



Scan for
NZSL name

Visual description: A purple Whaikaha logo with a QR scan for the NZSL name.

Aide-mémoire

Date:	23 October 2025
For:	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues
CC:	Rebecca Elvy, Deputy Chief Executive, Outreach and Innovation
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Security level:	In confidence

NZSL Strategy Launch

Meeting/visit details

- **Date:** Monday 17 November 2025
- **Time:** 5:30pm
- **Location:** Legislative Chambers, Parliament

The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board Chair will seek consent from people who may appear in the photos taken by your office when they arrive at the event.

A Runsheet is provided in **Appendix One**. Speech notes are provided in **Appendix Two**.

Primary contact and accompanying Official

- **Rebecca Elvy**, Deputy Chief Executive, Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha
Contact number: ~~s9(2)(a)~~
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Purpose

To officially launch the NZSL Strategy 2026-2036 and celebrate its significance with government officials, members of the NZSL Board, Te Rōpū Kaitiaki and key stakeholders.

Background

The NZSL Strategy 2026-2036 sets the direction for government support and promotion of NZSL over the next ten years. It builds on the original strategy

developed in response to concerns that NZSL was a language at risk and reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring NZSL survives and thrives.

It reflects two strategic approaches:

- **Energise** is focused on Deaf people and NZSL users, particularly children. It involves priorities and actions aimed at ensuring the survival of NZSL and ensuring early acquisition of use of NZSL by Deaf people and NZSL users.
- **Integration** is aimed at people who do not use NZSL. It involves priorities and actions aimed at ensuring NZSL thrives, and promoting the awareness, acceptance and everyday use of NZSL.

These approaches are supported by five priority areas:

1. **Acquisition and Learning** – ensuring deaf children, non-speaking children, and their families can learn and use NZSL.
2. **Evidence and Data** – building a robust evidence base to understand the experiences and outcomes of NZSL users.
3. **Deaf and NZSL Workforce** – growing the workforce of NZSL educators, interpreters (including trilingual and tactile interpreters), and Deaf professionals.
4. **Public Sector** – improving the responsiveness of government agencies to NZSL users, including through capability plans and annual reporting.
5. **Celebrating NZSL** – raising the profile of NZSL and recognising its cultural significance.

The strategy responds to long-standing issues such as language deprivation, poor education outcomes for Deaf children, and limited access to services in NZSL. It also reflects obligations under the NZSL Act 2006, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The launch event is a significant milestone. It signals visibility, leadership, and a renewed commitment to NZSL.

Key issues and advice

Education and Equity

Deaf children are not achieving at the same level as their hearing peers. The Strategy aligns with the draft Education Strategy for Deaf children and supports improved NZSL acquisition and delivery in education settings. This is particularly important for Turi Māori (Māori Deaf), who face additional barriers accessing te ao Māori through NZSL.

Legislative Foundations

As Minister for Disability Issues, your presence signals strong leadership and commitment to NZSL. It also reinforces the Government's responsibility under the

NZSL Act 2006 and the UNCRPD to promote and protect NZSL as a treasure / taonga and official language.

The NZSL Act 2006 sets principles for government departments to:

- Consult with the Deaf community
- Promote services in NZSL
- Ensure accessibility

Strategic Direction and Obligations

The NZSL Strategy is intentionally ambitious. It seeks to address long-standing systemic issues that prevent Deaf people and NZSL users from fully participating in society. Many actions will extend beyond the life of the Strategy but are necessary to create meaningful change.

Key obligations proposed in the Strategy include:

- Departments developing NZSL capability plans
- Government agencies reporting annually on NZSL use and service availability in their annual reports.

These requirements aim to improve responsiveness to Deaf people and NZSL users. Capability plans support departments to act in accordance with the principles of the NZSL Act 2006.

Data and Accountability

There is limited data on NZSL users and outcomes. The Ministry will work with agencies to develop indicators and action plans to measure progress. Annual reporting to Cabinet will help track implementation and ensure accountability.

Budget Considerations

Some actions may require reprioritisation of funding within agencies. Where additional funding is needed, initiatives will be subject to normal Budget processes. While some agencies have expressed concern about resource implications, these investments are essential for long-term impact.

Whole-of-Government Commitment

Attendance by Chief Executives and senior officials at the launch will demonstrate whole-of-government commitment and sets the tone for collaborative implementation. The success of the strategy depends on coordinated action across government agencies, communities, iwi, and the Deaf sector.

Next steps

- Copies of the NZSL Strategy will be given to government agencies.
- You could encourage agencies to work with the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha to implement the Strategy and co-develop action plans aligned with the five priority areas.
- An initial action plan will be developed and launched in April 2025.
- An initial indicator framework will be developed and released by November 2025.
- You could continue to engage with the Deaf community, Turi Māori, and NZSL stakeholders to ensure the strategy remains responsive and inclusive.

