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# Fact Sheet - Making Aotearoa accessible

Government has stated that a new and innovative approach is needed to meaningfully improve accessibility in New Zealand.

Improving accessibility is vital if New Zealand is to support disabled people to achieve fundamental human rights. As a result, Government is introducing a new framework that takes a progressive approach to identifying, preventing, and removing barriers to participation for disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, and others with accessibility needs.

This new framework will support the vision and principles of Enabling Good Lives and will recognise the importance of improving accessibility across society, including to housing, transport, information, communication, technology, public buildings and spaces. These are all really important for disabled people to participate in and feel a sense of belonging to their communities and the country.

This framework will reflect a partnership with disabled people, recognising disabled people as experts on accessibility from a lived experience perspective, and as advisors that can promote Government accountability on progress and begin to bring about changes across the private sector and wider society.

Our current framework for addressing barriers that disabled people face has been fragmented, slow, hard to measure, and hasn’t led to the credible policy, system design, and service delivery needed to achieve an accessible society.

### What we know:

* Many disabled people continue to identify barriers including accessing buildings, education opportunities and public facilities.
* Historically, New Zealand’s built environments, information platforms and many other key features of participation in civil society have been developed with little regard for disabled people’s access needs or their willingness to be full contributors to their communities. These barriers have often been long standing and systemic with improvements being slow and progress difficult to measure.
* Disabled people have a growing and legitimate expectation that universal design principles and accessibility features will be an integral part of planning and design. This expectation often extends beyond built environments and public infrastructure to education, health, government information and communication services and events. The responsibility for overcoming participation barriers too often falls unevenly on individual disabled persons and their family/whānau.
* At present responses to accessibility needs are fragmented across the public service and overly reliant on individual agencies to identify and appropriately prioritise remedial actions. This can lead to a lack of clear agency leadership on issues of accessibility. This was seen in the 2020 Level 4 lockdown that exacerbated existing inequities for many disabled people through lack of timely accessible information or access to PPE gear.

## Improving accessibility through legislation

Government has stated its commitment to making sure that changes in the accessibility arena are lasting.

The changes are designed to address historic participation barriers and prevent accessibility issues, and to embed an ongoing obligation over successive government terms.

The new stand-alone legislation lays the foundations to make New Zealand as accessible as possible.

The Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill will include a suite of measures like methodologies for addressing accessibility barriers, monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements, expectations for engaging with and listening to disabled people, as well as the purpose and principles for the accessibility framework.

## Establishing an Accessibility Governance Board

To sit alongside the disability system reform and to support the legislation, Government is also establishing an independent Accessibility Governance Board to ensure disabled people continue to be involved in decision making at the highest level possible.

In keeping with “nothing about us, without us”, the Board will be led by and represent disabled people, as well as bring in the technical expertise of government policy and business.

The Board will have an important role to play in complementing the work Government is doing to improve accessibility, by elevating accessibility, setting policy statements and monitoring progress.

You can access the Cabinet paper [here](https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/accelerating-accessibility.html).

**End of Fact Sheet - Making Aotearoa accessible**