



17 MAY 2021

Dear

On 20 April 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Can I please have copies of all findings, reports and correspondence related to the 2 paragraphs below:*
 - *This further work will begin early in the new year. A working group will be established to look at developing interpreter standards for courts and at how the current funding mechanisms for interpreters might be more effective. The group is to be made up of government officials, Deaf experts, and NZSL interpreters and will be coordinated by the Office for Disability Issues. This group will consider how to improve the accessibility of interpreter services for Deaf people.*
 - *Another working group will develop plans in consultation with the Deaf community to remove language barriers in the areas of education, health, employment, and public broadcasting. This group will also be coordinated by the Office for Disability Issues.*

On 28 April 2021, you emailed the Ministry and refined your request to the following:

- *Can you please send me findings on interpreter funding mechanisms. Who had inputs and what was the final resolution/recommendation to the interpreter funding mechanism.*
- *What were the recommendations resulting from the inquiry into NZSL access to education, health, employment and public broadcasting?*

On 30 April 2021, you confirmed that you are interested in recommendations specifically given to the Minister resulting from Inquiry into NZSL access to education, health, employment and public broadcasting.

The Ministry has undertaken a search and identified the following three documents to be in scope of your request:

- Cabinet Paper – *Funding Systems for New Zealand Sign Language Interpreter Services* – dated, 2005.
- Cabinet Paper – *Removing Language Barriers for Deaf People* – dated, 2005.

- Report – Review of Long Term Disability Supports – Short Term Enhancements – New Zealand Sign Language, dated 27 October 2006.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding advice provided to the Minister relating to interpreter funding mechanisms, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Brian Coffey
Director
Office for Disability Issues

Chair
Cabinet Social Development Committee

FUNDING SYSTEMS FOR NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER SERVICES

Proposal

- 1 This report considers the effectiveness of current funding systems for New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreter services.

Executive Summary

- 2 The current system for funding NZSL interpreting services is a patchwork of multiple funding sources. Anecdotal evidence gathered in a survey of service users and providers is consistent with the limited data available to officials about the operation of the system. It shows that the current system is neither efficient nor effective and can result in deaf people being denied access to services and information which hearing citizens take for granted.
- 3 I recommend that the Office for Disability Issues prepares a further report to the Cabinet Social Development Committee on options for improving the current system of NZSL interpreter funding and provision to ensure it is in line with the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the principles of the NZSL Bill.

Background

- 4 On 20 October 2003, Cabinet directed a working group to report to Cabinet Social Development Committee on the funding mechanisms for NZSL interpreters and an assessment of whether these can be more efficient and effective. The working group is chaired by the Office for Disability Issues with officials from the Ministry of Justice, Deaf Community experts, and NZSL interpreters [SDC Min (03) 25/2, CAB Min (03) 35/5B refers].
- 5 Clause 9 of the NZSL Bill provides principles to guide government when exercising functions and powers, especially in the provision of government information and services to deaf New Zealanders. NZSL interpreter services are necessary for many deaf people to access government information and services. Lip reading is not often an appropriate option as it is inaccurate and it is also important to note that many deaf people have a low level of literacy.
- 6 The 2001 post census disability survey shows that there are at least 210,000 deaf or hearing impaired New Zealanders. Census data shows that almost 28,000 New Zealanders use NZSL (this includes both deaf and hearing people). Estimates of how many of these people are deaf range from at least 2,500 to possibly 7,000.
- 7 The working group estimates there are around 60 qualified NZSL interpreters working full or part time in New Zealand. Forty-four of these work in Auckland. Outside of Auckland, only the Waikato (3), Wellington (5), and Canterbury (2) have more than one interpreter and some regions (Taranaki, East Cape, Marlborough, Westland, and Southland) do not have any NZSL interpreters at all.