End

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Responsible manager: Loren Savage, Acting Manager NZSL, Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha

Appendix One

NZSL Strategy Launch – Run Sheet

Date: Monday 17 November 2025

Time: 5:30 PM – 6:30 PM

Location: Legislation Chambers (LCC), Parliament

Duration: 1 hour total (30 minutes for speeches)

Time	Who	What
5-5:30pm	Everyone	Arrival – NZSL interpreters and Te Reo translator are present.
5:30pm	Te Ati Awa s9(2)(a) [REDACTED]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Upon the arrival of Minister Upston, the pūtatara will sound three times to signal the commencement of proceedings. Karanga – led by s9(2)(a) to call guests and hosts together. Mihi whakatau – will be given by s9(2)(a) on behalf of ahi ka “Te Ati Awa” and Parliamentary Services.
5:45pm	MC – s9(2)(a) (NZSL Board Chair)	Following the mihi whakatau, it will be handed to the MC to explain the house keeping rules, the formalities and launch may proceed.
5:50pm	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues	Speech about the Government’s commitment to NZSL
5:55pm	s9(2)(a) [REDACTED], Chair NZSL Board	Chair speech on behalf of the Board
6:00pm	s9(2)(a) [REDACTED], Chair Te Rōpū Kaitiaki – via video	Chair speech on behalf of TRK
6:05pm	Rebecca Elvy – DCE Outreach and Innovation, Ministry of Disabled People -Whaikaha	Speech on behalf of Paula

6:10pm	Closing remarks and closing karakia (Ryan Cassidy to do karakia)	Acknowledgements of each of the speakers, thanking everyone for coming and closing with karakia.
6:15pm	Everyone	Networking opportunity Sharing of the Strategy Interpreters available for networking Light refreshments available
6:30pm – 7pm	Everyone leaves	

Whaikaha kaimahi to greet people – check names on list, hand out stickers, guide to the room – make sure one interpreter with them

Appendix Two – Speech – NZSL Strategy launch

17 November 2025

602 words; 5 mins @ 115wpm

[Expected speaking length: 5 minutes]

Key messages

- Welcome everyone to the launch of the New Zealand Sign Language Strategy
- NZSL is important as it is an official language of NZ and is a way for Deaf and NZSL users to be connected to their community and society.
- Acknowledge the NZSL Board, Te Rōpū Kaitaiki, the Ministry of Disabled People, government agencies and the community for their involvement.
- The NZSL Strategy is for 10 years as it's ambitious, and aims to both integrate and energise the language more.

Introduction / Acknowledgements

- **SIGN** – Kia ora, my name is L-o-u-i-s-e, my sign name: Blazer.

Speak

- This name was given to me by Kellye from the NZSL team at the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha.
- It is a privilege to be here today to welcome you to Parliament to officially launch the New Zealand Sign Language Strategy 2026-2036
- NZSL is one of our official languages. It is a treasure that connects people and communities.
- It is the first language of many Deaf New Zealanders and for some, it is their only language. NZSL is a language of identity, inclusion, and pride.
- This Strategy is ambitious. It reflects the aspirations of Deaf people, Turi Māori, NZSL users and allies. It builds on years of engagement, research, and consultation.
- I want to acknowledge the NZSL Board, Te Rōpū Kaitiaki, and the Ministry of Disabled People - Whaikaha for their leadership.

- I know everyone involved has worked hard throughout the process of developing this strategy, ensuring that community members had the opportunity to give their thoughts and feedback into the strategy.
- I also want to thank the many individuals, families, and organisations who contributed to shaping this Strategy.
- I want to acknowledge that there was also engagement from across the public service, recognising that it is all our responsibility to increase access to NZSL and the information that is out there.
- To those of you here today – leaders from the public sector, the Deaf community, and whānau, thank you for your commitment to NZSL. Your presence reflects the shared responsibility we all have in making NZSL visible, valued, and used.
- The vision is clear: New Zealand Sign Language – everyone, everywhere, every day.

Energising NZSL for Deaf and NZSL Users

- To ensure NZSL survives and thrives, we must energise its use amongst Deaf people and NZSL users, especially children.
- This means ensuring early access to NZSL for deaf children, non-speaking children and their whānau. It means building strong learning pathways and addressing language deprivation, which we know can have lifelong impacts.
- It also means growing the Deaf and NZSL workforce, for example Deaf educators, NZSL interpreters, trilingual and tactile interpreters so that NZSL is available in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities everywhere.
- We must also strengthen the evidence base. We need better data to understand the experiences of NZSL users, including Turi Māori, Deaf Pacific peoples and Deaf plus communities. This will help us target resources and measure progress.

Integrating NZSL Across Society

- To truly lift the status of NZSL, we must integrate it into everyday life – across government, business, media, and communities.

- This means improving NZSL in public services. Government departments will develop NZSL capability plans and report on NZSL use and service availability. Staff will be supported to learn about NZSL and Deaf culture.
- It means celebrating NZSL through NZSL Week, media stories, and role models from the Deaf community. It means celebrating the 20th anniversary of NZSL as an official language and preparing to mark the 25th and 30th anniversaries during the life of this Strategy.
- Integration also means ensuring NZSL is visible and valued. Like kupu Māori, NZSL phrases should be part of our everyday language. This helps build understanding, reduce barriers, and promote inclusion.
- Everyone has a role to play. Whether you're a parent, teacher, public servant, or business owner, you can help to energise and integrate NZSL.

Closing

- As Minister for Disability Issues, I am proud to champion this strategy. I will report annually to Cabinet on its progress, to ensure NZSL is embedded in our systems and services.
- Let us all commit to making NZSL a visible, valued part of our everyday lives.
- NZSL is a language of connection, culture, and community. Let's make sure it thrives – everyone, everywhere, every day.
- Thank you very much and enjoy the rest of the celebration.