# **Draft RNZFB Board Position Statement on the Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill**

# **Issue**

The Government’s Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill (the Bill) does not go far enough. The scope of the Bill needs to be broadened and strengthened to include accessibility standards, a regulator, a barrier notification system and a disputes resolution process.

# **Statement**

The RNZFB Board believes that the Bill fails to:

* create the conditions to make New Zealand fully accessible and inclusive over time.
* ensure that people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision are included in society and can actively participate in all areas of life.
* deliver tangible improvements for people who are blind, deafblind, have low vision, or who have print disabilities.

# **Issues with the Bill as it was introduced**

* It doesn’t have credibility with the community it purports to advance.
* It sets up nomination committees to set up another committee to tell the Minister what she should already know. It comes across as laughable and insulting. After decades of hard work, barriers that disabled people face are already acknowledged in so many areas of government policy or strategy, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (UNCRPD), disability strategy, the Accessibility Charter and more recently, the establishment of the new ministry.
* It sends a clear message to disabled people that the discrimination they face isn’t really discrimination in the real sense of the word: not like others experience it. In a very real sense, it feels like a legislative pat on the head.
* It only partially delivers on five of the thirteen principles[[1]](#footnote-1) which the Access Alliance set out, which could be seen as the minimum requirements for legislation of this kind.
* It applies to nobody outside the committees it sets up or monitors, and doesn’t even adopt the few standards which have already been adopted by government.
* The committees it sets up will spend years identifying barriers we already know about. It’s red tape at its finest.
* It triggers a series of questions such as:
	+ What on earth has been going on in government for the past few decades?
	+ Doesn’t the Government not already know what the system barriers are? And if not, what was the purpose of a series of disability strategies and even a fully-fledged ministry?
	+ There is lots of talk of monitoring, evaluation, reviewing, progress, but of what?
* It states it will review accessibility progress, but since there will be no progress, this review will be a strange one.
* It lacks enforceable standards and it only allows for recommendations; which can be ignored, delayed or just kicked down the road.
* It does not support the Government to give effect to its commitment to Article 9 of the UNCRPD in domestic legislation. Under the Convention the Government must take “appropriate measures” to “develop, promulgate and check the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public, including those provided by private entities.”

# **Background**

Currently 180,000 Kiwis currently are blind, deafblind or have low vision and the numbers are forecast to grow to 225,000 by 2028[[2]](#footnote-2).

The three big hurdles that people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision continue to have to tackle in the external world are:

* Obstacles in the built environment — inaccessible public buildings, spaces and transport.
* Barriers to information and communication — inaccessible technologies, websites, published materials.
* Attitudes that underestimate the potential of people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision to contribute to society.

Advocates who are blind, deafblind or have low vision have worked tirelessly over decades to speak truth to power and make the case an accessibility legislation. Getting the Bill wrong risks alienating people who have waited too long for change, and have high hopes that this time they’ll see actual improvements in their lifetime.

Getting the Bill right has huge potential to address inequality, improve social cohesion and grow the economy. The consequences of getting the Bill wrong will take decades to unwind.

The Government has missed an opportunity to accelerate accessibility for business and the economy. Businesses want to open their physical and digital doors to more customers with access needs. Many organisations find it hard to become accessible without clear accessibility standards. At a minimum, the Bill should have included accessibility standards which would have boosted the accessibility market.

This Bill does not recognise that our ageing population is increasing and has access needs. There are currently over 800 000 SuperGold cardholders, with around 60,000 people joining each year[[3]](#footnote-3). Older people are a valuable market and are growing in size and spending power, and the total value of expenditure by seniors is projected to rise from around $20.7 billion in 2016 to around $42.4 billion in 2031[[4]](#footnote-4).

When people abandoned a retail website because of the barriers they find, that is lost business. The “Click away Dollar” of lost business in New Zealand is estimated to be between $395 - $522 million[[5]](#footnote-5).

A recent survey found that 97.5% of New Zealand websites have accessibility problems[[6]](#footnote-6). New Zealand has non-enforceable web accessibility and usability non-enforceable web standards. Although Government Departments have signed up to the Accessibility Charter, many failed to comply with web accessibility standards[[7]](#footnote-7). This Bill does not address barriers in the digital world.

# **What the RNZFB Board and Blind Low Vision NZ will do**

* Make a submission to the Social Services and Community Select Committee on the Bill, including additional evidence on what’s needed to broaden and strengthen the scope of the Bill.
* Encourage individuals and organisations to put in their own submissions.
* Continue to lobby to broaden and strengthen the Bill.
* Collaborate to accelerate New Zealand’s accessibility system.

# **What the RNZFB Board and BLVNZ wants Government to do**

Amend the Bill in order to strengthen and broaden it to:

1. Include provision for easy-to-understand and enforceable accessibility standards across key areas of life to be developed and implemented.
2. Create an enforcement and regulation regime to accelerate accessibility.
3. Make it easy for people to report and resolve access barriers quickly.
4. Guarantee that public money will not create new barriers. Currently there is no standard Government procurement process for purchasing accessible public goods and services and information.
1. Read the principles - <https://www.accessmatters.org.nz/the_accessibility_act> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Moore, David; Rippon, Rebecca; and Niemi, Malin. *Vision Rehabilitation in New Zealand*. 27 February 2019. Sapere Research Group. Available on request from jzidov@blindlowvision.org.nz. Page 14, Section 4.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://supergold.govt.nz/partners/partner\_information and for other references see: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/hansard-debates/rhr/document/HansS_20200311_052650000/8-question-no-8-seniors> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/factsheets/budget/factsheet-supergold-card-2019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Purple Dollar estimate for New Zealand based on Purple Pound Research from the UK. Peter Chou. July 2022. Unpublished. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Accessibility in Aotearoa, Access Advisors, Published 17 September 2021. <https://accessadvisors.nz/accessibility-in-aotearoa/> . Accessed 24 August 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. One example out of many - Covid-19 tracing app 'unusable' for blind and those with low vision. RNZ. 26 May 2020. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/417526/covid-19-tracing-app-unusable-for-blind-and-those-with-low-vision> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)