Comment

Current NZSL interpreter funding systems

- 8 At present, government agencies are largely responsible for funding and arranging their own interpreting provision. Generally, each department, or local office of a department, has its own criteria for deciding whether to provide interpreters, and method for sourcing interpreters. Interpreters are usually paid from departments' general operating budgets, and funding has to compete with a range of other priorities.
- 9 Interpreter services are provided by departments for various reasons and in a variety of ways:
 - 9.1 The Ministry of Justice provides interpreter services for legal proceedings consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and statutory obligations in relation to the Māori Language Act 1987. The NZSL Bill when enacted will also require the provision of NZSL interpreters for legal proceedings. However, a significant increase in demand for these interpreter services is not expected to result from passing of the Bill because courts already provide fairly comprehensive interpreter coverage.
 - 9.2 There is an expectation that services provided by District Health Boards, such as those within hospitals, are accessible to deaf people through the provision of interpreters and devices to assist communication. The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights 1996 Right 5: Right to Effective Communication, outlines that "every consumer has the right to effective communication in a form, language, and manner that enables the consumer to understand the information provided. Where necessary and reasonably practicable, this includes the right to a competent interpreter".
 - 9.3 The Ministry of Education funds support for students with high special needs in the compulsory education sector through the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes. The individual support package for a deaf student may include interpreter services.
 - 9.4 The Tertiary Education Commission provides supplementary grants to tertiary education institutions to support deaf and other disabled students in tertiary education. This may be used to fund interpreter services.
 - 9.5 The Work and Income Service of the Ministry of Social Development funds interpreters to facilitate case management processes, although provision of interpreters for this is patchy.
- 10 There are two national funding contracts to provide interpreter services:
 - 10.1 The Ministry of Social Development contracts Workbridge to administer Support Funds to disabled people, which includes interpreting in workplaces and education settings. In the 2003-04 financial year \$270,000 (GST incl) was provided for training and employment-related interpreting.
 - 10.2 The Ministry of Health contracts the Deaf Association of New Zealand to provide interpreting services to enable deaf clients to access "health and disability support services, and to be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities". The total amount allocated in the contracts is \$228,150 (GST incl). This reflects only three hours of interpreting per deaf person per year for the 2,000 deaf people registered with the Deaf Association. This funding can be used for interpreting services to access services such as a general practitioner, audiologist, or dentist appointment. However, there is some confusion over whether the funding can also be used for support needs that arise from the deaf client's "disability," including for access to social participation.

Problems with NZSL interpreter funding systems

- 11 The working group had difficulty getting good information about how funding is allocated. Departments, coordination and provider agencies have not collected data about interpreter services in a systematic way. There is a lack of reliable information about what, when, how, and why funding is allocated and who currently uses the services.
- 12 Consultation with funders, providers and service users revealed a general lack of awareness of communication issues for deaf people across government agencies. Many examples were also provided of deaf citizens finding that interpreter services were either not provided or inadequately provided so that they were unable to gain access to services that hearing citizens take for granted.
- 13 The following illustrate the sorts of problems that the working group heard about:
 - 13.1 Often frontline service delivery staff are unaware of departmental policies for providing interpreter services and deny deaf clients access to NZSL interpreters, despite the department having policies and resources to support the use of interpreters.
 - 13.2 Departments have not always factored the cost of interpreter services into their operating budgets. Often departments appear willing to provide interpreters, or have policies to support interpreter provision, but are unable to cover the cost from their operating budgets. The costs of providing interpreters can be high particularly for regular, ongoing appointments or for workshops/courses.
 - 13.3 Interpreting for community, social and cultural participation (such as funerals, marae events, and public speeches) has a low priority and is not often met. This reflects a lack of recognition of the New Zealand Disability Strategy within policies on interpreter services. The Strategy endorses support for disabled people to lead quality, independent lives in the community, and to access recreational and cultural opportunities.

Coordination of funding and supply of NZSL interpreter services

- 14 The Deaf Association is the primary coordinator of funding and supply of interpreter services and has provided a national booking and coordination system through its local offices since 1985. It is the primary contact for individuals or agencies requiring interpreter services and has some interpreters on staff and also contracts freelance interpreters.
- 15 Other agencies also provide coordination and supply services in Auckland and Wellington. The Deaf Mental Health Service in Auckland uses the Auckland Interpreting Management Service to coordinate special training for interpreters and the management of work assignments. The Wellington Community Interpreting Service fills a similar function and is used for coordination and assignment management purposes through regional contracts for health and justice interpreting. A significant number of interpreters are also self employed.

