**The Accessibility Fund**

**Accessibility Self-Assessment FAQs**

This document provides a list of FAQs related to physical, digital, and other forms of accessibility.

### What is the Accessibility Fund?

MSD’s Family and Sexual Violence (FV/SV) Accessibility Fund is a time-limited fund to help MSD-funded FV/SV providers improve their physical and/or digital accessibility. The Accessibility Fund can be used to:

* Make physical modifications to refuges so disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori have equal access
* Support MSD-funded FV/SV providers to improve their physical, digital, and information-based accessibility with the opportunity to apply for grant funding
* Increase FV/SV staff awareness of accessibility needs and barriers through training
* Gather data to better inform our knowledge of the existing accessibility barriers to FV/SV services.

### Why is accessibility important for the FV/SV sector?

Disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori make up approximately 24% of Aotearoa New Zealand’s population and experience significantly higher rates of interpersonal violence compared to other New Zealanders. Disabled adults are 52% more likely than non-disabled adults to be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. They experience substantial physical and digital barriers preventing them from accessing FV/SV services, including an absence of accessible refuges/safe houses in New Zealand. This means disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori are acutely disadvantaged and deprived of a critical need.

### Why should the organisation improve its accessibility?

Improving physical, digital, and other forms of accessibility is vital to support disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori so they can live, work, and be included in all aspects of society independently and on an equal basis with others.

It is essential that providers eliminate all barriers preventing disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori from accessing their services and supports. To do this, providers should consider whether and how their services accommodate all people with disabilities, including physical, learning, psychiatric, neurological, and sensory impairments. This might involve –

* identifying whether facilities are accessible
* ensuring people are informed of barriers prior to accessing the service
* recognising changes needed to reasonably accommodate people.

Disabilities may be temporary, intermittent, or ongoing. It is also important to remember many people have multiple and/or hidden impairments (an impairment that isn’t immediately obvious) such as autism, ADHD, anxiety, or a hearing impairment amongst many others.

### What is the accessibility self-assessment tool?

The self-assessment tool is designed to help assess the organisation’s current level of accessibility. It is divided into four sections.

* Section one asks general questions about the organisation.
* Section two asks about the property’s physical accessibility, like whether it has a wet area bathroom or ramps.
* Section three looks at digital and information-based accessibility such as whether the organisation has an accessible website and alternate formats.
* Section four looks at other forms of accessibility like inclusion, policy, and communication.

Completing the self-assessment is part of the eligibility criteria for the FV/SV Accessibility Grant funding and/or Disability Awareness Training. The tool can also help identify changes and enhancements required to make services more accessible to more people.

### Is the accessibility self-assessment tool the same as an accessibility audit?

The self-assessment tool provides a general idea of the organisation’s current level of accessibility. Completing the self-assessment can help to identify potential accessibility enhancements, and support continued service improvements. It is not the same as a full accessibility audit, which provides a more detailed analysis and recommendations for greater improvements.

MSD is aware of the following organisations which provide full accessibility audits: [Be.lab](https://www.belab.co.nz/accessibility-assessments), [Barrier Free Trust](https://www.barrierfree.org.nz/advice-education), and [CCS Disability Action](https://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/access-advisory-services). We also recommend you do your own independent research if you are interested in obtaining an audit.

### Why is physical accessibility important?

Access to the physical environment (including buildings, streetscapes e.g., intersection design, crossings, signage, transportation, public services, workplaces, schools and many more) is a basic human right. Accessibility barriers such as narrow doors, no ramps, and inappropriate lighting can prevent many people from accessing services and facilities.

Creating a physically accessible environment tells people that all are welcome and any difference they might experience is not a reason for being excluded from these support services. It is important to dismantle all existing barriers so disabled people/tāngata whaikaha Māori have access on an equal basis with others.

### Why is digital accessibility important?

As a society we rely heavily on technology, whether for jobs, school, or services. Digital search engines such as Google are often the first place people go to find out what services are available and how/whether they can access them. Digital web content is our main source of accessing information and is embedded in our daily lives.

It’s important to recognise diverse needs and ensure digital accessibility so all New Zealanders have access to all information and communications.

