



To the Petitions Committee

## Written submission in support of petition: Leave no-one behind - Campaign to address digital exclusion

### Introduction

Citizens Advice Bureaux New Zealand | Ngā Pou Whakawhirinaki o Aotearoa (CABNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a written submission in support of our petition: [Leave no-one behind - Campaign to address digital exclusion](#). This is a collated submission made on behalf of the 7,394 people who signed our petition. Our petition to Parliament is a call to action to prevent the harm being caused to people as a consequence of digital exclusion. We would also like to make an oral submission to the Committee in due course.

In 2020, CABNZ released the report [Face to Face with Digital Exclusion](#) putting a spotlight on digital exclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a focus on digital public services and their impact on inclusion and wellbeing. That report accompanies this submission as evidence in support of our petition. It provides insights taken from the analysis of 4,379 CAB client enquiries where issues of digital exclusion were identified.

We encourage you to read the report in full and the many stories it contains. These stories demonstrate the distress, frustration and isolation experienced by people who are struggling to participate fully in society because government agencies are prioritising online services and other channels of engagement are disappearing.

Please note that while CABNZ is championing this issue, you will see in this submission that the concerns being raised are shared by organisations that represent communities around Aotearoa. Contributors to this submission include:

- The Salvation Army
- IHC
- Grey Power NZ

- Human Rights Commission, Disability Rights Commissioner
- Rural Women NZ
- Disabled Persons Assembly
- Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa
- Age Concern NZ
- Joint submission from: Blind Low Vision NZ, Kāpō Māori Aotearoa NZ Inc, Parents of Vision Impaired NZ Inc, and Access Advisors
- Consumer NZ

These organisations have given their support to the CAB campaign, but they also bring their unique perspectives to the issue and have made submissions that reflect the challenges faced by the people and communities they serve and work alongside.

## What we're concerned about

### Access to public services is a human right

The Government has a legal obligation in its provision of public services to ensure that it does not exclude people from the services, rights and entitlements they are trying to access.

### People in New Zealand are struggling to access public services and are experiencing exclusion

Government agencies are shifting online and are taking a 'digital-only' or 'digital-first' approach. People in Aotearoa do not have equitable access to digital services and digital services do not meet the needs of every person or in every circumstance. Offline channels are being deliberately phased out and inclusive services are disappearing. This approach is excluding some of Aotearoa's most vulnerable people and communities,<sup>1</sup> is breaching the Government's Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations to Māori,<sup>2</sup> its domestic and international obligations to disabled people,<sup>3</sup> and wider human rights obligations to people in communities across Aotearoa.<sup>4</sup> This is further entrenching inequities in society.

### The Government is prioritising a digital-first approach without a public mandate for doing so

We are concerned that government agencies are operating on assumption that 'digital is best', without a public mandate for doing so. This demonstrates a total lack of regard for the importance of face to face or kanohi ki te kanohi services, and of human connection and interaction in providing people with the services they need and are entitled to, with dignity. We are disturbed to see the clear articulation in the Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan 2020–2021 that "we

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<sup>1</sup> The CAB [report](#) identified that digital exclusion is causing particular disadvantage to Māori and Pasifika people, people with disabilities, and those who face financial, literacy and language barriers. While it impacts on people across age groups, digital exclusion creates particular difficulties for older people. It also has an undeniable impact on those who aren't 'connected', with rural New Zealand being significantly disadvantaged.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/177~report-digital-inclusion-user-insights-maori/html>, note "digital exclusion is worse for Māori".

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>, refer in particular to Articles 9 and 21.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrc.co.nz/news/access-government-services-human-right-chief-human-rights-commissioner/>

recognise non-digital access will be time-bound as more and more government services will only be available online in the future”.

**Community services are being left to fill the gaps.** The Government’s programme of ‘digital transformation’ assumes increased efficiencies and cost savings, but does not account for the costs being shifted to the community sector and society more broadly. Community organisations such as the CAB are bearing the brunt of this cost shifting without being adequately resourced.

## What we want from you

### Ensure public services are accessible to all

- We ask that **public services to be designed and delivered with people’s needs at the centre** and for them to reflect the “spirit of service to the community” outlined in the Public Service Act 2020. This includes treating all people with dignity and compassion, as well as understanding and meeting people’s needs.<sup>5</sup>
- We ask that **all New Zealand Government services be provided through an integrated, equitable, holistic, person / whānau centred, omni-channel (choice of channels) approach.** This means that public services should be readily accessible to people through a streamlined, cross-government entry point that responds to the person / whanau as a whole, rather than in a siloed, disconnected way. It also means that people can access and transact with public services in a range of ways (eg, online, face to face, through others, or by phone) so they can get what they need and are entitled to, with dignity. Offline options should not be seen as a “time-bound”, or as a deficiency, but as a critical part of a well-functioning public service. There are good international models that the NZ Government should be drawing on, such as [Service New South Wales](https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/)<sup>6</sup> and [Service Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/service-canada.html)<sup>7</sup>.
- We ask that as an essential starting point, the NZ Government’s ‘[Digital Service Design Standard](#)’ **be expanded into a ‘Public Service Design Standard’.** A lot of work is going into developing the Standard, but by limiting government services to ‘digital services’, this misses the opportunity to ensure that public services are genuinely designed to meet people’s diverse needs. The ‘Public’ Service Design Standard needs to explicitly identify standards for services to be available across channels, to reduce the chance of social exclusion that happens with digital-only services. Minimum service standards should be identified and mandated across all government services, as per the Public Service Act 2020 requirements.

### Develop an integrated strategy to address barriers to inclusion

- We ask that the **Government develop, collaboratively with the social sector, an integrated strategy to address barriers to social inclusion.** This is about recognising that inclusion is the goal and that digital inclusion is just one aspect of this. Many of the digital exclusion barriers we have identified in our report are not ones that can fixed by giving a person a device and an

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<sup>5</sup> Refer Public Service Act 2020, sections 13 and 16.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/service-canada.html>

internet connection and sending them on a digital skills course. They reflect fundamental issues of poverty, literacy, disability, language barriers and systemic inequality.

