

In Confidence

Office of the Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media

Office of the Minister for Disability Issues

Chair, Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee

NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services Consultation

Proposal

1. This paper seeks agreement to release a public consultation document proposing changes to the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Video Interpreting Service and the Telecommunications Relay Service.

Executive summary

2. In 2018, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) sought feedback on the provision of the Telecommunications Relay Service (relay services) which help Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired and speech-impaired New Zealanders communicate over the phone. Feedback was also sought on the provision of the NZSL Video Interpreting Service for remote interpreting. The feedback was expected to feed into the next round of procurement for the services.
3. Feedback from users and representative groups told us that users wanted services that took advantage of the latest technologies and improved access to the Video Interpreting Service. In response, MBIE paused its procurement process to ensure services reflected the views of users and were aligned to government and sector initiatives.
4. We are now proposing to seek feedback on changes to move to more modern services. This includes improving the availability of the Video Interpreting Service, moving to relay services that are available across everyday devices (smartphone, tablet, computer), and introducing registration to provide a better service for users. To help facilitate this change, we are seeking feedback on how we transition away from services that use proprietary or legacy technologies, or offer a lower quality service.

Background

5. Relay services help Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired and speech-impaired New Zealanders communicate with hearing people over the phone with the assistance of a relay assistant. These services receive funding from the Telecommunications Development Levy, which is paid by firms in the telecommunications industry.
6. Relay services include:
 - 6.1. *NZSL Video Interpreting Service*: This service allows NZSL users to sign with an NZSL interpreter who relays their message verbally to a non-NZSL user using a standard phone, allowing two-way conversation.
 - 6.2. *Text-based relay services*: These services allow users to text or type their message and read the response, speak their message and receive a text response, text or type their message and listen for the response. Individual services include mobile text relay, internet relay, CapTel, and teletypewriter/TTY services
 - 6.3. *Speech to speech service*: This service allows speech-impaired users to have a relay assistant interpret what they are saying and relay their message to a hearing person over the phone.
7. The Video Interpreting Service and the CapTel service are the most used services based on call minutes. Speech to speech and TTY services are the least used services.
8. The NZSL Video Interpreting Service can also be used for remote interpreting. Situations where an NZSL user may use the remote service in this way include a doctor's appointment or for a parent-teacher interview at their child's school. Funding for remote interpreting comes from the Ministries of Business Innovation and Employment, Social Development, Education and Health, and the Accident Compensation Corporation.
9. Last year MBIE sought feedback on the current services and issues ahead of contracts coming to an end in June 2019. [CBC-18-MIN-001 refers]. Feedback from users and representative groups told us that users wanted video interpreting and relay services that took advantage of the latest technologies and improved access to video interpreting for NZSL.
10. MBIE decided to pause its process to procure new video interpreting and relay services and extend current service contracts by 12 months to allow more time to ensure services reflected the views of users and were aligned to government and sector initiatives.
11. We are now proposing to seek feedback on changes to the video interpreting and relay services to move to modern services that perform better for users and are ready for the future. MBIE and Office for Disability Issues have agreed to take a joint approach to this consultation and engagement.

12. The engagement process is designed to be accessible to maximise participation by users. It includes kanohi ki te kanohi opportunities, an easy to read summary of proposed changes, NZSL videos, and the option of responding in NZSL. A combination of online feedback and targeted workshops will effectively capture both the range and depth of views of those who are Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired and speech-impaired. Service providers, whānau and carers can also provide feedback.

Comment

Objectives

13. Changes over the years to video interpreting and relay services have resulted in a range of services. These services go by different names, use different technologies, and provide different standards of service.
14. We are proposing to move to more modern video interpreting and relay services that:
 - 14.1. Are available across everyday devices (smartphone, tablet, computer)
 - 14.2. Provide greater access to video interpreting for users of NZSL
 - 14.3. Do not require the purchase or loan of specialised equipment
 - 14.4. Make it easy to place and receive calls
 - 14.5. Focus on improvement and keeping up with technological change
 - 14.6. Make it easy to provide feedback and be informed with important notices about the service
 - 14.7. Incorporate strong and transparent privacy protocols
 - 14.8. Have a strong focus on education and support for a range of users, including government agencies, businesses, schools and the healthcare sector.

Proposals

15. To help move to more modern video interpreting and relay services, we are proposing to seek feedback on the following proposed changes:
 - 15.1. *Registration*: Introducing registration for users to improve customer experience, including making it easier to receive calls, top up an account for international calls, receive notifications, and provide feedback. Registration will also provide better aggregated data to more effectively evaluate service performance. It will not seek evidence of disability to access the service.
 - 15.2. *Make the Video Interpreting Service more available*: Improving availability by extending the Video Interpreting Service to seven days a week. The service is currently available 8am to 8pm weekdays and cannot be accessed outside these hours. We are also proposing to explore the feasibility of extending hours and allowing more flexible arrangements to draw on skills and availability of interpreters around the country.