### What is universal design and why is it important?

Universal design is about making buildings physically accessible to everyone, regardless of age, size, ability, or disability. Examples of universal design features include –

* wider paths, entrances, and thresholds
* level transition access inside and outside the building
* lever handles for doors and windows
* uniform lighting (avoiding sudden changes from bright to dim light)
* well-positioned grab rails for balance, especially in the toilet and shower
* slip-resistant flooring
* pull-out drawers
* step-free routes

Find out more about universal design on the Government’s Building Performance page – [Practice application of universal design.](https://www.building.govt.nz/building-code-compliance/d-access/accessible-buildings/about/practical-application-of-universal-design)

### What does it mean to be ‘digitally accessible’?

Being digitally accessible means having web content which anyone can use and interact with. The web content must comply with the [World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)](https://www.w3.org/WAI/test-evaluate/preliminary/) accessibility standards. These include considering font size and colour, captioning, ease of navigation, text readability, and the types of devices disabled people use to interact with websites (assistive technologies). Click [here](https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/#examples) for a quick introduction to web accessibility.

World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) provides the international standard on web accessibility ([the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/)). It is ba­sed on 4 principles:

1. Perceivable – people can hear or see web content
2. Operable – people can use a computer by typing or by voice
3. Understandable – having clear and simple language
4. Robust – people can use different assistive technologies.

Watch [this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20SHvU2PKsM&t=113s) about digital accessibility to find out more.

### Is there any digital accessibility advice available?

MSD is aware of the following services:

[Access Advisors Aotearoa](https://accessadvisors.nz/) are a pan-disability digital accessibility consultancy which help business become more digitally inclusive.

[Intopia](https://intopia.digital/) is a digital accessibility and equitable design agency, offering digital accessibility assessments.

We recommend you conduct your own independent research if seeking a digital accessibility advisor so you get a comprehensive overview of all services available.

### How can the organisation test its website content’s accessibility?

W3C provides useful guidance on how to assess the accessibility of a web page. To start, providers can do a [First Review of Web Accessibility](https://www.w3.org/WAI/test-evaluate/preliminary/).

There are also many automated tools available to test if a website is accessible. Some of these include:

1. [WAVE – web accessibility evaluation tool](https://wave.webaim.org/)
2. [Accessibility Insights for Web](https://accessibilityinsights.io/docs/web/overview/)
3. [ANDI – Accessibility Testing Tool](https://www.ssa.gov/accessibility/andi/help/install.html)

Please note, while automated web accessibility tools are a useful place to start, they do not always pick up all errors, whereas human user testing can be more thorough.

To find out more about testing a website’s accessibility, contact the MSD Accessibility Team at [accessibility@msd.govt.nz](mailto:accessibility@msd.govt.nz).

### Why is it important to provide information in different formats, other than digital?

Technology should enable not further disable and exclude, with many people not able to operate as simply as many others can, meaning that we need to cater beyond the obvious. This requires alternate options giving greater device choice for all users.

Consider those who cannot read English text and who prefer photos or drawings that show rather than tell as an example. Having posters, leaflets, and pictures available will also help to ensure services are visible and increase awareness.

Having accessible signage in and around the organisation’s premises will also help to ensure services are inclusive.

### How can organisations better accommodate neurodivergent people?

Consider the higher level of overwhelm that neurodivergent people may experience following traumatic events (e.g., stronger emotional reactions and exacerbated PTSD symptoms).

Thinking about the organisation’s **sensory environment** is one way to help.

Think about the sound, noise, smells, and colours and how they might cause sensory overload. Some quick fixes to prevent sensory overload include –

* creating calm, quiet spaces for people
* playing soothing music
* providing fidget tools
* using warm neutral or muted pastel colours to create a more relaxing environment
* installing dimmer switches and avoiding harsh lighting.

Also consider how the organisation communicates with neurodivergent people. This could include giving them –

* extra time to process information
* providing clear information using simple language/plain English
* breaking down long text into shorter sentences
* providing information in alternate formats

Together these might contribute to better supporting neurodivergent people.

### What is the process for developing alternate formats?

MSD has a centralised service to help convert information into alternate formats. This supports providing the right information, at the right time, and in the right way for the disability community.

Find out more about alternate formats on MSD’s website [Alternate formats - Ministry of Social Development (msd.govt.nz)](https://msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/accessibility-guide/alternate-formats.html).

Find MSD’s guide to requesting alternate formats at [Guide to requesting Alternate Formats - Ministry of Social Development (msd.govt.nz)](https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/alternate-formats/guide-to-alternate-formats.html).

Note: The earlier you can put in a request for creating alternate formats, the more likely you are to receive the information in a timely manner.

### What is assistive technology?

‘Assistive technology’ is an umbrella term for both physical and digital equipment which help people retain independence, enabling physical and digital access in their everyday lives. Physical assistive products include

* wheelchairs, and other mobility equipment
* glasses
* hearing aids
* core communication/choice/alphabet boards
* pen grips.

Digital assistive products include

* speech recognition software
* screen readers
* braille displays
* augmentative communication tools supplementing speech or writing
* voice amplifiers
* accessible keyboards
* alternative mouse options
* tablet devices with communication apps.