- We ask that **all government policies and services are publicly measured and monitored against the Living Standards Framework**<sup>8</sup> to ensure that decisions are informed by what will best support improved wellbeing.
- We ask that in the **Government address the specific digital exclusion issues** faced by people around Aotearoa to ensure that all people have equitable access and opportunity to use digital technologies. This includes the following actions:
  - Ensure that there is affordable and reliable connectivity for all communities across Aotearoa, noting in particular the challenges for our rural communities.
  - Increase access to free Wi-Fi and digital devices for those in low income households and those suffering disadvantage as a result of a lack of access.
  - Support people with disabilities to access appropriate equipment and technology that is best suited to their needs. Ensure public services are accessible and that service design is informed by consultation with people with disabilities and by universal design principles.
  - Ensure free-access computers, printing services, and facilities for scanning and uploading documents are readily accessible in the community.
  - Make all government websites zero-rated, which means they are able to be accessed without data use charges. This approach is currently being taken with a number of health and wellbeing websites.<sup>9</sup>
  - Provide ongoing learning opportunities with the aim of increasing basic digital literacy and confidence, and include ongoing 'helpdesk' type support.

#### **Provide increased resourcing for intermediary organisations**

- We ask that the Government **adequately fund the CAB to carry out its vital intermediary role**, including assisting people who experience exclusion (whether social or digital) to interact with government and to access information, services and entitlements.
- We ask that community intermediaries are provided with **specific funding to meet the demands and cost-shifting that has resulted from government services going online**. This includes providing funding for printing, for hardware, software and facilities, for learning and development for staff and volunteers, and to resource capacity within organisations such as the CAB to contribute to strategic engagement with government on social inclusion and digital inclusion issues.
- We ask that the Government provides **dedicated customer support and escalation mechanisms** for community intermediaries to help them to provide timely support for the people they are working with and alongside.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/measuring-wellbeing-lsf-dashboard>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/digital-health/other-digital-health-initiatives/sponsored-data>

## What people say about why they signed the petition

**Helen** “Because the lack of public service by the public service has concerned me for some time, including for reasons of accountability and sustaining and strengthening, rather than weakening and eroding, democracy.”

**Liz** “We are steered into a digital corral at every turn - pressured to buy a smartphone cos you need this app or that app and be plugged into the internet-of-things 24/7. My Dad is digitally illiterate and terrified he will soon lose access to his bank account for not owning a computer or cellphone. Vulnerable citizens needing access to services are least able to afford all the gadgets and gizmos and endless data plans required to participate in the most basic human levels society. ENOUGH ALREADY!”

**Suzie** “My mother is 91 and has no access to a mobile phone computer etc, through choice, however not being able to do banking and access services etc other than in digital form, takes away her independence.”

**Michelle** “We are throwing the baby out with the bath water by inadvertently excluding personal service for everyone.”

**Claire** “People that are most in need of the services that have been transferred online are often the people most likely to be digitally excluded.

**James** “Digital exclusion is real and affects many in the community.”

**Jene** “Because not everyone is able to use a device and for some using a device freaks them out. Customer service is about people, not numbers.”

**Evie** “Because inclusivity benefits everyone.”

**Joy** “Because not everyone has access to a computer. Especially the elderly, they like to speak to someone personally.”

**Ramona** “The assumption that young people are digital experts doesn't stand - when many Māori and Pacific young people do not have smart phones or internet access. If you can't download a job application or apply for a Work Visa - stress, after stress can occur - that's digital exclusion! Govt agencies need to account and provide inclusive services to ensure 'basic' things like 'hard-copies' and 'forms' can be completed without a smart-phone or internet. 1000s are excluded every day - we can do better!”

**Zoe** “Digital Exclusion should be a key focus as we move forward in a digital world. It shouldn't be left to NGOs to ensure that our most vulnerable get support they are entitled to.”

**Mike** “To ensure no one is left behind.”

**Patricia** “When I see someone use a smart phone, I feel left behind and unable to find information quickly. It is not a nice feeling. Technology can help but only if one knows how to use it.”

**Danny** “Because public/government services need to be accessible to all, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.”

**Merania** “So many people are digitally excluded - and unless every Kiwi is trained, given access to Internet and computer devices - they will always be disadvantaged.”

**Nataliya** “As a volunteer who has dealt with dozens of people who face digital exclusion, I can say that this is a real issue especially in our most vulnerable groups. This has never been more relevant for those people than during Covid-19 with the rapid decrease in face to face services.”

**Denise** “Too many people excluded.”

**Emma** “In our fast-paced lives, not everyone has access to the digital world, which so many of the community, organisations, services and governments take for granted. Peoples' rights shouldn't be jeopardized because they are marginalized.”

**Helen** “I am not a digital expert, and find I have to spend an increasing amount of time and trouble trying to carry out what some organizations demand- in a type of language one is not familiar with.”

**Ross** “I'm dyslexic and frequently make errors when on line. I do not feel safe dealing with important documents on line.”

**Lynda** “We need equitable access for all to support services.”

**Catherine** “My friend has no access or knowledge of how to use or navigate a computer and all communication to and from him is by his landline which he can manage. Anything else would be a huge disadvantage to him.”

**Olivia** “I wish to be offline and in the real world more. However, due to the government, my university, my job increasingly relying on technology for last minute announcements I feel I have no choice but to buy a smartphone / laptop which is a huge financial burden and it has a huge effect on lifestyle. Technology has changed from a tool to an attention mining machine and I feel it's dangerous to take away alternatives to technology with these risks.”

**Glenn** “I believe that it is unfair to exclude people who require services due to their inability or not having access to on line services. Although there are a number of courses to aid people with developing the necessary skills - some individuals through no fault of their own may never be able to retain the information necessary to use such services and will therefore be always disadvantaged in a society which insists on removing face to face service for essential services.”

## Stories of digital exclusion

Following are additional insights shared by people who wanted to tell us why they are concerned about digital exclusion and how digital exclusion can be addressed.

### George's story

I am in my 50s, own my own house, am autistic and I am becoming an outsider in my own life. It used to be that I could walk into a government department and speak with a person. It wasn't easy but I got used to it and they helped. I could ask questions, could take away information to look at and, if need be, I could go back and ask more questions. The people there would help me fill in forms if I needed it and I could do most tasks myself.

Now there are no offices and, if there are, I don't know how to find them or they are not there for public access or you are encouraged not to be there. It's hard to find a number in a phone book and then I get super stressed because I don't know which option to choose from the long lists. And that is if you can get an answer. My portable phone runs out of battery before most calls go through and then there is the automated voice giving options that don't mean much if you don't know exactly what you need. If none of the words match what I am asking then I am stumped and have to hang up. It's the same online. I am scared. Really scared. I am scared I have not done something that WINZ (or does it have another name now? I don't know) requires because they tell me to do it online.

I don't understand online. I find it too hard to find the right things and then it's written in a way that I am not sure if it's what I am supposed to do or if my information is for that form. Everyone says "it's easy online" and then I feel stupid and get more scared about phoning or trying online because of all the failures or the mistakes that can't be fixed or cause more problems. I'm not stupid but I didn't grow up with computers. I haven't had any way to learn computers.

