MINISTRY OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

Office for **Disability Issues**
Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

Summary of submissions:

Proposed changes to NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services

New Zealand Government

**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

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ISBN: 978-1-98-857064-8 (online)

May 2019

Introduction

New Zealand Sign Language Video Interpreting and Relay Services help Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired, and speech-impaired New Zealanders to communicate with hearing-people over the phone.

On 28 February 2019, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment together with the Office for Disability Issues asked for feedback on six proposed changes to help move to better, more modern video interpreting and relay services.

The six proposed changes are:

1. get you to register as a user

2. make the Video Interpreting Service more available

3. move to digital text-based relay services

4. phase out CapTel equipment

5. stop using teletypewriter (TTY) equipment

6. stop speech-to-speech services.

These proposed changes are part of the work we are doing to achieve one of the goals of the New Zealand Disability Strategy – that in the future, information and communications will be easy for disabled people to access, using formats and languages that are right for them (Outcome 5 – Accessibility).

This was the second phase of consultation with users. In 2018, The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment consulted with users about the current relay services. Users at the time told us they wanted video interpreting and relay services that took advantage of new technologies and that gave better access to video interpreting for New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).

More information about the consultation process and the proposed changes is available in NZSL and English on our website: www.mbie.govt.nz/relayconsultation. Individual submissions and workshops notes have also been published on this website.

Feedback received

People and organisations could provide feedback up until 9am, Monday 15 April 2019. Many individuals chose to give feedback at community workshops held around the country, while others provided feedback in writing or via video message.

- Approximately 60 people attended scheduled community workshops in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. A further 15 people provided feedback at an additional community meeting hosted by the Office for Disability Issues in Palmerston North.

- 18 submissions were received through written or video feedback from both individual users of services and organisations.

Most people who attended community workshops were Deaf users of services. Written and video feedback came from a range of users, including Deaf, hearing-impaired and speech-impaired users.

Organisations that submitted included Deaf Aotearoa, the Deafblind Association, the Talklink Trust, the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists Association and the Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ). Two providers of relay services also submitted. We did not receive any feedback from telecommunications providers.

Officials also met with a small number of groups to discuss the proposed changes and to get feedback. These groups included:

- senior and transition students in Auckland and Christchurch with support from Kelston Deaf Education Centre and Van Asch Deaf Education Centre

- NZSL interpreters with support from SLIANZ

- CapTel users in Te Awamutu and Dunedin with support from local Hearing Associations

- members of the Capital and Coast District Health Board Disability team.

Next steps

Thank you to everyone who gave us their feedback. We particularly valued meeting many of you in person. This feedback has been valuable and has helped us to better understand what is needed to move to better, more modern video interpreting and relay services.

Feedback will inform how we work with potential suppliers of video interpreting and relay services to understand what they can provide that meets user needs. We will be doing this over the next few months.

We will be providing updates on our progress. If you would like to receive email updates from us, please email *relayconsultation@mbie.govt.nz*.

The rest of this document provides a summary of feedback.

Summary of Feedback

Registration

Users generally supported the proposed change to introduce registration for services. This was because of the benefits that registration could offer.

There was strong demand for a good two-way calling experience with users wanting the ability for hearing people and organisations to be able to call them directly via the relay services.

Other features that users wanted registration to enable included: civil defence notifications, callers being able to leave a message, no longer using calling cards, using registration as 'proof' if there was a 'data-only' mobile phone plan for users, having a directory of other relay service users, and creating a profile to save interpreter preferences.

> "Good to have to register, maybe receive info, feedback, and updates, news" – feedback at Hamilton workshop

Some people were concerned that registration could create a barrier to using services if not kept simple. There were questions about whether hearing people and organisations would also need to register, and whether users would need to log in every time they use the service.

Some people were concerned about what information would be needed, and how this would be kept safe. The importance of confidentiality and privacy was emphasised. Some also felt that a provider who is independent from the community might help ensure confidentiality.

There was some interest in how services would work for visitors to New Zealand and for New Zealanders who travel overseas. At our Dunedin workshop, a German visitor attended after experiencing difficulty communicating with a tour operator.

Video Interpreting Service (VIS)

Users value VIS not only for phone calls, but also for facilitating access to NZSL interpreters. For example, a student in Auckland had recently used VIS at her GP appointment, and a Christchurch attendee used VIS when his workplace organised a last minute staff meeting after the terrorist attack.

There was strong support for extending the hours of availability of VIS, particularly to weekends, early mornings, later into the evenings, and public holidays. Users also wanted to see demand for interpreters better managed, including through an improved booking system and an ability to queue or have a call back when busy.

During the consultation period, the Government announced that from 1 July 2019, VIS would be available on weekends and public holidays.

Users would ideally like to see this service available 24/7 in the future, particularly for emergency situations. There is also interest in having access to VIS for 111 calls, with NZSL users not feeling confident about using the txt 111 service.

