

# Summary of Submissions: Proposed changes to the NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services

## Summary document

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 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 to help Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired, and speech-impaired New Zealanders to communicate with hearing-people over the phone.

These six proposed changes were:

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.

We received feedback at community workshops and in writing or via video message from individual users of the service and organisations.

- Approximately 60 people attended community workshops in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. A further 15 people provided feedback at a community meeting hosted by the Office for Disability Issues in Palmerston North.
- 18 submissions were received through written or video feedback.

Officials also met with senior and transition students from Kelston Deaf Education Centre and Van Asch Deaf Education Centre, NZSL interpreters, CapTel users in Te Awamutu and Dunedin and Members of the Capital and Coast District Health Board Disability team

Thank you to everyone who gave us their valuable feedback. We valued meeting many of you in person. This feedback has helped us to better understand what is needed to move to better, more modern video interpreting and relay services and will inform how we work with potential suppliers of services. 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](mailto:relayconsultation@mbie.govt.nz).

## Registration

Users supported introducing registration for services, because of the benefits it could offer, including a good two-way calling experience between users and hearing people.

It was highlighted that registration should be simple, or it could create a barrier to using services. There were also questions about whether hearing people and organisations would need to register, and whether users would need to log-in every time they use the service.

The importance of privacy and confidentiality was emphasised, concerns were raised about what information would be needed, and how this would be kept safe.

There was some interest in how services would work for visitors to New Zealand and for New Zealanders who travel overseas.

## Video Interpreting Service (VIS)

There was strong support for extending the availability of VIS and users would like to see the service extended 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Users also wanted to see demand for interpreters better managed, an improved booking system and ability to queue or have a call back when busy.

There is an interest in having access to VIS for 111 calls as NZSL users do not feel confident about using the txt 111 service.

It was noted that in certain situations, VIS should not be seen as a replacement for an in-person interpreter.

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

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.

## Interpreter preferences

Most users want greater choice in the interpreters, including the ability to choose from a list which could be managed through interpreter photos and biographies, with an overview of their skills. However users accepted that it is not always possible to use a preferred interpreter.

We received feedback from interpreters about the workload of a VIS interpreter and how this will be managed if users had greater choice of interpreters.

Other issues raised included how the changeover between interpreters on long calls is managed, with some users experiencing a sudden change halfway through a call and a new interpreter without background knowledge taking over. 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 because of the regional differences in NZSL, and the need for local knowledge in some situations.

While users were generally comfortable with the idea of interpreters, there were still some concerns from both users and interpreters. These concerns focused on the quality of an internet connection and equipment, ensuring consistent standards and quality assurance are in place, ensuring privacy, and ongoing support and training for less experienced interpreters.

Interpreters think the call centre model works well and provides the opportunity to work in a team environment, which is helpful for accessing support, supervision and training. An alternative option of multiple call centres around the country was preferred to working remotely from home.

## Using everyday devices

Users supported the idea of being able to use the services across different devices through a common app as this would be more accessible and easier to promote.

Users want to see services that are easy-to-use for a range of users, particularly the elderly.

There were some concerns about how digital services would perform on different devices, as well as business firewalls preventing users from accessing the service.

There was interest in how other technologies could be used to deliver services and exploring alternatives to Skype, as well as in vision enhancement and Braille display technology for deafblind users.

## 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 - and working closely with organisations such as Deaf clubs and Hearing Associations.

Users would also like 'how to' tutorials, the ability to make test calls, accessing information on the relay service website in NZSL and resources available for download by businesses and organisations. There were also concerns about some remote regions where there may be few relay users due to the level of training and support currently available.

## Older users

We received mixed feedback about how elderly will manage changes to the services, with some concern expressed that elderly users will not cope with changes whereas other feedback said that older users will be able to manage.

There was concern that some Deaf elderly may be left without a service as TTY equipment falls out of use and people do not feel confident moving onto other services.

From our engagements with CapTel users and Hearing Associations, it was clear that there is a mixed uptake of different technology. 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 new types of technology.

While some elderly users are not confident using computers, many elderly do regularly use smartphones. It was suggested that elderly users could focus on how services can work on smartphones.

## CapTel

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

Concerns were raised about the current service with some of the feedback stating it was difficult-to-understand captions, it was a slow service, there is trouble with installation, accessing support, and more recently issues with users moving to a fibre network.

There were a few suggestions about the time frame for phasing out CapTel - ranging from 6-12 months.

## Teletypewriter (TTY) users

There was support for stopping TTY services as it is seen as outdated. However, there was some concern about remaining TTY users who are seen as particularly vulnerable because they are less likely to use text, email or the internet, and are often socially isolated. Feedback emphasised the need to make sure these users are well supported through transition to digital services.

## Speech-to-speech

There was recognition that the wide range and complex needs of speech impairments, means that speech-to-speech is a difficult service to use. However there were concerns about stopping the 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.

## 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 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 came from the current Skype service, which can be interrupted with a poorer connection.

There was some interest in being able to use the services in public places to address barriers to accessing technology and connectivity.

## Business and organisations

A number of businesses and organisations are not supporting the use of video interpreting and relay services, including call centre staff refusing to take relay calls, and users not being allowed to use VIS or access Wi-Fi at 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.

There was a strong call for education and training to focus on primary users, as well as extending to businesses and organisations and to be prioritised in certain sectors such as Police and hospitals.

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.

## Information from the market

We received two submissions from potential suppliers of services that used the consultation to provide information about what services they provide.