### Is there a database where clients can find out which services are accessible?

[Service Finder](https://www.areyouok.org.nz/get-support/support-for-me/family-violence-services/) provides some information on accessible family and sexual violence services to help people find the right support service. However, clients often go to access help and support without knowing whether they can access the building and facilities.

Coming face to face upon arrival with access issues can cause additional anxiety and stress.

To alleviate this pressure, providers should –

* update their websites, information, and social media where possible
* inform people whether their service is accessible
* note any barriers client may face if they have to access their services and supports.

### What is Aotearoa’s obligation to accessibility?

In 2008, Aotearoa New Zealand ratified the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD),](https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-articles) committing to ensuring disabled peoples’ full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and freedoms. As part of the Convention under [Article 9](https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/article-9-accessibility), New Zealand has committed to removing physical and digital barriers which prevent disabled people from equal access.

Aotearoa envisages becoming a non-disabling society where people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations. This is set out in the [New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/about-the-strategy/new-zealand-disability-strategy-2016-2026/the-new-disability-strategy-download-in-a-range-of-accessible-formats/).

The strategy recognises eight outcomes. Particularly relevant to accessibility are outcomes 5 and 7:

* [Outcome 5: Accessibility](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/outcome-5-accessibility/#accordion-79-heading) envisages a future Aotearoa where there is access to all places, services, and information with ease and dignity.
* [Outcome 7: Choice and Control](https://www.odi.govt.nz/assets/New-Zealand-Disability-Strategy-files/pdf-nz-disability-strategy-2016.pdf) involves providing support which empowers people so they can make informed choices.

The National Disability Action Plan 2024-2028 is currently being designed to deliver the eight outcomes in the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

### What is the Accessibility Charter?

The Accessibility Charter is an all-of-government approach to developing accessible communications and alternate formats.

MSD has championed the charter, launched on 15 February 2018. As of 16 September 2022, 40 government agencies, four DHBs, and three local government agencies had committed to the charter.

Read the [Accessibility Charter](https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/accessibility-charter/the-charter.html).

### What does developing disability policy involve?

The Office for Disability Issues (now integrated into Whaikaha) has developed a [Disability Toolkit for Policy](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.odi.govt.nz%2Fassets%2FUploads%2Ffull-resource-kit.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK). This is a useful resource to start thinking about how to create a disability policy.

### Is there more information about supporting disabled people who have experienced family/sexual violence?

There is limited research in Aotearoa about the intersectionality of disabled people experiencing family and/or sexual violence and the barriers of accessibility. We have listed some useful literature, research, reports, and guidelines below:

[Designing for access and usability | Building Performance](https://www.building.govt.nz/building-code-compliance/d-access/accessible-buildings)

[A roadmap for a violence and abuse free future for disabled people in Aotearoa. Human Rights Commission: Te Kāhui Tika Tangata. (2023).](https://tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/acting-now-for-a-violence-and-abuse-free-future/a-roadmap-for-a-violence-and-abuse-free-future-for-disabled-people-in-aotearoa?stage=Live)

[Equitable access to wellbeing framework. Te Pou. (2022).](https://www.tepou.co.nz/resources/equitable-access-to-wellbeing-framework-pdf)

[Everything, with us: Working with people with disabilities. Ezekiel Robson. (2016).](https://toahnnestgoodpractice.squarespace.com/inclusive-practice#/supporting-survivors-in-pacific-communites-1-1/)

[The hidden abuse of disabled people residing in the community: An exploratory study. Michael Roguski. (2013).](https://communityresearch.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/formidable/Final-Tairawhiti-Voice-report-18-June-2013.pdf)

[Making Disability Rights Real – Whakatūtutu Ngā Tika Hauātanga: Third report of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/sites/default/files/2020-06/Making_Disability_Rights_Real_2014-2019.pdf)

[Not inherently vulnerable: An examination of paradigms, attitudes and systems that enable the abuse of dis/abled women. Debbie Hager. (2017).](https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/36826)

[Te Puna Aonui: available support](https://tepunaaonui.govt.nz/)

[New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse](https://nzfvc.org.nz/)

**International literature:**

[A handbook on Supporting people with Intellectual Disability who have Experienced Family and Domestic Violence.](https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/A-Handbook-on-Supporting-People-with-ID-who-have-Experienced-DFV-Final.pdf)

### Is there more information available about disability?

[The Federation of Disability Information Centres](https://www.thefederation.nz/) has some useful videos and resources.