> "There have been times I wish NZSL interpreters were available during weekends and after hours for hospital emergencies" – VIS user

> "Deaf people have been calling for extensions to the Video Interpreting Service for years. Extending the hours of this service will help increase Deaf people's participation in society" – Deaf Aotearoa

> "I have the right to call my mum at Christmas but I just can't" – VIS user at Christchurch workshop

Other feedback emphasised that making VIS more available requires more than increasing the hours of service, and requires attention to the quality of the service, which includes the quality of the technological systems, hardware and quality of NZSL interpreting.

There was some concern about how VIS is used and that in many situations it should not be a substitute for an in-person interpreter.

Some users asked for a voice carry over option for VIS to assist people who feel confident using their voice but want to receive signed responses.

Interpreters

Preferences

A lot of the feedback we received about VIS focused on the experience users have with interpreters. Most users want greater choice in the interpreters they work with. This includes an ability to choose interpreters who are familiar with their signing skills, have topic knowledge, or who are trusted to interpret for sensitive situations, including having a gender match for GP appointments.

There were a number of suggestions about how preferences could be managed, including having interpreter photos and 'bios' available with an overview of skills (including medical vocabulary, Te Reo, Pasifika and International sign language skills). Users also accepted that it is not always possible to use a preferred interpreter.

> "People should be able to choose their interpreter" – feedback at Wellington workshop

> "Have all interpreters' faces on the Skype icon or something like that along with their name to help us choose" – feedback at Dunedin workshop

> "It's better when we have a connection with the interpreter" – feedback at Palmerston North workshop

In our engagement with interpreters, we heard that in the past there had been concern about how the workload of VIS interpreters would be managed if users had greater choice of interpreters.

Other issues raised included how handovers between interpreters on long calls are managed, with some users experiencing a sudden change halfway through a call and a new interpreter without background knowledge. There is also uncertainty about how much time someone was allowed to use VIS for.

Local interpreters

Users from around the country wanted to see non-Auckland interpreters working for VIS. This was mostly because of the regional differences in NZSL and the need for local knowledge in some situations. For example, Deaf users in Wellington wanted access to interpreters through the service who are familiar with some of the jargon and terminology used in Wellington workplaces. Some users also noted the potential for VIS to help provide greater job security for some interpreters.

There was some nervousness about the idea of interpreters working from home. While users were generally comfortable with the idea of interpreters not working from a call centre, they saw a need to ensure confidentiality and privacy, and for consistent standards, and quality assurance to be in place. As an alternative option, some suggested the use of multiple call centres.

Interpreters that we talked to thought the call centre model works well and provides the opportunity to work in a team environment. This is particularly helpful for accessing support, including on long calls, as well as supervision and training. They would prefer multiple call centres to working from home.

Concerns from interpreters about the home environment included the quality of internet connection, how privacy would be upheld, the quality of equipment remote interpreters would use and whether they would need to cover the cost of this equipment, as well as access to training and support for less experienced interpreters.

> "Possibility of more VIS interpreters working from all over NZ gives those interpreters more work, especially if living rural allowing for true NZSL variation to be used" – feedback at Auckland workshop

Using everyday digital devices

Users supported the idea of being able to use the services across different devices through a common app. Feedback was that they liked the idea of being able to make calls on the run through an app and that a single app would be more accessible and easier to promote.

Many users want to see services that are easy to use for a range of users, including the elderly. Some people shared some of the issues that they experience with the current text services that they would like addressed, such as slow typing, not being able to correct spelling mistakes, and responses not spelling Māori place names correctly. A number of users shared their frustrations about having to use calling cards to make calls to mobile phones.

> "Can we have a one-button service for older users?" – feedback at Wellington workshop

There were some concerns about how digital services would perform on different devices, in particular if a user didn't have an expensive phone. Other concerns included whether businesses' firewalls would prevent services being used, for example while at work.

There was interest in the technologies that could be used to deliver services, for example receiving incoming call notifications on a watch or fitbit, and exploring alternatives to Skype. For deafblind, users require access to vision enhancement and Braille displace technology.

> "One stop shop – easy to understand and use and promote" – feedback at Auckland workshop

Transition to modern services

Education and training

A number of people welcomed the changes to the services but raised the need to support all users through a transition. Users wanted to see community-led training and education, for example a 'train the trainer' or coaching approach, working closely with organisations such as Deaf clubs and Hearing Associations.

> "I think the proposed changes are a step in the right direction for providing deaf and hearing-impaired people with better access to the communication assistance they need... however changes will only achieve their full potential if help is provided to current users and potential users of these services in the transition and future uptake". - CapTel user

Some of these concerns stem from the current level of education and training. Relay users don't have the same phone etiquette as hearing people and feedback

suggested that users need more support to use services. There were also concerns about some remote regions where there may be few relay users due to the level of training and support available.

Other suggestions for education and training included 'how to' tutorials, the ability to make test calls, access to information in NZSL on the main relay services website, and resources available for download by businesses and organisations.

> "Information in NZSL about everything that's in text (except boring stuff)"
> – feedback at Wellington workshop

Older users

We received mixed feedback about how elderly will manage with changes to the services. There was some concern that elderly users will not cope with changes. Others were confident that elderly will be ok with an easy to use service, and the right help and training.