Effect of the NZSL Bill on demand for NZSL interpreters

- 16 Over time, the NZSL Bill is expected to increase consumer expectations, and demand, for interpreter services. No new budget allocation has been planned for implementation of the NZSL Bill. Departments are expected to implement the Bill within baseline budget allocations.

Overview of situation and recommended policy work

- 17 The lack of data on demand and supply of interpreter services is a symptom of inadequate planning in relation to these services. Anecdotal evidence gathered from the Deaf Community is consistent with what is known about how services are funded. For example, in some cases the contract price for interpreter services has not been updated in ten years. The evidence shows that deaf people experience barriers in accessing services and information because of poor access to interpreting services. In part these weaknesses appear to be due to a lack of effective coordination between the funding and the provision of services. However, sometimes there are no funds allocated for interpreters, or government agencies have decided that providing interpreters is either a low priority or not necessary.
- 18 The working group has considered the question of whether current funding mechanisms for NZSL interpreters could be streamlined to improve access. Some overseas jurisdictions have in place 'one agency' approaches to interpreter service funding across the whole of government which could be an effective approach. However, more work is required to develop a coherent framework. Moreover, I note that many of the identified funding and system issues are under consideration by the Office for Disability Issues led Review of Long-term Disability Supports, which reports to Cabinet in July 2005 with proposed directions for the future provision of all disability supports (including interpreter services).
- 19 I recommend that the Office for Disability Issues and the Treasury, report by 31 March 2006 on options for improving the system of interpreter funding and provision to ensure they are consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the principles of the NZSL Bill. The proposed report date considers the potential timetable for the detailed development of options by the Review of Long-term Disability Supports.
- 20 This further work will throw light on other relevant issues, such as current capacity and capability in the interpreter workforce, and the infrastructure needed to grow and maintain the workforce. Also, it will provide the Government with better information on the potential demand for NZSL services generally, and the work needed to enhance the level of awareness among government departments of the need for, and use of interpreters and other services to achieve greater participation of deaf people in their communities.

Consultation

- 21 A working group, comprising deaf leaders, interpreters, interpreter service providers and government officials, was established to consult widely and report on its findings. The group oversaw production of a consultation document which was distributed to key stakeholders in November 2004, and stakeholders' responses have closely informed this report.
- 22 The Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, and Social Development, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and The Treasury were consulted in preparation of this paper and their comments have been taken into account.

Financial implications

- 23 There are no immediate financial implications in this paper. Any additional costs that might arise from proposals arising out of this work will be subject to normal budget processes.

Human rights implications

- 24 The Human Rights Commission and the Health and Disability Commissioner have received complaints from deaf people regarding access to government services and information. The proposed work on improving funding systems for interpreters will help to ensure deaf people improved capacity to exercise their rights consistent with the Human Rights Act 1993.

Legislative implications and regulatory impact and compliance cost statement

- 25 No legislative implications, regulatory impacts or compliance costs arise from this paper.

Gender implications and Disability perspective

- 26 Work towards improving funding systems for the provision of NZSL interpreters in accessing government services, would be consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy in providing deaf men, women, boys and girls with full access to government services, as well as supporting deaf people to participate in social, cultural and community events.

Publicity

- 27 No publicity is expected or required in relation to this paper.

Recommendations

- 28 It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that clause 9 of the New Zealand Sign Language Bill provides principles to guide government departments when exercising their functions and powers especially in the provision of government information and services to deaf New Zealanders
- 2 **note** that in October 2003 Cabinet directed the Office for Disability Issues to report on the current funding mechanisms for NZSL interpreters, including an assessment of whether these can be made more efficient and effective [SDC Min (03) 25/2, CAB Min (03) 35/5 refers]
- 3 **note** that the current system for funding interpreting services is a patchwork of multiple funding sources and, according to a survey of service users and providers, the system is neither efficient nor effective and can result in deaf people being denied access to services and information which hearing citizens take for granted
- 4 **direct** the Office for Disability Issues, in consultation with the Treasury, to report to the Cabinet Social Development Committee by 31 March 2006 on options for improving the current system of NZSL interpreter funding and provision to ensure it is in line with the NZ Disability Strategy and the purposes of the New Zealand Sign Language Bill.