Kia Roha provides a directory of available learning and information: [Disability Supports & Services Directory - Your Way Kia Roha](https://www.yourwaykiaroha.nz/learning-information/disability-supports-and-services-directory/)

[Altogether Autism - Trusted Autism Information and Advice](https://www.altogetherautism.org.nz/) provides information and advice on autism.

### Who should the provider contact to find out more about the Accessibility Self-Assessment?

Providers can contact the MSD Accessibility Fund team at accessibilityfund@msd.govt.nz

## Further Information – Practical Tips

### What modifications are required when installing a wet area bathroom?

Wet area bathrooms can contain various fixtures and appliances, including a shower, toilet, and sink. However, there are many additional fittings required to make the wet area fully accessible. Consider –

* level access
* slip-resistant flooring
* installing grab rails in and beside the shower/bath area
* installing a bathroom lock that allows emergency access
* the positioning of fixtures
* the correct dimensions to ensure a fully accessible wet area.

BRANZ provides further information on [designing accessible wet areas.](https://www.level.org.nz/wet-areas/wet-area-design/accessibility/)

It is also essential to ensure the user’s safety. Wet areas can accumulate high humidity levels and condensation and must comply with the [E3 Internal Moisture New Zealand Building Code Regulation](https://www.building.govt.nz/building-code-compliance/e-moisture/e3-internal-moisture). Installing waterproof membranes and appropriate ventilation can help manage moisture.

### How can the organisation make its reception accessible? (counters)

Having an accessible counter or service desk which anyone can use creates a more inclusive experience for clients. Barrier Free Trust recommends accessibility should be incorporated into the overall design of the counter so everyone including wheelchair users, children, and people of shorter stature can interact with staff.

The design includes having –

* a 900mm high counter that includes a 775mm high accessible counter space suitable for seated users
* a 250-300mm shelf as a substitute for knee space for wheelchair users.

Guidelines for suitable counters are set out on the [accessible reception and service counter](https://www.building.govt.nz/building-code-compliance/g-services-and-facilities/g5-interior-environment/accessible-reception-and-service-counters) page of the Government’s Building Performance website.

### What is accessible parking?

Mobility parking spaces are wider than standard parks and positioned closer to building entrances. Accessible parking should have the following features:

**Size** – the standard size for an accessible park is 3.5m x 5m

**Slope** – the slope should not be steeper than 1:50 in any direction

**Surface** – the best surfacing materials are tarmac or concrete. Other surfaces that have similar slip resistance could be acceptable, but only if they are stable and firm enough to support a wheelchair under all weather conditions

**Location**– the park should be positioned as close to the building entrance as possible and free of moving vehicles.

**Access** – there must be an accessible route from the park to the building entrance.

**Signage** - the International Symbol of Access (ISA) should be applied to the surface of the park, or pole-mounted at the head of the parking space, positioned to be seen from arrival. Other signs that include the ISA indicate the direction to the park along the route from the street as well as the park itself.

### What is an accessible route?

An accessible route is one that can be easily and safely traversed by a wheelchair user without assistance, free of kerbs and other obstructions. There should be –

* no abrupt changes of gradient other than kerb ramps where needed
* no need to pass behind parked cars to reach an accessible park
* a route marked with high visibility paint

### Why are slip-resistant surfaces important for accessibility?

It is essential to have suitable flooring and surfaces which comply with health and safety standards. It is particularly important to have slip-resistant surfaces for –

* stairs
* access routes to buildings
* emergency exit routes
* public foyers and corridors

Slips and falls are often caused by –

* wet or greasy surfaces
* loose flooring
* steps with no grip
* hazardous flooring material

Injury can be avoided by using the right flooring materials with non-slip coatings and sufficient friction.

Examples of slip-resistant surfaces can be found in the [New Zealand Building Code DI Access Routes](https://www.building.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/building-code-compliance/d-access/d1-access-routes/asvm/d1-access-routes-2nd-edition-amendment6.pdf).

### Where can mobility aids and equipment be purchased?

MSD is aware of the following websites providing a range of aids and equipment:

[Independent Living | Disability Equipment NZ | Mobility Aids Equipment (ilsnz.org)](https://ilsnz.org/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwr7ayBhAPEiwA6EIGxA4WLNPJN2yMhWHLQijpbrBoWHbgngpiWHAT6z2AiVcg0n4UvnnwGBoCfzAQAvD_BwE)

[Mobility Centre - Aids & Equipment | Wheelchairs | Mobility Scooters | NZ](https://www.mobilitycentre.co.nz/?utm_plasource=Search&keyword_k=mobility%20centre&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwr7ayBhAPEiwA6EIGxKukLe39_IbsRxBD1UgzIsUpbmu17jY8ffeVcj-DSbewepyMR2je5BoCcBwQAvD_BwE)