There was concern that technology is already moving on with landlines being phased out and that some Deaf elderly have been left without a service, as TTY equipment falls out of use and these users have not felt confident moving onto other services.

From our engagements with CapTel users and Hearing Associations, it was evident that there is a mix of technology know-how among elderly. Some elderly relay users are happy to use email and text but find that this is not always an option. Other elderly users do not feel confident with technology.

Even if not confident on computers, many elderly do have smartphones and it was suggested that transitioning elderly users focus on how services can work on smartphones.

> I understand that maintaining legacy equipment can be expensive, but my concern is for elderly deaf people who are not tech savvy. Over the last few years, faxing services have reduced to the point that elderly deaf who have no smartphones are left relying solely on TTY equipment.

CapTel

A number of people supported the phase out of CapTel, provided that a good digital alternative is procured. Some users commented that the upfront cost and need for a broadband connection can be a barrier to using CapTel at the moment, and an alternative service may be more accessible.

There were concerns raised about the current service, including captions that can be difficult to understand, a slow service, trouble with installation and accessing support, and some issues more recently with users moving to a fibre network.

There were a few suggestions about how long we should provide to phase out CapTel. These ranged from 6-12 months to 'wait for the next generation'.

Teletypewriter (TTY) users

There was support for stopping TTY services as these services are seen as outdated. However, there was also some concern about remaining TTY users who have not already moved onto other services. These users are seen as particularly vulnerable as they are less likely to use text, email or the internet, and are more likely to be socially isolated. The need to make sure these users are well supported through transition onto digital services was emphasised.

> "I do not have any concerns about phasing out the equipment which I agree is now dated. Sometimes the equipment seems faulty and the call is not processed properly... a common problem when someone is talking the text changes to random numbers and digits..." (Voice Carry-Over user)

Speech-to-speech

There was concern about stopping the speech-to-speech service. Some people suggested that low usage could just be low awareness of the service, with the service not being adequately promoted or resourced to ensure its success.

There was recognition that given the wide range of speech impairments, speech-to-speech is a difficult service to use. Feedback suggests that issues with the service are not unique to the New Zealand service, with submitters being aware of issues experienced by users in other countries.

One submission suggested that services be redesigned in close consultation with people with speech impairments and speech language therapists. There was also a call for the service to use two-way video for calls.

While feedback suggested that new digital text-based services would help a number of speech-impaired users, these services wouldn't be a substitute for Speech-to-speech for users with complex needs.

> "I get the impression that it is too hard to provide a service that caters to people with speech impairment because there is a wide variation in needs and it is complex. This is no reason not to put resources into exploring an alternative" – (speech-to-speech user)

Using services and accessibility

Affordability and connectivity

Concerns about affordability were common among users. In particular, using VIS can be expensive as it requires either generous mobile data or a good Wi-Fi connection. There was general frustration that users are charged for calling minutes they cannot

use, with users wanting to see text and data-only mobile phone plans being made available to relay users.

There was also concern about the affordability of digital devices, particularly for elderly users. One suggestion was for the relay services to provide all users with digital devices.

Some concerns about connectivity stemmed from the current Skype service which can be interrupted with a poorer connection. Attendees at our workshop in Dunedin were particularly concerned about the prevalence of blackspots around Otago.

There was some interest in being able to use the services in public places to address barriers to accessing technology and connectivity. For example, there was a suggestion of setting up 'stations' at places such as libraries, hospitals, train stations and shopping centres.

Business and organisations

A number of businesses and organisations are not supporting the use of video interpreting and relay services. Users had issues with a range of organisations, for example, frontline government services, banks and insurance companies, and hospitals and GP clinics. Examples of concerns raised include call centre staff refusing to take relay calls, and users not being allowed to use VIS or access wi-fi in appointments.

These concerns were also shared by people within businesses and organisations who want to see more processes in place to support users of video interpreting and relay services.

> At the moment, very few community pharmacies have a device capable of audio and video in the pharmacy... I would like to float the idea of integrating NZVIS into the existing pharmacy software" – community pharmacist

There was a strong call for education and training to not only focus on primary users, but to extend to businesses and organisations. In particular, for relay calls, there is a need to have call centre staff aware of the services. VIS interpreters shared that while they have authentication processes in place for communicating with banks, they find that call centre staff are not necessarily familiar with the relay service and the processes to follow.

There was a suggestion that education and training could be prioritised in certain sectors, for example for use by Police and hospitals. There was also a suggestion that hospital clinicians and police officers should have VIS on their phone for easy access.

Some users shared that they do not always need to use the relay services, and they would like to be able to specify 'text only' when businesses and organisations ask for their phone number, or to choose an email option. When organisations do support

text enquiries, users may still end up needing the relay services due to slow replies or a lack of response from an organisation.

Information from the market

We received two submissions from potential suppliers of services that used the consultation to provide us with information about what services they provide, as well as information about the market for relay services overseas and relevant technical standards that are in use.