[SDC Min (05) 6/5; CAB Min (05) 12/5]

Chair
Cabinet Social Development Committee

REMOVING LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOR DEAF PEOPLE

Proposal

- 1 This paper proposes an approach for developing and reporting on plans to remove language barriers to participation for Deaf people in the areas of health, education, employment and public broadcasting.

Background

- 2 During consultation on proposals for a New Zealand Sign Language Bill (NZSL Bill), the Deaf community reported that language barriers to participation exist in every facet of their daily lives. The Deaf community identified the removal of these language barriers as the key to enabling Deaf people to participate in and contribute to society. They identified health, education, employment and public broadcasting as four priority areas where language is a barrier to access for Deaf people.
- 3 The NZSL Bill sets out principles that government departments, be guided, so far as reasonably practicable, by the following: the Deaf community should be consulted on matters that affect their language (including, for example, the promotion of the use of NZSL); NZSL should be used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public; government services and information should be made accessible to the Deaf community through the use of appropriate means (including the use of NZSL).
- 4 In October 2003 Cabinet agreed to the establishment of an interdepartmental working group, chaired by the Office for Disability Issues, tasked with developing plans to implement the principles of the NZSL Bill in the four priority areas. This working group includes the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Development, and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Department of Labour and the State Services Commission. Cabinet directed officials to report back to the Social Development Committee on the progress of this working group [CAB Min (03) 35/5B refers]¹.

Comment

Consultation

- 5 The interdepartmental working group consulted with the Deaf community through a Deaf advisory group comprised of Deaf leaders from around New Zealand, including Maori Deaf representatives. The key themes were that:
 - 5.1 barriers to participation for Deaf people are pervasive and marginalise and isolate
 - 5.2 discrimination and stigmatisation is a persistent problem that needs to be addressed both within government and among the general public

¹ The original report back date was 30 June 2004 and an extension was requested and approved to 28 February 2005 [CAB Min (04) 28/5 refers].

- 5.3 the community felt strongly that it should be consulted more on the design and delivery of services, and that consultation strategies should take care to be culturally and linguistically appropriate
- 5.4 the provision of resources (including interpreters) to Deaf people needs to be made more equitable and consistent.

Progress on developing the plans

- 6 The unique barriers faced by Deaf people are unlike those experienced by other disabled groups and other minority language groups, as NZSL is a wholly visual language with no written equivalent and it is the only effective method of communication for Deaf people. The work to date has been a learning process for government departments as a precursor to developing steps to adjust their policies and practices. They have also needed to review their current practices and policies in order to determine future steps and explore some innovative ways to remove these barriers.
- 7 Draft plans have been developed which identify some significant barriers for Deaf people and some current work that may address them. However, these plans need to be developed further to include more specific steps for addressing the barriers and should take a longer term view.
- 8 I propose that the interdepartmental working group continue to work on developing the plans which should include specific outcome targets and actions for achieving those outcomes over the next five years. I propose that the plans should form part of the departmental implementation plans for the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Reporting

