

RIGHTS OF A DEAF PERSON

Deaf New Zealanders
are entitled to the
same rights as any
other New Zealander



“Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.”

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 30

Deaf New Zealanders are entitled to the same rights as any other New Zealander. This equal status of Deaf New Zealanders was cemented in 2006, with the implementation of the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act.

The Act recognises NZSL as an official language of New Zealand, alongside English and Te Reo Māori.

The NZSL Act is endorsed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 21 of the Convention requires parties to ensure Deaf people can access government information and services.

The purpose of the NZSL Act is to promote and maintain the use of New Zealand Sign Language by:

1. Declaring New Zealand Sign Language to be an official language of New Zealand;
2. Providing for the use of New Zealand Sign Language in legal proceedings;
3. Empowering the making of regulations setting competency standards for the interpretation in legal proceedings of New Zealand Sign Language;
4. Stating principles to guide government departments in the promotion and use of New Zealand Sign Language.

The Act incorporates principles to guide Government departments in providing resources and information:

1. A government department should, when exercising its functions and powers, be guided, so far as reasonably practicable, by the following principles:
 - (a) The Deaf community should be consulted on matters relating to NZSL (including, for example, the promotion of the use of NZSL)
 - (b) NZSL should be used in the promotion to the public of government services and in the provision of information to the public
 - (c) Government services and information should be made accessible to the Deaf community through the use of appropriate means (including the use of NZSL).

2. Consultation carried out by a government department under subsection (1)(a) is to be effected by the Chief Executive of the government department consulting, to the extent that is reasonably practicable, with the persons or organisations that the Chief Executive considers to be representative of the interests of the members of the Deaf community relating to NZSL.
3. The purpose of the principles in subsection (1) is to promote access to government information and services for the Deaf community, but nothing in subsection (1) is to be read as conferring on the Deaf community advantages not enjoyed by other persons.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states:

1. Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information. To accept and facilitate the use of sign languages, Braille, other communication tools as chosen by the person with disability. (Article 21)
2. Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the Deaf community. (Article 24)
3. Ensuring action is taken to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. (Article 24)
4. Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign language and deaf culture. (Article 30)
5. Providing forms of the live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate access to buildings and other facilities open to the public. (Article 9)

Deaf people have the right to have NZSL interpreter/s present, enabling them to access information in their preferred language. It is strongly recommended you book a qualified NZSL interpreter for your meeting with a Deaf person. Visit www.deaf.org.nz for more information.

Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand

Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand is a Deaf-led, not-for-profit organisation formed more than 30-years ago by D/deaf New Zealanders. The organisation focuses on promoting

Awareness of, Access to and Advancement of NZSL – to help strengthen the rights of Deaf people and give them the confidence to be an active part of society.

As the only nationwide provider of services to Deaf people, Deaf Aotearoa works with Deaf people and provides information on a range of services, including legal advice, education opportunities and employment issues.

Deaf Aotearoa also works with government agencies, businesses and organisations to provide information and resources on life for Deaf New Zealanders, the Deaf community and NZSL.

Deaf Aotearoa

- Promotes the advancement of human rights for Deaf people
- Celebrates New Zealand Sign Language
- Works with Dedication, Discipline and Determination to strengthen the rights of Deaf people

World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)

As a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), Deaf Aotearoa is accountable to the Federation's principles – promoting the human rights of Deaf people in accordance with the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

WFD is an international, non-governmental, central organisation comprising national associations of Deaf people. The organisation represents more than 74 million Deaf people worldwide. WFD activities are conducted according to the following principles:

- To promote the status of national sign languages
- To improve Deaf education
- To improve access to information and services
- To claim for Deaf human rights in developing countries
- To promote the establishment of Deaf organisations where none currently exist

For more information about Deaf Aotearoa and the services it provides please visit www.deaf.org.nz

For more information about learning NZSL please visit www.nzsign.co.nz