I don't have a fancy computer or a new computer or the latest programmes or a smart phone or data. My computer is old and it doesn't like all the updated programmes that the government departments use. My phone only does text because that's what I can afford and it's what I know and sometimes there's no money on my phone either. Some online information isn't shown because it's too updated for my computer or none of it shows.

I don't know which options to choose or sometimes how to choose them. Words can be interpreted in more than one way and with nobody to ask I am lost. What do I do if I need something but the only option is pay online. I can't and I can't go into an office and pay because there is no office. I want to do a volunteer role but I can't because I don't have a new enough birth certificate (I have six old ones but they aren't good enough) and it took too long to find online and then it costs too much and it's pay online. So, it's more stay at home.

I don't try working anymore because I am scared I am earning too much and if I phone to declare income the phone message says do it online and there is no option for anything else and it's too hard so even if I do earn some money I don't phone and now that's breaking the rules and I'm scared I will be caught out. So, I don't do anything. I used to be able to do the basics. The basics now are well outside my realm of ability.

Please, I don't like things happening to me. I want to participate but the digital systems are disabling me. I need someone to show me, explain to me, answer my questions, assist me if I need it. I don't need screens and lists and more lists of information to trawl through and still not be able to find the answers to my questions so that I can make decisions. I can't "just look something up".



I also have to follow rules but now I don't know what the rules are and it makes me sad and stressed and sick. I feel more and more isolated from being in charge of my own affairs. I feel more isolated from information. I fear for what will happen in the future. I fear that I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing. I fear I am being left behind. I fear I am not worthy. I fear the government doesn't care.

### **Rosemary's story**

Not having a computer is difficult, I only have a cell phone. When I do access services online, I am confused by the language. I do not have a computer literate vocabulary, and I find the sequence and format very confusing (format presented on screen).

I rely on others to help me, access services and fill in appropriate forms and boxes. I find the process overwhelming, and get confused.

Many people rely on phone communication and are unable to connect with Government organisations. It would be helpful if:

1. More call centre staff are employed.
2. Callers can request a call back and leave their number as IRD does.
3. And, actually call back.

### **Ann's story**

Digital exclusion can come from more than one area. There seems to be a general presumption in the media that digital exclusion usually comes from people who either don't have a computer or have computer and mobile phone but can't access these tools well enough to process their needs. Digital exclusion can also occur even if people have a working knowledge of computers and phones. A working knowledge is nowhere enough to navigate the online systems present in government department, banks and service providers. Some of these online transactions may not be very difficult, but many of them simply do not work. Many are deficient in transactional setup and submission.

People are being bullied into trying to do transactions online while the actual programmes and setup are second rate. I have experienced many personal visits from students, displaying state of the art phones and well versed in their operation, yet unable to complete final transactions and finish what they started. Digital exclusion is not just with senior citizens and non-computer people.

In my job as a volunteer I feel less worthy of being able to help others when frankly I have difficulty in assessing and processing online stuff myself. My latest online submission to Auckland Transport failed miserably at the 'submit' stage and a follow up phone call was no better.

This is a problem. No online only transaction should be put into practice until it is properly trialled by a cross section of end users. The instructions need to be written in clear, simple, non-ambiguous language. This is a dying art in this country. Even newly passed parliamentary bills frequently don't make sense and have to be 'updated'. A backup 0800 phone number also needs to be provided. Particularly one that is manned by a person not selection of press button options and musical drivel.

Areas of concern are passport applications, Auckland Transport, in fact most online transactions are not user friendly and often just don't work. This would be why most folks are constantly on their phones as the attention which has to be paid to completing these transactions is endless. Large organisations need to stop bullying clients into uplifting services by online only. We need to be providing a service - not actively withdrawing it.



## Stories shared anonymously

My husband is in care, he cannot manage anything digitally. It means I have to do everything for him which is not always easy or practical often with a lack of information. Often if I try to do something online for him there is no option for my questions or how to deal with on behalf of someone else. IRD is one example of that. He can only manage a small amount of cash and so often there are things he needs to do which are suggested he can only do online. He comes across as capable in many circumstances but clearly is not when he needs to do something.

Often the only way some organizations can be contacted is online which doesn't always mean there will be a reply or an option to deal with anything on someone else's behalf. This seems to be a backward kind of progress as it affects many people negatively.

Banks should be covering the cost of using cheques and manning phones and branches from their large profits gained already from fees.

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My godmother of 95 lives independently and uses cheques to pay her bills. Now most banks will not accept cheques and her poor eyesight means she cannot use internet banking. She is wondering how she will keep her independence if she can no longer be in control of her own money. At least some banks need to be persuaded to retain the option to use cheques.

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While I have had trouble getting information or dealing with issues that come up using the digital format, I would also like to add that this approach takes us further and further away from community and bottom up empowerment. The digital approach may save money, but money and the economy are not everything - it is simply a tool for life, and must be used wisely, otherwise it doesn't serve life. But, sadly, I sometimes think this government would rather be dealing with robots!

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Thank you for the opportunity to bring these issues to the attention of the Petitions Committee. Please contact us if you have any questions, or want any clarification about our submission.

We look forward to appearing before the Committee to speak to our submission.

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05 August 2021

**Salvation Army letter to the Petitions Committee re: Petition of Citizens Advice Bureau New Zealand: Leave no-one behind - Campaign to address digital exclusion**

Tena koe,

The Salvation Army supports the CAB's *Leave no-one behind* campaign to address digital exclusion. We offer this short letter in support of the CAB's submission now being considered by Petition Committee. The primary reason that The Salvation Army is supporting this campaign is that we affirm that digital inclusion is vital to holistic wellbeing in modern New Zealand. Therefore, addressing digital exclusion gaps issues like those outlined in CAB's *Face to face with digital exclusion* paper are crucial for our nation. We've offered some specific thoughts below:

- **Impacts of increasing digitalisation on our people (clients)**
  - Our frontline workers regularly report some of the key digital challenges occur when our people engage with WINZ for their benefits and other issues. These include problems accessing the internet or Wi-Fi, having enough credit for access to go online, having appropriate devices (i.e., smart phones) to go online, and being digitally illiterate and unable to navigate through online systems and processes.
  - Our frontline financial mentors across the country also report issues around the increasing digitalisation of banking services and utilities payments. This leaves many of our clients anxious and disconnected from critical services.
  - The effects of Covid have magnified many other social issues for our clients, particularly around financial hardship, housing, gambling, and food insecurity. We have highlighted this through our six *Covid-19 Social Impact Dashboards* (2020), our *State of the Nation* report (2021), and other advocacy reports on online gambling and financial hardship (2021). Digital exclusion is a factor that works across all these areas. Therefore, developing good solutions to improve digital access and inclusion, particularly for poorer New Zealanders, is vital moving forward.
- **Government responses**
  - We welcome the work of groups like the 2020 Trust and others doing great work to enhance digital inclusion in our communities. But the government, through its multiple services, has a crucial role to play here. We support the series of recommendations that CAB has outlined in their campaign. We specifically highlight:
    - An over-arching, cross sector strategy around digital inclusion for New Zealand should be developed between the government and key community groups. This strategy must have clear goals and KPIs that will work towards digital inclusion of all citizens, depending on the level of inclusion they want.