- 9 The NZSL Bill provides in clause 10 that the responsible Minister may report on progress in implementing the principles set out in the NZSL Bill and that the report may be included in any report on the progress being made in implementing the New Zealand Disability Strategy.
- 10 Government departments are required to develop and report on annual plans that specify the work they will do to implement the Disability Strategy [EHC Min (01) 8/4 and CAB Min (01) 23/2 refer]. Information from these reports is used to inform the annual report to Parliament by the Minister for Disability Issues on progress with the Disability Strategy. The Office for Disability Issues manages this planning and reporting process.
- 11 The plans to remove barriers to participation for Deaf people in relation to health, education, employment and public broadcasting will assist the implementation of the principles of the NZSL Bill. Incorporating the plans into the Disability Strategy's planning and reporting process will enable ongoing and incremental implementation of the four plans. In addition, because the Disability Strategy implementation process is centrally managed by the Office for Disability Issues, it could facilitate inter-sectoral initiatives and a whole-of-government approach to removing language barriers for Deaf people.
- 12 I propose that the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Development and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Department of Labour and the State Services Commission report in their Disability Strategy implementation plans for 2005/2006 that they will develop, or contribute to developing, a detailed and long-term plan for the removal of language barriers to participation for Deaf people in the priority areas relevant to them.
- 13 I also propose that these key departments report on their progress in implementing the plans as part of their ongoing Disability Strategy implementation reports.

Timeframes

June 2005	The Disability Strategy implementation plans for 2005/2006 of the key departments state that they will develop, or contribute to developing, a detailed and long-term plan for the removal of language barriers to participation for Deaf people in the priority areas relevant to them.
June 2006	The Disability Strategy implementation plans for 2006/2007 of the key departments include specific outcome actions from the plans for the removal of language barriers to participation for Deaf people.
Ongoing	Actions for the removal of language barriers to participation for Deaf people included in Disability Strategy implementation plans and reports.

Consultation

- 14 The following departments were consulted in the development of this paper: the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Development and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Departments of Labour and Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the State Services Commission.

Financial implications

- 15 It is expected that departments will meet any costs from within their existing baselines, as is the case with implementing the Disability Strategy. Any additional expenses that arise from the implementation of the NZSL Bill will be subject to normal budget processes.

Human rights implications

- 16 The Human Rights Commission and the Health and Disability Commissioner have received complaints from Deaf people regarding access to government services and information. If further work is not undertaken there is a risk that government departments and services will continue to limit the participation of Deaf people and further complaints may be received.
- 17 The plans and the principles of the NZSL Bill aim to reduce inequalities experienced by Deaf people. This will go some way towards ensuring Deaf people improved capacity to exercising their rights consistent with the principles of the NZSL Bill.

Legislative implications

- 18 No legislative implications, regulatory impacts or compliance costs arise from this paper.

Gender implications and Disability perspective

- 19 Removing language barriers to participation for Deaf people in the four priority areas and implementing the principles of the NZSL Bill will benefit Deaf men, women, boys and girls. This work addresses the removal of language barriers for Deaf people so that they can reach their potential and contribute effectively to society.

Publicity

- 20 No publicity is required or expected in relation to the recommendations of this paper.

Recommendations

- 21 It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that during consultation on proposals for the New Zealand Sign Language Bill, the Deaf community identified removing language barriers as the key to enabling Deaf people to participate in and contribute to society
- 2 **note** that in October 2003, Cabinet agreed to establish an interdepartmental working group, chaired by the Office for Disability Issues, to develop detailed plans (in consultation with the Deaf community) to implement the New Zealand Sign Language Bill and remove language barriers to participation for Deaf people, so far as is reasonably practicable, in the priority areas of education, health, employment and public broadcasting [CAB Min (03) 35/5B refers]
- 3 **agree** that the plans will be developed further to include specific outcome targets and actions for achieving those outcomes over the next five years to address the particular language barriers experienced by Deaf people in the priority areas of education, health, employment and public broadcasting
- 4 **agree** that the Ministries of Health, Education, and Social Development and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, the Department of Labour and the State Services Commission report on their progress in implementing their plans in their ongoing New Zealand Disability Strategy implementation reports.

