



NZSL Strategy submission form

Have your say

Your feedback on this draft strategy is important. You do not have to answer all of the questions. However, your feedback will help shape the final strategy, and support the NZSL Board to maintain and promote NZSL in Aotearoa New Zealand.

For more information about the consultation process, please go to <https://www.nzsl.govt.nz> or contact: nzsl_strategy@whaikaha.govt.nz

Submissions

Please send your submission to nzsl_strategy@whaikaha.govt.nz

The closing date for submissions is 2 June 2025.

Official Information Act requirements

Under the Official Information Act 1982, anyone can request feedback from this consultation. If this happens, Whaikaha-Ministry of Disabled People officials would normally redact personal information (for example, your name and any contact details) and then release your feedback to the person who asked for it. If you feel there are good reasons to withhold your submission in its entirety, please clearly indicate these in your feedback.

Background information about you

This submission was completed by:

Name: Catherine Hall

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Email: policy@alzheimers.org.nz

Organisation (if appropriate): Alzheimers NZ

Position (if appropriate): Chief Executive |

Are you submitting this:

☐ as an individual?

☒ on behalf of a group or organisation?

☐ other? (please specify): Click or tap here to enter text. |

If completing as an individual, do you consider yourself to be:

☐ deaf / Deaf

☐ hard of hearing

☐ hearing

☐ other? (please specify): Click or tap here to enter text. |

If completing as an individual, do you work in any of the following capacities (tick as many as applicable)?

☐ NZSL interpreter

☐ NZSL translator

☐ NZSL tutor or teacher

☐ Deaf tutor or teacher

☐ Other role that works primarily with deaf / Deaf or hard of hearing people (including Turi Māori) |

If completing as an individual, do you consider yourself to be (tick as many as applicable):

- ☐ New Zealand European / Pākehā
- ☐ New Zealand Māori
- ☐ Pacific / Pasifika
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ other? (please specify): Click or tap here to enter text. |

If completing as an individual, do you identify as:

- ☐ male
- ☐ female
- ☐ gender diverse |

If completing on behalf of an organisation, does your organisation work with or support either or both of the following groups (tick as many as applicable):

- ☒ deaf / Deaf or hard of hearing people generally
- ☒ Turi Māori specifically |

If completing on behalf of an organisation, does your organisation either work in or support the following roles (tick as many as applicable)?

- ☐ NZSL interpreters
- ☐ NZSL translators
- ☐ NZSL tutors or teachers
- ☐ Deaf tutors or teachers
- ☐ Other role that works primarily with deaf / Deaf or hard of hearing people (including Turi Māori) |

Questions

1. Do you agree with the proposed vision and approach of the draft NZSL Strategy? How could these be improved? Please include the reasons for your answer

☒ Yes

☐ No

Comment:

We support the vision of making NZ Sign Language (NZSL) a common and everyday language. From a dementia perspective, this is vital. Hearing impairment is a known modifiable risk factor for dementia, and many people living with dementia also experience hearing loss, which can compound communication difficulties and increase social isolation. NZSL can offer an essential alternative mode of communication for people with cognitive and hearing impairments.

We recommend including explicit recognition of older people and people living with dementia in the strategy. Making NZSL more visible and accessible across aged care and health settings, especially dementia services, would reflect an inclusive, equity-focused approach. |

2. Do you agree with the five strategic priority areas? How could these five strategic priority areas be improved? Please include the reasons for your answer

☒ Yes

☐ No

Comment:

The priority areas are well conceived and we particularly support those that aim to make NZSL more accessible and integrated across public services.

We suggest improving them by:

- Recognising the importance of NZSL access in aged care, dementia care, and health settings.
- Including older people and people with dementia as a specific group who need tailored NZSL access and support.

This would align with the strategy's focus on improving outcomes for all deaf communities, including those with complex needs. |

3. Do you agree with the high-level actions set out under each of the strategic priority areas? Why / Why not?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Comment: The high-level actions provide a strong foundation, but further specific actions are needed regarding health and aged care who may rely on NZSL to express themselves.

For example:

- Include action to train health and aged care professionals in basic NZSL and increase access to interpreters in dementia and aged care services.
- Ensure dementia-inclusive communication approaches are developed in line with NZSL education and distribution efforts.

This would better meet the needs of people with dementia who may rely on gesture-based or visual communication methods. |

4. What other actions do you think could be included? Please include the reasons for your suggestions.

Comment:

We recommend the following actions:

- Develop NZSL communication guidelines for dementia and aged care settings, co-designed with older people and people with dementia.
- Fund training sessions for health professionals to better communicate with people who use NZSL.
- Fund NZSL interpreter access specifically for dementia assessments, care planning, and aged care services.
- Run public awareness campaigns that highlight NZSL as a tool for supporting people with hearing loss.

These actions would improve quality of life, communication, and healthcare outcomes for people with dementia who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or experience language decline. |

5. What do government agencies need to consider when considering the draft NZSL Strategy to ensure what is delivered meets the needs of communities? Please include the reasons for your suggestions.

Comment:

Government agencies must ensure NZSL Strategy are inclusive of older

people, people with dementia, and their families/whānau, many of whom may also have hearing loss. This includes:

- Incorporating NZSL into dementia-friendly standards for public and healthcare services.
- Making co-design with people with dementia and hearing impairments part of all strategy implementation.

This would reflect Te Tiriti obligations and the UNCRPD principles of inclusive, equitable access to communication and care. |

6. Some actions will need to be led by communities – for instance, ensuring that Deaf people are included in community events. What do communities, in particular Deaf and Turi Māori communities, need to consider when implementing actions? Please include the reasons for your suggestions.

Comment:

Communities should consider how to make events more dementia-friendly, older people and NZSL-accessible, including clear signage, quiet place, and NZSL interpreters.

Communities should also consider partnering with dementia organisations and aged care providers to increase awareness of the impact of hearing loss and dementia, and ensuring Turi Māori with dementia are supported to access te ao Māori using NZSL. |

7. What are the key barriers that you have experiences in accessing NZSL?

Comment:

From the dementia sector perspective, the key barriers include:

- Lack of NZSL-trained interpreters in healthcare settings, including in dementia care.
- Insufficient integration of NZSL into dementia support services and diagnostic processes.
- Limited access, availability and awareness of NZSL among health professionals and public services.

These barriers need to be addressed to avoid missed diagnosis, poor care planning and communication breakdowns. |

8. What do you see as the most important areas that need the most urgent improvements?

Comment:

The most urgent areas for improvement include:

- Embedding NZSL access in healthcare, especially for dementia and aged care services.
- Training for healthcare professionals to understand and support people who use NZSL.
- Promoting NZSL in dementia-friendly communities including in care homes, hospitals and community-based services so that people with dementia can fully participate in decisions about their care. |

9. Finally, how will we know if the strategy has been successful?

Comment:

We will know if the strategy is successful when:

- Increased number of NZSL users in the community.
- People with dementia and hearing loss report better communication and care experiences using NZSL.
- Healthcare professionals demonstrate increased awareness and are more confident in supporting people who use NZSL.
- Interpreters are available for people with dementia and older people across health, legal, and social settings.
- Data includes outcomes for people with dementia who use NZSL, showing improvement in service access and inclusion. |