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## **New Zealand Telecommunications Relay Services Beyond June 2019**

### *Public consultation document summary*

Through its contracted providers, the Government provides a Telecommunications Relay Service for deaf, hearing impaired, speech impaired and deafblind New Zealanders. The current contracts for the provision of this service are due to expire on 30 June 2019.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) is eager to hear your views on what services and equipment are required to meet the needs of users, and how these may need to change in light of technological developments.

Please let us know what you think by filling out the submissions template available at [mbie.govt.nz](http://mbie.govt.nz). NZSL users are able to submit video responses at <https://www.seeflow.co.nz/direct>. For video submissions please provide your name and email/physical address. There is some information at the end of this document about what we do with the submissions, and your privacy.

The closing date for submissions is 5:00pm, Friday 13 April 2018. If you use more than one service, please be sure to provide feedback on any or all of these as you see fit.

We also ask that you let us know:

- the region you live in, and your age (if you are comfortable providing this information);
- if you are submitting on behalf of an organisation, the name of the organisation, your role, and which (if any) of the user communities the organisation represents;
- which relay services you were aware of prior to this consultation;
- if you have a communications disability, and what it is; and
- if you are a user of the relay service, and which service or services you use, how often you use them, and what you use them for.

Our objective is to:

Ensure the New Zealand Relay Service meets the needs of users in facilitating the accessibility of deaf, hearing-impaired, speech-impaired, and deafblind people in New Zealand society and the economy.

Our guiding principles are that the relay service should be:

- **Available:** to those who need it, when they need it, regardless of where they live
- **Accessible:** widely known, easy to access and straightforward to use
- **Affordable:** for users whilst offering value for money for the Government
- **Fit for purpose:** compatible with mainstream technologies and networks and keeps pace with technological advancements.



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Current services are:

- **Teletypewriter to Voice (TTY)** - A TTY user types their conversation to a Relay Assistant (RA) who then reads the typed message to a standard phone user (hearing person). The Relay Assistant (RA) relays the hearing person's spoken words by typing them back to the TTY user. This service is available 24/7.
- **Voice Carry Over** - A deaf or hearing impaired user, who prefers to use their own voice, speaks directly to the party they are calling. The RA types the voice responses back to the user who reads the typed message on a TTY screen. This service is available 24/7.
- **Hearing Carry Over** - Users who are speech impaired use their hearing abilities to listen directly to the other party. The RA voices the typed responses from the user to the hearing person, who then speaks directly to the user without RA interaction. This service is available 24/7.
- **Mobile Text Relay Service** - A deaf or hearing impaired user makes a relay call using a mobile text application called 'TexMee' on their smartphone or tablet to communicate with hearing people. The user types a message into the mobile application, which is read by a RA to a standard phone user. The standard phone user then responds, and the RA types the message back to the user. This service is available 24/7.
- **Internet Relay** - Allows users to place relay calls using a web browser via a computer, laptop or tablet with an internet connection. This service is available 24/7.
- **CapTel or WebCapTel** - A deaf or hearing impaired user speaks directly with a hearing person through a CapTel telephone, or through a computer, laptop, tablet or via the web-browser on a smartphone. The hearing person's speech is transcribed by a specially trained operator, and the text is relayed via the internet to a screen on the user's CapTel phone in near real time. This service is available 7:00am to 10:00pm, seven days per week.
- **Video Interpreting Service (VIS)** - Links any deaf or hearing impaired person who uses New Zealand Sign Language with a Video Interpreter (VI) and a hearing person. The hearing person may be in the same room as the user, or in another location (including overseas). The user and VI sign to each other on a video screen. The VI talks with the hearing person on the telephone, or through video if they are in the same location as the user, and relays the conversation between the two parties. This service is available 8:00am to 8:00pm, Monday to Friday.
- **Speech to Speech and Video-Assisted Speech to Speech** - Enables a person with speech impairment to communicate over the telephone using their own voice or a voice synthesizer. Specially trained RAs act as the speech-impaired user's voice. The RA listens and repeats the speech-impaired user's message to the other party as necessary. Video-Assisted Speech to Speech also connects the user via Skype, enabling the RA to also see visual cues during the conversation that improve the quality of the call. This service is available 7:30am to 9:00pm, Monday to Friday, and 9:00am to 5:00pm Saturday.