[SDC Min (05) 5/7; CAB Min (05) 10/6]

Hon Ruth Dyson
Minister for Disability Issues

Office for Disability issues

Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

Date: 27 October 2006

Security Level: **UNCLASSIFIED**

Report to: Minister for Disability Issues

REVIEW OF LONG TERM DISABILITY SUPPORTS – SHORT TERM ENHANCEMENTS – NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE

Executive Summary

- 1 This paper seeks your agreement in principle to funding proposals to assist with New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act implementation in the context of the Review of Long-Term Disability Supports.
- 2 Although sign language is the natural language for deaf people, NZSL literacy is low, and there is little support given to enabling deaf children and their families to develop NZSL as a primary mode of communication within the family, and for the deaf person in the wider community.
- 3 Many deaf people learn NZSL as young adults and come increasingly to rely on NZSL and interpreters to communicate in the hearing world. Funding for NZSL interpreters is inadequate to enable deaf peoples' participation in the economic and social life of the nation and there are few incentives to stimulate growth of a sustainable supply of appropriately qualified NZSL interpreters and tutors.
- 4 This paper presents proposals for short-term enhancements to provide improved access to NZSL learning and interpreter supports and recommendations for further work to implement the NZSL Act in line with the outcomes desired from the Review and the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Recommended Actions

We recommend that you:

- 1 **agree** that we should proceed with proposals to develop budget bids for the following initiatives:

1.1 Proposal 1: Family Support Facilitators

AGREE / DISAGREE

1.2 Proposal 2: Access - Volume of Interpreter Hours

AGREE / DISAGREE

1.3 Proposal 3: Resources for Access to Government Information

AGREE / DISAGREE

1.4 Proposal 4: Resource for Scoping Further Work

AGREE / DISAGREE

Jan Scown
Director
Office for Disability Issues

Date

Hon Ruth Dyson
Minister for Disability Issues

Date

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to seek your agreement that we should proceed with a number of proposals for short-term enhancements to assist with New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act implementation in the context of the Review of Long-Term Disability Supports.

Previous consideration

- 2 On 4 April 2005, Cabinet directed the Office for Disability Issues, in consultation with the Treasury, to report to the Cabinet Social Development Committee by 31 March 2006 on options for improving the current system of NZSL interpreter funding and provision to ensure it is in line with the NZ Disability Strategy and the purposes of the New Zealand Sign Language Bill [SDC Min (05) 6/5; CAB Min (05) 12/5 refers]. On 3 May 2006 the date for report back to SDC was extended to 30 November 2006 [[SDC Memo (06) 8/2 refers].
- 3 The NZSL Act came into force on 11 April 2006. In May 2006, it was decided to progress this report as part of the Review of Long-Term Disability Supports so as to ensure that NZSL interpreters and other NZSL supports are provided to deaf citizens in ways that are consistent with the way disability supports are provided to citizens with other impairments. This aligns with the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy, particularly Objective 7: to create long-term support systems centred on the individual.

Background

- 4 Sign language is the natural language of Deaf citizens. In 2004, the average age of diagnosis of hearing impairments among deaf children was 45 months. Implementation of a National Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (at present being piloted in Waikato and Tairāwhiti) expects to reduce this to age three months. Although many deaf children receive services from Advisors on Deaf Children (employed by the Ministry of Education), the emphasis to date has been on developing the deaf child's ability to utilise residual hearing and to develop oral-aural modes of communication.
- 5 Parents wanting their deaf children to learn NZSL can choose to enrol their children at one of the two Deaf Education Centres (at Kelston in Auckland, and Van Asch in Christchurch) or link in to services provided by the NZ Federation of Deaf Children and its local networks of voluntary associations that are supported through fundraising by the parents themselves. Outside of the Deaf Education Centres there is little support for the learning of NZSL and less than one-third of deaf children use NZSL. NZSL literacy within the Deaf community, among families of deaf people, and elsewhere in New Zealand society is low.
- 6 As deaf children mature toward adulthood, they often wish to identify as deaf and migrate to the Deaf community and learn NZSL as a means of accessing Deaf culture.
- 7 To participate effectively in the wider activities of public life, deaf NZSL users rely on NZSL interpreters to receive and impart messages and information with hearing people. The NZSL interpreter workforce is small (about 60 nationwide) and public funding provided specifically for NZSL interpreters allows about two hours per annum of interpreter time for each deaf person enrolled with the Deaf Association of New Zealand (although support funding provided

through Workbridge and the Tertiary Education Commission may be applied to the provision of NZSL interpreters).

