



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Summary of the 'Improving access to family and sexual violence services' report

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Transcriber's Note: The logo at the top of the page is
Ministry of Social Development—Te Manutū Whakahiota
Ora.

Summary of the ‘Improving access to family and sexual violence services’ report

Background

Disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori experience higher rates of violence than non-disabled people.

However, evidence shows family and sexual violence (FVSV) services are often inaccessible and do not meet disabled people’s needs. There is a lack of disability support, limited workforce capability, and insufficient data on FVSV experiences within the disability community.

In 2023, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) received \$3.419 million to start improving the accessibility of FVSV services for disabled people. The funding was part of the wider government strategy Te Aorerekura National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence (Te Aorerekura).

MSD established the Accessibility Fund, a work programme to support FVSV providers increase their service accessibility. The programme also created an opportunity to collect data so we could develop a better understanding of the accessibility barriers disabled people face.

We have used data collected through the Accessibility Fund to produce a report: Improving access to family and sexual violence services, found at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/initiatives/family-and-sexual-violence/accessible-family-and-sexual-violence-services-for-disabled-people-fund-the-accessibility-fund.html> or shortened URL: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/accessibilityfund>.

This document provides a summary of the report.

What the Accessibility Fund involved

The Accessibility Fund work programme had four main initiatives:

Initiative One: Designing an accessibility self-assessment and providing accessibility evaluation reports to help FVSV providers improve their awareness and identify accessibility barriers. We used this tool to collect valuable data on the current state of FVSV service accessibility.

Initiative Two: Awarding Accessibility Enhancement Grants for FVSV providers to improve their physical, digital, information, and communication-based accessibility. 44 providers received grants of up to \$75,000.

Initiative Three: Making three safe houses physically accessible for disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori.

Initiative Four: Developing a disability training programme for staff working in MSD-funded family and sexual violence services. The training was about disability awareness and response and aimed to increase workforce knowledge and capability. It included topics like understanding accessibility barriers and how to better support disabled people affected by family and/or sexual violence.

How we collected data

We collected data across the four initiatives, including:

- Information from 85 Accessibility Self-Assessments completed by FVSV providers
- Face to face engagement and questionnaires from 44 Accessibility Enhancement Grant recipients
- A survey completed by 121 training programme participants
- The process of retrofitting three safe houses
- Evaluation reports undertaken by two accessibility specialists documenting the physical and digital accessibility of seven eligible FVSV providers.

What we learned

Before this programme, there was very little information about the accessibility of FVSV services. Data collected from the Accessibility Self-Assessments, evaluation reports, and questionnaires highlighted critical gaps in

FVSV service accessibility. Overall, findings showed most services had:

- Multiple physical accessibility barriers, including inaccessible entrances, toilets, parking, lifts, kitchens, and a lack of wayfinding signage. Few properties were sensory-friendly.
- Digital and/or communication barriers, including inaccessible websites and a lack of accessible information.
- Limited workforce capability and awareness to confidently respond to disabled people's needs, with limited access to training.

Overall, accessibility was not embedded in organisational processes and few providers had disability policies and strategies.

These barriers make it harder for disabled people to access services and may discourage them from seeking help.

How the Accessibility Fund has helped improve services

Accessibility Enhancement Grants

44 FVSV providers received Accessibility Enhancement Grants and improved their accessibility. Most providers

chose to implement a combination of physical, digital, and information-based enhancements:

- 14 providers installed accessible toilets
- 11 providers installed accessible ramps
- 10 providers translated documents into alternate formats
- 24 providers developed accessible websites
- 9 providers purchased sensory items e.g., fidget tools, tactile objects, interoception cards, and dimmable lamps.

Findings show the enhancements have had a positive impact:

- Removing physical, digital, information, and communication barriers has created more accessible and inclusive services.
- Providers reported disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori have more independence, autonomy, and can access services on an equal basis with others.
- Improving the sensory environment has reduced client anxiety and increased engagement, enabling staff to build rapport and trust.
- Having accessible websites with clear, inclusive information about FVSV services and accessibility options has led to a reported increase in self-referrals.

- The enhancements have helped staff increase productivity and efficiency.

Safe House Accessibility

MSD worked with Kāinga Ora and women's refuges in Auckland, Palmerston North, and Nelson to make three safe houses physically accessible. We collected data by tracking property modifications and engaging with the refuges. This helped us develop insights into disabled women's accessibility needs, the process of retrofitting a safe house, cost, and impact.

Key modifications included installing fully accessible kitchens, accessible bedrooms with wheelchair turning space, accessible bathrooms, and ramps for front and back entrance access.

Having accessible safe houses has improved the service for all women and children who need a safe place to go to escape violence. Some of the key outcomes reported include:

- Increased independence and autonomy of disabled women
- Reduced anxiety and increased trust in services
- Dismantling existing institutional and attitudinal barriers

- Motivating leaders to consider prioritising accessibility in organisational policies, budgets, and long-term planning.

Workforce Disability Training

MSD contracted a training provider to develop and deliver a series of workshops called ‘Beyond Barriers: Towards disability inclusive family and sexual violence services’. The workshops were designed to help FVSV staff improve their capability so they can support disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori.

143 FVSV staff members attended the workshops. After training, participants reported having a better understanding of how violence impacts disabled people. Data showed they had greater awareness of accessibility barriers:

- Their ability to recognise attitudinal barriers for disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori increased from 50 to 89 percent.
- Their ability to recognise environmental barriers for disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori increased from 48 to 92 percent.
- Their ability to recognise institutional barriers for disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori increased from 44 to 88 percent.

Overall, training has helped staff recognise and reduce bias, increasing their ability to meet clients' accessibility needs. It has also helped to improve cultural awareness and increase staff confidence to support disabled clients.

Opportunities to increase accessibility

The Accessibility Fund has made progress towards improving FVSV services in Aotearoa. For the first time, we have clear evidence about what works and what needs to change to make FVSV services fully accessible. When looking at opportunities to continue improving FVSV services for disabled people, it is important to consider:

- 1. There are still major accessibility gaps**

Many services are not yet fully accessible in physical, digital, communication, and information-based areas.

- 2. Providers want to improve their services**

The sector shows strong commitment and motivation to change.

- 3. Funding makes a real difference**

Even small investments like purchasing fidget toys can create meaningful improvements.

- 4. Training is essential**

Workforce capability is important to meet the diverse needs of disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori.

5. Accessibility is ongoing work

Achieving full accessibility requires long-term planning and continued investment.

End of Summary of the 'Improving access to family and sexual violence services' report