- Government services must maintain various channels of service to people, especially poorer or vulnerable citizens. This includes both face-to-face and online options. Online might suit many. But many others still want to have that face-to-face contact. In our Manukau Community Ministry centre, we are blessed to have a WINZ worker onsite meeting face-to-face with people using our services. This works extremely well for our communities. But there are only a small number of these collaborative initiatives between MSD and NGOs.
- When online options are used, then providing increased access to free, safe Wi-Fi, and increased access to things like free printing, scanning documents, photocopying, language support and online upskilling training is helpful for poorer and/or high needs, complex needs clients.

We thank the CAB for their leadership on this issue. This campaign also highlights to us the chronic under-funding of the social services sector, which is contrasted by the huge demands on our services from the public despite this underfunding. Better funding is needed across the board for NGOs and community groups working with disconnected, vulnerable, and poorer New Zealanders. We therefore support and commend this petition to the Committee. As a Christian church and NGO, we welcome strong, evidence-based solutions that will help all New Zealanders thrive in our communities. We are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Ma te Atua e manaaki!



Ian Hutson  
Director  
Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit

## Digital Exclusion Petition – IHC New Zealand’s Written Submission

### **1. Why are issues of digital exclusion and inclusive and accessible public services important to you?**

Many intellectually disabled people do not go online or do not feel confident going online.

A move towards more government services going online can increase the likelihood of people being targeted and falling for fraudulent communications.

Websites are often designed in ways that are very confusing and inaccessible.

People need data or a wireless connection to access the internet and go online. Disabled New Zealanders are amongst the poorest people in New Zealand. They may have an older phone that cannot properly display certain websites, they might not have any data and they may not have access to a device that lets them access the internet in a private and safe way.

Some intellectually disabled people may need someone to explain things to them in a certain way, they often prefer to have information provided to them in an accessible format before they need to make a decision about something, and the instant nature of online service provision may not work with this.

### **2. What needs to happen to ensure that public services are inclusive and accessible to all?**

Government services need to be provided in a variety of ways - online, on the phone, in a hard copy and in person. Many intellectually disabled people prefer to talk to people face to face.

Any government services that are available online must not have a cost associated with it – so that all can access.

The Government needs to make sure that disabled people can access devices in a private and safe way.

The Government needs to ensure that disabled people are offered courses to improve their digital literacy. The courses need to be appropriately targeted.

The Government needs to put people at the centre of service delivery. If the settings are right for intellectually disabled people, they will probably be right for all.



**SUBMISSION REGARDING THE PETITION OF CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU NEW ZEALAND:  
LEAVE NO-ONE BEHIND - CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS DIGITAL EXCLUSION**

To the Petitions Committee

Petition number 2020/106

**DATE** 3/8/2021

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This submission is made in support of the above petition on behalf of the **Grey Power New Zealand Federation Inc.**

1.2 The contact and submission author is Jan Pentecost

Phone 03 312 9331

Email [jan.pentecost@gmail.com](mailto:jan.pentecost@gmail.com)

1.3 The Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc) is a non-sectarian and non-party political, advocacy organisation that aims to advance, promote and protect the welfare and well-being of older people.

1.4 The Grey Power New Zealand Federation (Inc) is made up of some 76 individual Associations with an overall membership of approximately 55,000.

**2. Comments on the petition topic:**

The Grey Power NZ Federation Inc. supports the Citizens Advice Bureau New Zealand petition to ensure that no-one is left behind because they can't or don't wish to engage online and we agree that it is essential that accessibility and inclusion standards for public services that include offline channels in the present and the future need to be provided.

**Why is it important for Grey Power to be involved in digital exclusion issues such as accessibility to public services?**

Although many people are affected by digital exclusion and our comments apply to these groups as well, research discloses that people over 75 years of age are much less likely to use digital devices than their younger cohorts. In the 65-74 age group the percentage of non-users is 10 percent, in the 75-84 age group it is 25 percent and for those over 85 years of age the rate is 50 percent. (World Internet Project New Zealand Internet in New Zealand in 2017 - [https://workresearch.aut.ac.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/174915/WIP-2017.pdf](https://workresearch.aut.ac.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/174915/WIP-2017.pdf))

This means that these people are seriously disadvantaged; they cannot use the internet to access public services because, as Lips et al found in 2020, they face barriers such as lack of access to computers and the internet, limited digital literacy, general literacy difficulties, various disabilities, lack of motivation to be online and privacy and security concerns.

Thus, digitally excluded people are unable to access public services which are a vital function in their everyday lives. This means many of this group are frightened and stressed; they are incredibly anxious, because they have no idea how they will manage their affairs independently in the future.

The personal narratives Grey Power hears from members are very disturbing- as an example, a Grey Power member recently begged for help; she is a rural dweller and, with tears streaming down her face, said: *"My children have worked so hard to teach me how to use the internet, but my brain just won't work for me to do it."*

Another said because she is unable to use the internet, she must now ask other people to help her *"they have turned an independent old lady into a dependent old lady."*

And recently Grey Power received a phone call from a member who said she cannot and never will be able to use the internet and on her way home from town as she approached a bridge, she thought about driving straight into the bridge approach - she felt so hopeless because she could not manage her own affairs anymore.

Grey Power must be involved in the digital exclusion issue. These are desperate people! And they cannot and it is unlikely ever will access on-line public services.

What does Grey Power think should happen to ensure that public services can be accessed by everyone, including older people?

As noted in the petition off-line access to public services is imperative. And although Grey Power is pleased to note the government has a digital inclusion action plan 2020–2021 (see <https://www.digital.govt.nz/dmsdocument/174~digital-inclusion-action-plan-20202021/html>) which will assist some of those currently digitally excluded we do not believe everyone now or in the future will be internet savvy.

Off-line access with user needs as the top priority, not those of the public services must always be available for those who need them, and strong government leadership is required to achieve this.