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**Availability of services – Please let us know if your comments relate to a specific service**

New Zealand is well placed in terms of broadband infrastructure, which allows users to access online relay services. Most relay services are available 24/7, however some are not – most notably VIS (8:00am to 8:00pm Monday to Friday) and CapTel (7:00am to 10:00pm 7 days).

Questions:

1. What do you think of the current availability of the relay service (i.e. are you able to access the relay service when you need it)?
2. If you have encountered problems, what are these and what impact have they had?
3. What changes could be made to relay service to improve their availability, and why?

**Accessibility – Please let us know if your comments relate to a specific service**

The NZ Relay Advisory Group has highlighted a lack of awareness within user communities of the services offered by the relay service. MBIE considers that promotion and outreach activities should remain a key role for future service providers.

Questions:

4. What could be done to increase awareness of the relay service and its benefits to users of the service and the wider community?

For many New Zealanders fixed line telephones (landlines) are giving way to mobile devices, and service and data consumption is increasing.

Questions:

5. If you had the choice between accessing a relay service from a fixed device at home or from your mobile, laptop or tablet, which would you prefer and why?
6. What specific relay services would you like to see available on your mobile, laptop or tablet and why?
7. For those relay services that are available on your mobile, laptop or tablet already, are there any improvements that could be made that would make them easier to use and why?
8. Are there any other issues related to ease of access and use with the current relay service that we should consider?

**Affordability – Please let us know if your comments relate to a specific service**

The NZ Relay Advisory Group has highlighted the costs of connectivity, equipment and using voice minutes or data to make relay service calls. Currently, only calls to national landlines (excluding premium numbers) are provided free of charge to users, yet an increasing number of service users have only mobile phones. We recognise that these costs may still represent a barrier for some relay service users, especially those on low incomes.

Questions:

9. Do you find that the costs of connectivity are a barrier to you accessing and using the relay service?



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10. If so, what kind of problems have you encountered and what impact has this had?
  11. What changes could be made to the relay service to improve its affordability and why?

**Fit for Purpose – Please let us know if your comments relate to a specific service**

Since the relay service began operating in 2004, technology has evolved significantly, changing the methods we use to communicate with each other. These developments may have implications for declining 'legacy' technologies.

Questions:

12. Are there any particular changes that you think should be made to the relay service to ensure it continues to offer a good experience to users and why?
13. Are there any relay services or equipment that you think are no longer relevant and could be phased out or discontinued? If so, what would be needed to support users to transition to other services or mainstream devices?
14. Have you ever discontinued use of any of the relay services? If so which service or services, and why?
15. What other comments do you have about New Zealand Telecommunications Relay Services?

**Access to Emergency Assistance**

The NZ Relay Centre is not equipped to handle 111 calls. 111 calls can be made by deaf users from TTYs and fax machines to dedicated emergency Freephone (0800) numbers. There is currently no video calling service available for deaf people to contact emergency services.

However, there is a text-based system (111 TXT) for direct communication with NZ Police.

We do not propose to include emergency calling as a part of the relay service. However, we will continue to coordinate with providers to ensure that these services are accessible to relay service users.

**Submissions**

We may publish the submissions that we receive, and will consider you to have consented to this by making a submission unless you specify otherwise. For video submissions we will not publish the video itself, but may publish a translated transcript.

All information provided to this discussion document is subject to the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). Please advise if you have any objection to the release of any information contained in your submission, which information should be withheld, and the reasons for withholding the information.

Please tell us if you do not wish your name or any other identifying details to be included in any summary of submissions that the Ministry may publish, or in any responses to OIA requests.



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The Ministry will consider all such objections when responding to requests for copies of information on submissions to this document under the OIA. Please note that in certain circumstances information you have provided to us may be required to be released to a requester under the OIA, even if you would prefer it to be withheld.

The Privacy Act 1993 governs access by individuals to information about themselves held by agencies. Please contact us if you would like a copy of, or to correct, any of your personal information. Any personal information you supply in the course of making a submission will be used by the Ministry only in conjunction with the matters covered by the consultation on New Zealand Telecommunications Relay Services Beyond June 2019.