- 8 Recent reports commissioned by the Office, the Deaf Association, and the National Foundation for the Deaf have identified serious issues for concern with the supply and coordination of NZSL interpreters and other NZSL professionals including tutors. Problems with the NZSL interpreter workforce are common to other languages as well and the Office has co-sponsored a study to examine the feasibility of establishing a single interpreter service covering all minority languages including NZSL.
- 9 To address the issues identified above, we have developed some proposals for short-term enhancements to provide improved access to NZSL learning and interpreter supports and recommendations for further work to implement the NZSL Act in line with the outcomes desired from the Review and the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Proposals

Short-term enhancements

Proposal 1: Family Support Facilitator

- 10 This proposal (linked to wider Review work) is to fund and develop a new role of Family Support Facilitator, for families with a deaf child, from the point of diagnosis of hearing impairment. A key role will be to offer communication support to enable the deaf child to participate and to foster the development of NZSL as the primary language for communication with the deaf child within the family unit.
- 11 Providing Family Support Facilitators will benefit deaf people and their families by linking them to the Deaf community and supports to assist them to develop NZSL. Acquiring NZSL at an early stage will make it easier for the deaf child to acquire English language.
- 12 As noted, this proposal is wider than just for deaf children and further details and costs are discussed in an accompanying paper – *Proposal for Establishment of Support Facilitators*.

Proposal 2: Access - Volume of Interpreter Hours

- 13 This proposal is to provide additional funding to increase the number of interpreter hours available to deaf New Zealand Sign Language users by an additional 10,000 - 14,000 hours. The funding would improve deaf peoples' access to Health and Disability Services as well as a range of other activities that enhance deaf peoples' participation in the economic and public life of the nation, as deemed to be a priority by deaf people themselves. Currently, public funding for NZSL interpreters is provided for access to Health and Disability Services only (although general disability support funding for employment and education may be applied to the provision of NZSL interpreters).
- 14 Increased funding for interpreter services will benefit deaf people by providing opportunities for effective communication with hearing people in a wider range of community settings and will contribute to NZSL interpreter workforce sustainability.
- 15 The cost of implementing this proposal is estimated to be within the range of \$460,000 to \$600,000 (excluding GST).

Proposal 3: Resources for Access to Government Information

- 16 This proposal is to provide funding to convert mainstream information resources of various agencies into formats that are accessible to the deaf community. For example, DVDs, videos, etc. Many agencies provide a range of information resources for potential clients and the general public, however most are not accessible (other than written pamphlets) to deaf people.
- 17 The funding would be administered by the Office and directed to initiatives by other government and public agencies wanting to develop policies and resources in fulfilment of their obligations under section 9 of the NZSL Act to make their information and services accessible to the Deaf community through the use of NZSL. The Office would invite proposals for funding projects that would be completed during the 2007-2008 fiscal year. In addition, the Office would produce guidelines to assist agencies to develop best practice in the provision of access for deaf people. We recommend that the initial fund be set at \$500,000, and that agencies receiving funding would agree to fund any ongoing provision of these resources.
- 18 Providing publicly available information resources in NZSL formats will benefit deaf people by making the information more immediately accessible, more understandable, and will enable the information to be shared among members of the Deaf community.
- 19 Also, one of the longer term directions of the Review is the development of the concept of a central information hub to assist disabled citizens to better navigate the disability supports system. This proposal will maximise the opportunities to link information resources into the central information hub mechanism once it is established.
- 20 The cost of implementing this proposal is estimated to be \$500,000 - \$600,000 (excluding GST).

