

# Improving access to electoral events

New Zealand (Electoral Commission) – ACCESS 2020 DISABILITY STRATEGY

Persons with disabilities may encounter a number of barriers when enrolling and voting at elections. To ensure that all aspects of the electoral process are accessible to these persons, New Zealand's Electoral Commission has implemented a comprehensive strategy, in close cooperation with civil society.

## IN BRIEF

In 2014, New Zealand's Electoral Commission finalized its Access 2020 Disability Strategy. This strategy takes the improvements made over the past three electoral cycles and embeds them into a longer-term framework, through which the Commission aims to reduce barriers that persons with disabilities may encounter when enrolling and voting at elections. In addition, it provides information in accessible formats and maintains strong relationships with the disability sector.

## FACTS & FIGURES

- Initial Year 2014
- The Commission offers a wide range of information and resources in accessible formats.
- Some 1,500 videos, 8,000 large brochures, 15,000 Plain English Guides, and 11,000 posters have been produced.
- Web content also appears in New Zealand sign language.
- 11,500 videos explaining telephone dictation voting have been distributed.

## INNOVATION

### Telephone dictation voting

In 2012 electoral regulations for the first time enabled anyone who is blind, partially blind, or has another physical disability that prevents them from marking their paper ballot without assistance to cast a secret ballot from home via telephone dictation.

### Accessibility

Access 2020 recognizes the need to ensure that materials about enrolling and voting are appropriate, accessible, and easy to understand.

## Strong relationship with disability sector

Public consultations on the draft strategy brought together representatives from a range of disabled peoples organizations (DPO), including people with physical, hearing, vision, learning, and intellectual impairments. The Commission has worked with a number of DPOs and service providers to deliver on its goals, and continued all existing accessibility initiatives for the 2014 general election.

## CONTEXT

Since 2005 the Electoral Commission has been working to improve access to electoral events for New Zealanders with disabilities. In consultation with the disability sector, action plans were developed and implemented for the 2005, 2008, and 2011 elections that detailed initiatives to improve accessibility of venues and information. Access 2020 takes the improvements made over the past three electoral cycles and embeds them into a longer-term framework. When preparing Access 2020, the Electoral Commission first published a consultation document in a range of accessible formats and wherever submissions could be made – in writing, verbally, in sign language, and online. The Commission then prepared a draft strategy for the second phase of consultation, in which it invited a range of disabled peoples organizations as well as the country’s Human Rights Commission. Their feedback helped the Commission to refine the accessibility initiatives proposed in the strategy.

*“Having a say on Election Day is the right of all New Zealanders. In close cooperation with the disability sector, Access 2020 shows how this can become a reality.”*

—Robert Peden, Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Commission

## KEY FEATURES

Existing accessibility initiatives of the Electoral Commission include that every enrolled voter is sent an EasyVote information pack; that election officials assess all voting places against access criteria; and that anyone can ask a friend, family member, or electoral official for help. Access 2020 goes beyond these efforts and aims foremost to enable voters with disabilities to cast a secret ballot. Telephone dictation voting was introduced in 2014 for those who are visually impaired or have another disability. Access 2020 focuses on making more information available in accessible formats so that everyone can access the Electoral Commission’s services in ways that meet their needs. In addition, Access 2020 recognizes the crucial relationship with the disability sector so that continuous consultations on improvement are carried out.

## OUTCOME, IMPACT AND EFFECTIVENESS

The last survey held, following the 2011 general election, showed a high level of awareness and approval of the measures that the Electoral Commission has undertaken to make the voting process more accessible.

## TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY AND COST-EFFICIENCY

The Commission hosts a small group of international electoral officials in the few days preceding a general election. These officials have indicated a specific interest in New Zealand's accessibility initiatives, particularly telephone dictation voting.

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## SOURCES

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## NOMINATED BY

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