implementation
- Influence future policies and regulations for people with visible and invisible disabilities
- Ensure that the government supports and educates organisations on the changes
- Enable independent monitoring and review of the new system
- Ensure a continuum of compliance, including incentives, and progressive realisation of accessibility

IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY, IMPROVE WELLBEING

Fully including people with access needs in every aspect of life benefits everyone.

The new accessibility legislation will unlock the potential of people with visible and invisible disabilities and other access needs, who are currently often excluded from education, employment and participation in society. This change will create the conditions to:

- make it easier for people to complete primary and secondary education, and take part in higher education
- make it more likely that people can secure jobs, easily travel to work, and move around within the workplace
- make it easier for people to take part in the economy through the purchase and use of goods and services.

Excluding people with access needs from the labour market doesn't make good business sense. Inaccessible digital online services and products means potential customers can't spend their money with these businesses. Difficulties accessing education and vocational training leads to society denying itself the talents of

potential professionals. Society as a whole would prosper from greater inclusion and participation of this diverse community of people.

GIVE US THE CHANCE TO REBUILD TOGETHER

Aotearoa New Zealand has an opportunity to remove barriers now. We can improve our ageing infrastructure and create new, accessible transport and housing solutions. It's time to address the gaps in our society and allow it to flourish, creating a stronger and more resilient Aotearoa New Zealand for us all. People with access needs won't need to ask for reasonable accommodations because universal design principles will be built in at the start of major projects.

Economic modelling has estimated that by removing the barriers to employment for people with visible and invisible disabilities, around 14,000 people would be able to move from welfare into employment [1]. This scenario would likely add \$1.45 billion to real gross domestic product in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Accessibility legislation is the way to create this positive change that benefits the whole country.

SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN IS GROWING

Eighty percent of New Zealanders agree that the law should specify minimum accessibility standards. These results suggest that most New Zealanders understand that every Kiwi will have access needs at some point in their lives and are empathetic towards those who have access challenges.

In July 2020, the Minister for Disability Issues released the "[Framework to accelerate progress towards accessibility in Aotearoa New Zealand](#)". This Cabinet paper notes the Minister for Disability Issues' intended policy approach to accelerate accessibility in Aotearoa New Zealand – a new legislative framework to act as a vehicle for progressive implementation of accessibility over time. Right now the Access Alliance is proud to work in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development on this framework.

In the lead up to the 2020 General Election, the Labour Party, the National Party, the Green Party and the ACT Party committed to support new accessibility legislation.

Now we want to see the bill drafted and introduced in 2021, and passed in 2022.

WE'RE CALLING ON YOUR SUPPORT

We need your help. Here are some actions you can take to help get new accessibility legislation introduced and passed:

- Show your support by emailing or sending a letter to your MP or party leader
- Visit your MP to explain the urgency
- Vocalise your support on social media using the hashtags:
 - #AccessLawNow
 - #GiveUsAccess
 - #ActForAccess
 - #AccessForAll
 - #AccessMattersNZ
- Encourage your MP to join the Parliamentary Champions for Accessibility Legislation group to:
 - Support accessibility legislation when it is introduced to Parliament
 - Emphasise that the best results come from developing accessibility legislation in close consultation with multiple stakeholders, including disabled people, government (central and local), business, Iwi and all New Zealanders who have access needs.

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