It is unlikely that the digital divide will ever be closed completely. One reason is that '*the more advanced the Internet applications become the more digital skills are needed*,' causing continued problems for complete usage by all populations. (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/07/Closing-the-Digital-Divide-by-Jan-A.G.M-van-Dijk-.pdf>). And UK research also discloses that between 3.5 to 4 million people (6.8% to 7.9% of the adult population) may never have basic digital capabilities (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy>).

However, it seems that the fate of those on the wrong side of the digital divide is not a consideration in New Zealand because the government action plan states that "*we recognise non-digital access will be time-bound as more and more government services will only be available online in the future*" which obviously means that off-line government services will not be available.

All affected people, including older people, cannot be left behind, surely the government has a legal obligation in its provision of public services to ensure that it does not exclude people, now and in the future from the services, rights, and obligations they need access to, in their everyday lives.

**Disability Rights Commissioner**  
**Statement of Support for Citizen Advice Bureau Spotlight Report**  
**Face to Face with Digital Exclusion**

The focus of the Citizen Advice Bureau's (CAB) recent report is on digital exclusion in New Zealand. Digital exclusion is framed in the report as situations where people face barriers to full participation in society, given that public information and services are increasingly only available online.

CAB's report identifies disabled people among those least digitally included in New Zealand society. This finding is in line with various surveys. For example, in the 2018 New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey, 17% of disabled people stated they had no internet access compared to 5% of non-disabled people. In addition to covering the costs of being online, many economically disadvantaged disabled people face the added costs of specialised devices and software to access government information and services.

While technological developments can, in certain circumstances, contribute to disabled people's greater independence and social inclusion, we support the viewpoint expressed in CAB's report that providing more government information and services online only will further disadvantage and isolate priority population groups like disabled people. Among the top areas of enquiry by CAB clients experiencing digital exclusion are income support and material (non-financial) welfare assistance, that is, government services needed by many disabled people.

Providing more government information and services online only is also not consistent with Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which mandates the Government to take all appropriate measures to ensure that disabled people seek, receive and share information in forms that they can understand and use.

We support the key recommendation in CAB's report that the onus is on the Government to position digital inclusion in the wider context of social inclusion. In relation to the significant overrepresentation of disabled people experiencing digital exclusion, we endorse CAB's recommendations addressed to the Government, including:

- Increase access to free Wi-Fi and digital devices for those in low-income households.
- Support disabled people to secure appropriate equipment and technology to meet their access needs.
- Ensure that all online public services are accessible to disabled people (e.g., increasing the number of documents available in alternate formats such as Easy Read, Large Print, Audio).
- Ensure that offline (in-person) channels are an integral part of the proactive design of improved public services.

Level 8, Vector Building, 44 The Terrace, PO Box 10424, Te Whanganui a Tara Wellington 6011  
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5 August 2021

Sacha Green  
Citizens Advice Bureau,  
via Email: [Sacha.Green@cab.org.nz](mailto:Sacha.Green@cab.org.nz)

Dear Sacha,

Rural Women New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to provide support to the CAB in its submission on the petition:

*We, the undersigned, are calling on the New Zealand House of Representatives to pledge their support to the following:*

- 1. Leave no-one behind: Ensure that steps are taken to address digital exclusion and that no-one is left behind or left out because they can't or don't wish to engage online.*
- 2. Public services accessible to all: Implement accessibility and inclusion standards for the delivery of public services that include offline channels as part of the proactive design of government service delivery.*
- 3. CAB compensated for cost-shifting: Ensure that the Citizens Advice Bureau is properly funded to meet the demands and cost-shifting that has resulted from government services going online.*

Why are issues of digital exclusion and inclusive and accessible public services important to RWNZ?

1. Digital exclusion creates inequities for the rural population across a range of public services including health, financial, education and social services.
2. The removal of physical public and private services has been an ongoing issue for rural New Zealand and the move to online services when rural connectivity is unreliable or cost prohibitive creates inequity between urban and rural communities. As the rural population reflects a microcosm of the broader New Zealand population, many of the issues identified by Citizens Advice Bureaux are also relevant.
3. A recent RWNZ "Quality of Life" research report identified the lack of quality digital technology in rural New Zealand as the biggest issue rural communities face. Being excluded from digital transactions in their homes, on their farms and in their communities has profound effects on rural communities' ability to be able to transact their lives and businesses, implement digital innovations on-farm and contact emergency services and/or others in an emergency. Digital exclusion puts the safety of rural communities and profitability of rural businesses at risk.
4. In addition to the impact on public education, health and social services, digital exclusion impacts on public and private financial and regulatory services. These include banking transactions and compliance (such as filing tax returns, filing payroll data, applying for and complying to resource consents, reporting to farm plans).

5. It seems that the policy, programme and service changes we are seeing have not included a rural impact analysis at the development level. This is unacceptable when digital exclusion has such a disempowering impact on the health, social and economic wellbeing of rural communities.

What needs to happen to ensure that public services are inclusive and accessible to all?

6. We need digital infrastructure for all.
7. When Government, both local and central, think infrastructure, digital should be included. It's not just about roads and pipes – its cell towers, fibre and satellites, even something as simple as bandwidth.
8. Investment in the provision of solid, reliable digital infrastructure supports the social and economic wellbeing of rural New Zealand.

#### About Rural Women New Zealand

1. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit, member-based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and has an authoritative voice on rural environment, health, education, technology, business and social issues.
2. RWNZ strives to ensure that all rural residents, workers and families have equitable access to services, inequalities are addressed by Government, and the wellbeing of rural communities is considered from the beginning of all policy and legislative development.
3. RWNZ is affiliated to the Associated Country Women of the World and as such upholds all United Nations, ILO, FAO and WHO conventions and outcome statements as they relate to women and rural women in particular.

Yours sincerely,



Angela McLeod  
Manager, Policy, Leadership and Development  
*Kaiwhakahaere Tuhinga, Whakatipu ārahitanga hoki*



## DPA Supplementary Submission in Support of the Citizens Advice Bureau Petition urging Government to address Digital Exclusion.

### [Petition of Citizens Advice Bureau New Zealand: Leave no-one behind - Campaign to address digital exclusion - New Zealand Parliament \(www.parliament.nz\)](#)

DPA supports the call by the Citizens Advice Bureau for Government to take urgent steps to address issues around digital exclusion.

Digital exclusion is an issue that disproportionately impacts disabled people and as more and more public services move online, this makes accessing public services difficult and challenging for many disabled people.