- 15.3. *Move to digital text-based relay services:* Making all text-based services available on everyday devices, such as through a single app. This will remove the need for proprietary equipment and make it easier for improvements to the services following user feedback or technology developments. It is also similar to how services are being delivered in the United Kingdom and Australia. Other improvements such as extending free calling to mobile phones are proposed.
- 15.4. *Phase out CapTel equipment:* Stopping loans of proprietary CapTel equipment (caption telephones) but continuing to support existing users through a transition period. CapTel currently costs users \$325 to loan and requires both landline and broadband connections, potentially limiting the number of users.
- 15.5. *Stop using teletypewriter (TTY) equipment:* Stopping support for services using TTY equipment. Feedback from last year's consultation suggested the community is ready to turn off these services, which submitters considered to be outdated and poorer quality.
- 15.6. *Stop speech to speech service:* This is the least used service (about 3 hours of call time a month) and does not appear to be meeting the needs of speech-impaired users well. We would look to make sure new digital relay services can help more speech-impaired people.

Alignment with wider disability work programme

- 16. Proposed changes will help improve access to communications but will not address all issues raised by users in the earlier consultation, including:
 - 16.1. Users not having access to affordable and adequate broadband, mobile data and digital devices to use video. NZSL users rely on video for regular communication with friends and whānau, accessing information in NZSL, and using the Video Interpreting Service.
 - 16.2. Organisations not necessarily having the processes in place to support customers who are Deaf, deafblind, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired to access information and services. This can lead to organisations not supporting use of the video interpreting and relay services, or not providing other communication channels to help these customers communicate.
- 17. There are a number of initiatives currently underway across government that are working to understand and address issues relating to accessibility, disability support, and digital inclusion.
 - 17.1. The Ministry of Social Development has started a major project to explore how we can achieve full accessibility for everyone. It is also working with a wider range of organisations to implement the Government's Accessibility Charter across the public sector.
 - 17.2. The Ministry of Health is testing a new approach to disability support in the MidCentral District Health Board region, 'Mana Whaikaha', to provide disabled people and whānau with more flexible support options.

17.3. The Office for Disability Issues and the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition have been working with the disability community to develop the next four-year action plan to deliver the priorities of the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

17.4. The Department of Internal Affairs is leading a cross-government programme to develop a Digital Inclusion Blueprint.

Consultation

18. The following departments have been consulted on this paper and the consultation document: Office for Disability Issues, Ministry of Social Development, Office for Seniors, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Accident Compensation Corporation, New Zealand Police, Department of Internal Affairs, Treasury, and Te Puni Kōkiri. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has been informed.
19. Proposals have been informed by consultation in 2018 and further targeted engagements with the community and stakeholders, including with Disabled People's Organisation Deaf Aotearoa.

Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications. There is an existing appropriation within Vote Business, Science and Innovation.

Legislative Implications

21. There are no legislative implications.

Impact Analysis

22. Impact Analysis requirements do not apply.

Human Rights

23. Proposed changes seek to improve access to communications, including access to NZSL, and are consistent with New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, the Human Rights Act 1993, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Gender Implications

24. Proposed changes to allow more flexible service delivery arrangements for the Video Interpreting Service may benefit the NZSL interpreter workforce, which is predominantly female, with interpreters often working part-time.

Disability Perspective

25. Access to communication is core to health and wellbeing, and to having choice and control.
26. The proposed changes are consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026, particularly Outcomes 5 (Accessibility), 3 (Health and Wellbeing) and 7 (Choice and Control). They will contribute to the goal that in the future, information and communications will be easy for disabled people to access in formats and languages that are right for them.
27. Improved Relay Services will lift access to government services and information, and enable the views of people with disabilities to be heard and their rights respected.
28. The focus on improvement and keeping up with technological change may also encourage innovation and technological developments that will further enhance these services.

Publicity

29. Publicity is planned to coincide with the release of the consultation document. This publicity will include a press release, as well as communications targeted to users and other stakeholders. Communications will be available in NZSL and plain English to ensure information is accessible. A series of workshops will also be held to provide users and their whānau an opportunity to share their views.

Proactive Release

30. This paper will be released at the same time as the consultation document.

Recommendations

The Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media and the Minister for Disability Issues recommends that the Committee:

1. **Note** that in 2018 the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment sought feedback on existing Telecommunications Relay Services. [CBC-18-MIN-001 refers]
2. **Note** the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment and the Office for Disability Issues are planning further consultation to seek feedback on proposed changes to the Video Interpreting Service and Telecommunications Relay Service.
3. **Note** that proposed changes to the Video Interpreting Service and Telecommunications Relay Service are intended to modernise the services while managing a transition away from services that use proprietary or legacy technologies, or offer a lower quality service.
4. **Agree** to the release of the discussion document “Proposed changes to NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services” in English and New Zealand Sign Language, subject to minor editorial changes.

5. **Agree** that the Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media in consultation with the Minister for Disability Issues will make decisions to inform a Request for Proposals to procure new services.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Kris Faafoi

Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

Minister for Disability Issues