Proposal 4: Resource for Scoping Further Work

- 21 This proposal recommends the commitment of resources for the scoping of further work to implement the NZSL Act. This will require the cooperation and input of other agencies to determine the most appropriate methods of development and delivery, and to further investigate and cost all the options and opportunities, thereby creating ownership by the various agencies.
- 22 Further work to implement the NZSL Act is required to ensure, among other things, that government agencies put in place operational policies and other mechanisms to support the use of NZSL in making information and services accessible for deaf citizens. Section 7 of the NZSL Act provides a right to use NZSL in legal proceedings and section 9 provides principles to guide government agencies in using NZSL to make information and services accessible.
- 23 The key four pieces of work identified for future development are:
 - (a) Direction: Interpreter workforce strategy
 - (b) Access: Technology options
 - (c) Awareness: NZSL literacy strategy
 - (d) Coordination – Single Service for Accessing Interpreter Services
- 24 The cost of implementing this proposal is estimated to be between \$150,000 and \$250,000 (excluding GST).

Detail on further work

Direction: Interpreter workforce strategy

- 25 This proposal would scope an interpreter workforce strategy to ensure that a sustainable supply of appropriately qualified NZSL interpreters can be assured to meet the Deaf community's expectations that NZSL will be the primary language of public discourse between deaf and hearing citizens and agencies.
- 26 This work would need to consider the future demand for interpreters, the capacity and capability of the NZSL interpreter workforce, the capacity of current interpreter training and prerequisite courses to provide candidates for entry to the profession, and systems and policies to support career development and progression, and the needs for interpreters for specialist settings (eg legal and health and Maori settings).
- 27 This work would also consider the feasibility of establishing additional training courses for NZSL interpreters and tutors outside of the existing courses offered by Auckland University of Technology.
- 28 Development of an interpreter workforce strategy would benefit deaf people by providing better training and professional development for NZSL interpreters and ensuring thereby that the right interpreter can be found for the right job at the right time.

Access: Technology options

- 29 This proposal would investigate the opportunities presented by various government strategies and work underway that utilise technological innovations such as e-Government, potential introduction of a video relay service, broadband access improvements, and private sector initiatives to improve information flows and communication between agencies and deaf people.
- 30 The work would need to consider issues relating to the geographic spread and concentrations of deaf citizens, the cost and ease of use of technologies, and the adaptations and supports that may be needed to enable deaf citizens to have access.
- 31 Developing technological options would benefit deaf people by providing a greater range of solutions for agencies and others to use NZSL to convey information and messages to and from remote locations and at times when interpreters are unavailable.

Awareness: NZSL literacy strategy

- 32 This proposal would develop a public awareness campaign, similar to *Like Minds, Like Mine*, to increase the community understanding of deafness and the visibility of NZSL as an effective medium for communication with and among deaf people. Consideration would be given to increasing the uptake of NZSL learning throughout the community by providing free access to deaf people and their families, to attend New Zealand Sign Language classes, in their local communities. The goals are to improve levels of sign language literacy in New Zealand and improve the ability of families to communicate and access their wider community.
- 33 Developing a NZSL literacy strategy would benefit deaf people and their families by increasing the general public understanding of the language and communication barriers deaf people face in doing ordinary, everyday activities and the tools that are available to enable them to surmount these barriers and participate on an equal basis with others. Early acquisition of sign language will assist integration into the deaf community, facilitate the

development of English language acquisition, and contribute to increased levels of NZSL literacy in the wider community.

Coordination – Single Service for Accessing Interpreter Services

- 34 This proposal is to scope the feasibility of creating a single New Zealand wide service for booking and accessing NZSL interpreters. The Office is co-sponsoring a feasibility study for establishing a single nationwide translator and interpreter services covering all minority languages (including NZSL but excluding Maori). This proposal would consider the desirability of having a discrete NZSL interpreter service and would link into any future proposal to establish a single interpreter and translator service for all languages (including NZSL).
- 35 This would include consideration of how to incorporate a regional focus, and be informed by the knowledge of, and strong links with, the Deaf community. It would also consider policies for coordination and booking of interpreter services and how to create and implement clear and transparent rules of engagement for interpreters, and consistent and sustainable charge out rates.
- 36 Creating a single NZSL interpreter service would benefit deaf people by providing one entry point for accessing NZSL interpreters and by reducing the possibility of double booking. Better coordination of NZSL interpreter services would encourage trained interpreters to stay in the profession and better meet their employment and career needs so the career choice looks more attractive.