#### **Digital Access for Disabled people:**

DPA highlighted some of the wider issues for disabled people around digital access in its feedback to the Digital Council last year here:

<https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/DPA-Digital-Council-Response-May-2020.docx>

In our feedback to the Digital Council we identified three priority areas that need addressing for disabled people to close the digital divide that exists for disabled people.

All three of these areas need to be addressed to ensure disabled people have equity of access to public services.

These are

1. Affordability of digital access, including internet and devices
2. Accessibility of online services,
3. Support to assist disabled people to gain digital skills and keep themselves safe online.

## **1. Affordable Internet Access**

The 2019 Motu Working Paper<sup>10</sup> looking at digital inclusion and wellbeing in NZ identified a number of demographic groups that have relatively low access to the internet.

They identified two groups - those living in social housing and disabled people – as being particularly disadvantaged with respect to internet access with just 69% of those living in social housing reporting having access to the internet, compared with 91% reporting access across all respondents, and only 71% of disabled people reporting having internet access.

The Motu paper be argued that increasingly internet access needs to be treated as an essential service in the same way as water, electricity and waste is.

DPA would like to see the following actions implemented

- affordable access to the Internet for everyone focusing on the groups who have the lowest level of access to the Internet, including those in social housing and disabled people.
- all social housing providers and care agencies provide internet access and install Wifi in their properties.
- devices and necessary adaptive technology be provided to people on low income at low or no cost.

## **2. Accessibility of Online Services**

While DPA acknowledges that work is underway to improve access to online services with most public services having now signed up to the Accessibility Charter<sup>11</sup> we would like stress that there is still a long way to go for public online services to actually be fully accessible for disabled people. DPA regularly hears from members who are experiencing difficulty accessing a particular public service online. There is much more that the public sector could do to ensure that disabled people

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<sup>10</sup> <https://motu.nz/our-work/wellbeing-and-macroeconomics/well-being-and-sustainability-measures/digital-inclusion-and-wellbeing-in-new-zealand>

<sup>11</sup> [The Accessibility Charter - Office for Disability Issues \(odi.govt.nz\)](https://odi.govt.nz/accessibility-charter/)

can access public services on an equal basis to others. This includes ensuring that other ways of accessing public services are available as called for by CAB.

### **3. Gaining Digital Skills and Keeping Safe Online**

Many disabled people face significant barriers to gaining digital skills and keeping themselves safe online. Many digital courses are not accessible or geared to the needs of disabled people. There is a need to extensively expand free accessible courses for disabled people gain the skills to confidently operate online and to do so safely.

The Motu report found that disabled people were at greater risk than others from an internet violation (i.e. a virus infection or other internet interference) which highlights the need to ensure that there is appropriate ongoing support to ensure that disabled people can access the internet confidently and safely.

Ongoing support may need to be provided to some disabled people, especially those who are more at risk of harm online and those who may not be able to access support from mainstream organisations.

Submission in support of the Citizens Advice Bureau Digital Exclusion Campaign petition.

By the Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (DECA)

The vision of the Digital Equity Coalition Aotearoa (DECA) is:

**Everyone in Aotearoa is able to make the most of an increasingly digital world.**

We know that around 11% of people in Aotearoa are digitally excluded. Communities most affected are seniors, Māori, the disability community, offenders and ex-offenders, migrants and refugees, Pacific peoples, rural communities and those with low household incomes. A recently released Digital Skills report from BNZ (Bank of NZ) stated 20% of NZers are without the digital skills needed to safely and effectively use the internet.

DECA's Community Manager was in a meeting with Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon who recounted some shocking digital inclusion statistics from his recent visit to Massey High School in Auckland. 35% of their students don't have devices and 65% of those who do have devices, don't have internet access in their homes.

**We acknowledge there are four components to digital inclusion:** access (connectivity, devices and accessibility) skills, motivation and trust. More info on the barriers in NZ [here](#).

**Aotearoa cannot be a leading digital nation and leave over 10% of the population behind.**

We call on government to make a significant investment in digital equity work in the next budget, including investment in affordable connectivity, skills development, and in support for communities to lead this work.

Any questions or opportunities to present a submission in person, please contact the DECA Equity Advocate and Community Manager, Anissa Ljanta

[info@digitalequity.nz](mailto:info@digitalequity.nz)

021 542 087

[www.digitalequity.nz](http://www.digitalequity.nz)

Hon. Jacqui Dean  
Petitions Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Private Bag 18041  
**Wellington 6160**

5 August 2021

Tēnā koe Hon. Jacqui Dean

**Re: *Leave No-one Behind: Campaign to address digital exclusion* petition to Government**

Age Concern New Zealand supports the *Leave No-one Behind: Campaign to address digital exclusion* petition to Government. We support solutions to ensure all people in Aotearoa are able to access information, services and support.

**1. Why are issues of digital exclusion and inclusive and accessible public services important to you?.**

Covid-19 lock downs, the phasing out of cheques, bank closures and government services moving online have been the perfect storm highlighting the predicament of older people who do not use online services.

Age Concern New Zealand has been a reasoned, expert voice in the media and in various discussion forums recognising that many of these service shifts, including the phasing out of cheques, are a fait accompli.

We have encouraged banks to take the time to explain their terminology and products to older adults so older people can find new ways of paying bills and managing their finances. Banks have also heeded our advice that some older adults require face-to-face support.

We have approached the banking sector changes from the perspective of “What will this mean for older people?”. We have put the onus on the banks to meet the needs of their older customers, have provided feedback on messaging and have been a conduit for their communications. Banks and local Age Concerns have worked in partnership to host sessions with older people to learn how to safely use online banking.



We ask you to apply the same questions when providing information and services online:

“What will this mean for older people?”

“How will you meet the needs of older people?”

“How will you address the impact on older people who are not online?”

“How will you address the impact on older people who are not online and in rural areas?”

Not everyone wants to be digitally connected, some processes are challenging and require human assistance, and sometimes it is not the preferred method of the user. The risk of digital exclusion is that these people's needs go unmet. Inequities will only be exacerbated by digital exclusion so providing inclusive and accessible information, services and support is essential.

## **2. What needs to happen to ensure that public services are inclusive and accessible to all?**

2a. Work in partnership with tangata whenua to develop inclusive and accessible services for iwi, hapū and whānau.

2b. Establish/draw upon an expert advisory group to direct inclusive and accessible services and to assist with messaging and communications.

2c. Enable ways for information, services and support to be provided in addition to online.

2d. Place vulnerable people at the centre of service delivery.

In summary, Age Concern New Zealand supports the petition to Government: *Leave No-one Behind: Campaign to address digital exclusion.*

Ngā mihi



Stephanie Clare  
Chief Executive



04 8019338



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Formerly Blind Foundation



Kāpō Māori Aotearoa  
New Zealand Inc.



