

Disability awareness information sheet



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WHAKAHAUHAU KATOA O HANGA

Definition of disability

The New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001) presents a long-term plan to change New Zealand from a disabling society to an inclusive society. It defines disability thus:

“Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments. Disability is the process that happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.”

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 1) states:

“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

These definitions recognise that disability may be hidden, temporary or long term. They also recognise that negative attitudes towards disability can be a major barrier, further reducing participation in society.

In summary:

- Disability is an evolving concept. How disability is defined and understood is influenced by social and environmental factors.
- Disability is a process of experiencing barriers and exclusion from full participation in society. It is not seen as a medical condition.

New Zealand statistics

- An estimated 660,300 people (17% of the population) reported that they experienced disability in the 2006 Statistics New Zealand survey. That's one in six people in New Zealand.
- Disabled New Zealanders are a diverse group, representing all sectors of society and a wide range of impairments.
- An ageing population is likely to increase the number of people with experience of disability.
- Disability is experienced across all social groups, genders, ages and communities. There is no one homogenous experience of disability. Disabled people have lives as diverse as any other community group.

Legal requirements

Two pieces of legislation govern buildings. The Building Act 2004 and the Building Code require all buildings to which the public are admitted (whether for free or by charge) to have reasonable and adequate facilities for disabled people to visit, work, and carry out normal activities there. The New Zealand Standard NZS 412:2001 is a comprehensive guide to providing access in buildings and facilities.

The Human Rights Act 1993 protects disabled people from discrimination. It is, therefore, not only helpful to provide access to disabled people; often it's a legal requirement.

The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 promotes and maintains the use of New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). It recognises NZSL as an official language of New Zealand.

New Zealand is party to other non-legislative and international documents that promote inclusion. Underpinning the New Zealand Disability Strategy, developed in 2001 by the Government in consultation with disabled people and the wider disability sector, is a vision of an inclusive society.

In 2008, New Zealand ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention describes measures and actions that countries and states should undertake to ensure disabled people have equal rights and opportunities as all other people.

Language

There are two views about disability prevalent in New Zealand and internationally: "people-first" and the "social model" of disability. Both views believe society disables people through the physical and social barriers it presents.

People-first language

People-first language affirms the individual and does not define people by physical impairments. This is about describing disabled people in a way that values them for who they are, rather than identifying them by what they cannot do.

For example:

Okay: person with a disability

Not okay: crippled, handicapped, suffers from/afflicted with disability, wheelchair bound

The social model

A view of disability that recognises people are disabled by barriers in society (systems, attitudes, architecture, services) that exclude or prevent them from participating fully. The New Zealand Disability Strategy and the Office for Disability Issues use the term “disabled people”. Although this term places the word “disabled” prior to “people”, the social model interprets this as people who have been disabled by society.

Okay: disabled people, disabled community, disability sector, disability perspective

For more information:

- Visit the Office for Disability Issues (www.nzds.govt.nz).
- Read more about the New Zealand Disability Strategy (www.nzds.govt.nz/nzds/index.html).
- Go to United Nations Enable (www.un.org/disabilities/index.asp) and read the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



For the full picture about arts and accessibility in New Zealand, you can download *Arts For All | Ngā toi mo te katoa*, published by Creative New Zealand in partnership with Arts Access Aotearoa, 2009.

> www.artsaccess.org.nz/index.php/arts-and-disability

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