4 August 2021

Tēnā koutou,

Please find attached the joint submission from Blind Low Vision NZ, Kāpō Māori Aotearoa NZ Inc, Parents of Vision Impaired NZ Inc, and Access Advisors on the Petition of Citizens Advice Bureau New Zealand: Leave no-one behind - Campaign to address digital exclusion

## About us

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**Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ)** is the operating name of the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, an incorporated charitable society under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908. We are motivated as a 'for purpose' organisation. Our community includes those individuals who are blind, deafblind, have low vision or may have a print disability.

BLVNZ's mission is to empower approximately 14,000 clients and New Zealanders who are blind, deafblind, or low vision to live the life they choose. 180,000 Kiwis currently are blind, deafblind or have low vision and we are forecasting those numbers will increase to 225,000 by 2028.

Our services include providing vision loss rehabilitation, equipment and training to continue reading and communicating, and services that facilitate mobility, socialisation, recreation, education and employment. We endorse and will be guided by the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 (NZDS) and He Korowai Oranga (Māori Health Strategy) in our consideration, decisions and actions.

**Kāpō Māori Aotearoa NZ Inc (KMA)** is the oldest and only national indigenous disabled peoples led organisation in Aotearoa, New Zealand. It has a dual role, as an indigenous disability advocate and as a Government contracted health and disability service provider. The Society's foundation is Te Tiriti o Waitangi with governance and operations guided by Māori principles, values and practices.

Kāpō Māori Aotearoa is an incorporated charitable society under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908. Our society is open to all people: disabled, able-bodied, Māori and Non-Māori. We are a founding member of the Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) Coalition in accordance with Section 4(3) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

We are a national health and disability service provider contracted by Government to provide disability information and advice services and specialist Māori disability

cultural support services. We focus on tāngata whaikaha Māori and whānau access, engagement and navigation of health and disability services. Our purpose is to educate, inform and support our over 1,500 kāpō Māori, tāngata whaikaha Māori and whānau members to thrive and prosper. We design and deliver our services in accordance with Te Ao Māori principles and practices.

**Parents of Vision Impaired NZ Inc (PVI)** is a registered charity which supports parents who have blind, low vision, or vision-impaired children. There is no cost to enrol and we provide a supportive community of parents who are overcoming challenges every day. Our current membership is at just over 1300 active members, with close to 800 email subscribers.

PVI offers parents advice, information, and opportunities to meet other parents. We publish a quarterly newsletter (eVision) and have a members-only Facebook page for families and whānau to share information and to network. PVI also runs an annual conference and AGM which allows parents and whānau to get together face to face for a longer time to talk, listen and learn in a social setting. Additionally, PVI takes an active part in the disability sector through making sure that the voice of visually impaired children and their parents is heard in consultations with government, schools, local councils, and other organisations.

**Access Advisors** is a leading New Zealand owned and operated pan-disability digital accessibility consultancy. Access Advisors was initiated by Blind Low Vision NZ (BLVNZ) in July 2017. In January 2020 Access Advisors became a privately-owned social enterprise and is now growing rapidly. Still partnering with BLVNZ, Access Advisors is now an independent, nationwide, pan-disability consultancy with a talented [Team](#) who have many years of experience. We are also digitally nomadic, with staff working remotely and throughout New Zealand as client needs dictate.

Our goal is to help make businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand be more digitally inclusive. Making products and services more accessible will make it easier for people with access needs to do the things others take for granted. Access Advisors wants to help so that disabled people can enjoy the same opportunities as everyone.

Current [Clients](#) range from mainstream banks to government departments, with a little bit of agriculture, retail and politics thrown in for good measure. We support business with websites, apps and other digital experiences to discover, design, develop and deliver digital solutions that comply with best practice and guidelines. We have been on the [Government Web Services Panel](#) since 2017.

## Summary

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### **1. Why issues of digital exclusion and inclusive and accessible public services are important**

We believe that public services and digital spaces that are not fully accessible to disabled people cannot be accurately described as “public”. Government agencies and subsidiaries must work alongside the disability sector to integrate disabled peoples’ perspectives to make public services accessible to all.

### **2. What needs to happen to ensure that public services are inclusive and accessible to all**

(1) Engage early with digital accessibility consultants who address needs of people with all types of disabilities to help design digital public services.

(2) Increase training in digital accessibility

(3) Develop a mandatory, enforceable digital accessibility standard, which is included in all government procurement contracts

Further, there are two additional issues that need to be addressed and considered:

(1) The cost of adaptive technology

(2) Digital literacy and connectivity gaps

## The submission

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### **1. Why issues of digital exclusion and inclusive and accessible public services are important**

We believe that public services and digital spaces that are not fully accessible to disabled people cannot be accurately described as “public”. Government agencies and subsidiaries must work alongside the disability sector to integrate disabled peoples’ perspectives to make public services accessible to all.

**Te Tiriti o Waitangi** – Most importantly, Government must have a plan to demonstrate how public services will give effect to their obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

**The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990) (NZBORA)** states that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination from government and state officials, including being able to access public services, and including on the grounds of disability.

Aotearoa New Zealand is a signatory to three key United Nations conventions that emphasise disabled peoples' right to access public services. As such, central and regional Governments are required to undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the following conventions:

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\) - Articles 9](#) states that, "To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas."
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\) – Article 21](#) which states that Indigenous peoples/persons with disabilities have the right to full and effective participation in all aspects of life. Realization of this right requires accessibility in terms of public services, information and communications, and access to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\) – Article 23](#) which recognizes that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. This includes access to public services and information and communications.

Also of note is **Outcome 5: Accessibility** of the **NZ Disability Strategy**, which is based on the NZ Disability Action Plan.

The above documents are key in considering how central and regional governments can enable access to information and communications for disabled people.

## **2. What needs to happen to ensure that public services are inclusive and accessible to all**

Inaccessible websites, apps and other technologies are key barriers for people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision in accessing information and communications, public services and goods and services. With an aging population and 24% of the population with some form of permanent disability those barriers also affect many others.

Removing these barriers can be achieved through the following three-step process:

### **(1) Engage early with digital accessibility consultants who address needs of people with all types of disabilities to help design digital public services.**

While there is a mandate to ensure information is accessible, often this is not considered until the end of the design process. It is far more cost effective to build accessibility into the planning stage, rather than attempting to retrospectively adjust websites, applications, online forms, and suchlike.

Many digital solutions fail to design for accessibility which effectively excludes disabled people. Poor interface design also excludes many others who have undiagnosed, temporary or situational access needs. Subsequent retrofitting is time-consuming, expensive, and often less useful than incorporating accessibility into the design phase.

A very recent example is the [inaccessible MIQ booking system](#), which still hasn't been addressed.

In May 2020, [the Covid-19 tracing app was found to be 'unusable' for blind people and those with low vision](#), and had to be fixed retrospectively. This example was particularly concerning as being unable to use location tracing weakened the whole Covid-19 response.

Additional examples include blind people who continue to receive (small) print letters from DHB's and health services, despite their clear, stated



requests to receive information in their preferred alternate format (e.g. large print, audio files or braille).

Many government websites continue to use inaccessible features (e.g., captcha) to complete forms. Such features make it tricky or impossible for people with vision impairments to navigate. This inaccessibility can result in delays to people receiving urgently needed essential services that they are entitled to.

We urge central and local government to engage with digital accessibility consultants (such as Access Advisors) in the design stage of digital public services. This is a key component of Aotearoa New Zealand moving towards digital inclusion.

We also urge central and local government to make use of Blind Low Vision NZ's Clearing our Way Guide to make public services accessible. The purpose of this resource is to encourage people involved in design to think before they proceed with plans. The guide is available to download from the [Blind Low Vision NZ website](#).

## **(2) Increase training in digital accessibility**

Many of our digital design, programming and marketing graduates are receiving little or no specific education on the needs of people with disabilities and access needs. Specific skills in digital inclusion are often not included in job descriptions for technologists.

A recent report by IT Professionals of NZ for the IT Industry transformation plan also identified that there fewer people with disabilities employed in our technology sector. Digital inclusion cannot move forward if the voices of disabled people are not being heard.

As a result Aotearoa New Zealand has insufficient trained personnel who have the knowledge and expertise in digital accessibility to meet the needs of all agencies.

Government plays a role in helping to grow this capacity and expertise through education and support for disabled people. We strongly encourage government to address the lack of education around digital accessibility and digital inclusion.

## **(3) Develop a mandatory, enforceable digital accessibility standard, which is included in all government procurement contracts**

In the late twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand was a leader in creating assistive technology to remove barriers by supporting people



with access needs. Aotearoa has had web accessibility guidelines in place since 2003 (DIA, Cabinet Minute — New Zealand Government Web Guidelines: Mandatory Requirements, 2013). Aotearoa New Zealand also has an Accessibility Charter, which has been signed by government ministries (MSD, 2018).

However, this good start is now lagging behind. For example, recent Covid-19 apps and websites were initially inaccessible for blind, deafblind, and low vision persons. If experts had been involved earlier in the process these issues may have been addressed earlier. This demonstrates that a lack of overarching leadership results in little to no change to accessibility barriers.

A mandatory, enforceable digital accessibility standard must be developed. This standard must be included as a basic requirement in any government procurement contracts. This will prevent public funds from perpetuating existing digital barriers and ensure new rollouts and digital sites are accessible.

**Further, there are two additional issues that need to be addressed and considered:**

### **1) The cost of adaptive technology**

Many disabled people require high-spec computers and advanced smartphones for their communication needs. This is particularly the case where a disabled person relies on specialised adaptive features or technologies to communicate.

For example, people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision utilize screen reading technologies. These technologies are expensive, with some specialised adaptive features or technologies costing upwards of \$10,000.

Deaf people are also heavily reliant on smartphone services for communication. Apps include video access to NZSL interpreter services, using the smartphone to purchase essential items, ask directions, or ascertain if they are on the correct bus. It is essential that a smartphone has sufficient memory and processing power to run such apps.

### **2) Digital literacy and connectivity gaps**

Fully digitising government services has negatively impacted on and excluded people with vision loss, older people unfamiliar with digital services, neurodiverse people, and those who cannot afford smartphones and digital access.

We note the inequitable impact of these on Māori, which exacerbates existing inequities of access, as well as the absence of te reo Māori in many accessibility requirements. For example, while te reo is now being included in many government websites, there are no guidelines about how to do this in a way that does not negatively impact on screen reader users and people with language processing issues.

Government agencies must be required to provide adequate non-digital provisions for persons who are unable (for whatever reason) access their services virtually. It is inequitable to penalise people who do not have access to digital connectivity or do not feel comfortable using digital public services. For older adults with vision loss, the prospect of digital-only public services induces high stress. For blind persons who interact with Work and Income there is the prospect of severe financial consequences in making a mistake – yet in-person access is difficult.

Issues in accessing digital-only public services for people who are blind, deafblind or have low vision include:

- Reluctance to use unknown technology or new digital formats
- Low digital literacy (leads to vulnerability to scams)
- Inaccessible websites, apps, and other digital platforms increases the digital divide
- Difficulty navigating digital systems
- Inability to independently manage their affairs. People who require help to navigate online services must disclose their private details to those who are helping them. There is potential here for unscrupulous family members and ‘helpers’ to take advantage of this information.
- Convenience. For many older persons the familiarity of writing a cheque for public service, or to pay their taxes, means such tasks are simple and non-time consuming. Learning to navigate new digital services, particularly for those who do not have a computer at home or have easy access to one, can be difficult and time-consuming.
- Stress and anxiety. For disabled people unfamiliar online services are a highly stressful process, with the ever-present fear of inputting incorrect information or pushing the wrong button leading to severe penalties (such as fines or a loss in service provision).
- Feelings of failure associated with navigating digital processes adds to feelings of vulnerability, exacerbates a lack of confidence, and can lead to low self-esteem and decrease feelings of self-worth.

5 August 2021

**Statement of support for:  
Citizens Advice Bureau's petition on digital exclusion**

**1. Introduction**

Consumer NZ is an independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to advocating on behalf of New Zealand consumers. Consumer NZ has a reputation for being fair, impartial and providing comprehensive consumer information and advice.

Contact: Aneleise Gawn  
Consumer NZ  
Private Bag 6996  
Wellington 6141  
Phone: 04 384 7963  
Email: [aneleise@consumer.org.nz](mailto:aneleise@consumer.org.nz)

**2. Support for petition**

Consumer NZ supports the Citizens Advice Bureau's petition that the House of Representatives urge the government:

*to address digital exclusion so that no-one is left behind because they can't or don't wish to engage online; and to implement accessibility and inclusion standards for public services that include offline channels.*

We also urge the government to consider the issue of digital exclusion in the context of essential services, such as banking, energy and telecommunications.

Consumers excluded from online services have reduced access to products. As a result, they frequently have less choice and may face higher prices.

We therefore support Citizen Advice Bureau's petition that no-one is left behind due to digital exclusion.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Aneleise Gawn  
Consumer NZ