

# Refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy

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## Submitter details

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## Submission

### Introduction

1. Recreation Aotearoa is the professional association and peak industry body responsible for providing leadership, advocacy, and professional development opportunities for those involved in the broader recreation sector. We represent the collective voice of recreation in New Zealand, ensuring that the value of recreation is recognised across government, industry, and communities.
2. Our membership includes recreation policy makers, territorial local authorities, voluntary organisations, regional sports trusts, outdoor recreation providers, and others engaged in delivering facilities and services that make recreation accessible.
3. Our role is to champion high-quality recreation for the benefit of New Zealand. Our vision is that New Zealand will have a strong recreation industry that meets the needs of current and future participants, so that through recreation, New Zealanders are active, healthy, and connected.
4. Recreation Aotearoa believes recreation is vital to New Zealand society. Recreation is not just about enjoyment, it is about being healthy, engaged, stimulated, and interacting with others, and this occurs via outdoor recreation, community recreation, parks, and aquatic and facility-based recreation centres.
5. Our mission is enhancing wellbeing through recreation. We believe recreation is not a discretionary “nice-to-have” but a fundamental contributor to New Zealand’s physical and mental health, social cohesion, youth development, and climate resilience.
6. We welcome the opportunity to submit on the Draft Refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030 (NZDS). This strategy sets out the Government’s commitment to disabled people and their whānau and invites everyone, including the community, to contribute to making New Zealand accessible and equitable.
7. Our strategic plan, Te Whai Oranga, outlines the importance of accessibility, conveying that our aspiration is for all people of New Zealand

to access high quality recreation opportunities regardless of location, age, ethnicity, gender, ability or socio-economic status. Our purpose is to empower, support, and connect the recreation industry so that all New Zealanders can access quality recreation experiences.

8. Recreation Aotearoa is leading sector-specific initiatives to improve accessibility and inclusivity:

Outdoor Accessibility: Alongside a national Accessible Outdoors Working Group, we developed Outdoors Accessibility Design Guidelines to assist providers of outdoor spaces, trails, and associated infrastructure in developing more accessible spaces.

Outdoor Education: We developed a complementary resource focusing on accessibility and inclusion in outdoor education and recreation, in partnership with Education Outdoors New Zealand and Sport NZ.

Aquatics: Our Aquatics Facility Guidelines provide guidance relating to disability, inclusion, and accessibility in Aquatic facilities.

9. This submission draws on our organisation's focus on Disability & Inclusion initiatives and advocates for the explicit recognition of accessible recreation spaces, places, and programs as crucial vehicles for achieving the vision and outcomes outlined in the Draft NZDS.

### **Specific Comments**

10. Recreation Aotearoa submits that the provision of accessible recreation environments directly supports the proposed vision, principles, and priority outcomes identified within the Draft NZDS. We wish to see more alignment of Recreation, Accessibility, and Wellbeing
11. The proposed vision for the NZDS states that New Zealand should be an accessible and equitable society for disabled people and their whānau – a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life.

12. Recreation Aotearoa submits that accessible recreation is critical to realising the NZDS principles of Accessibility and Participation and inclusion:

Accessibility: This principle is defined as fundamental to participation and inclusion, benefiting everyone when environments and services are designed inclusively from the beginning. Recreation Aotearoa is actively working to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of recreation spaces, places, and programs for people with disabilities in Aotearoa.

Participation and Inclusion: This principle recognises the right of disabled people to be active members of their communities and cultures in all aspects of life. Accessible parks, trails, pools, and open spaces are essential for community participation.

13. With regard to delivering accessibility in public spaces, while the Draft NZDS identifies Accessibility as a critical cross-cutting theme relating to buildings, transport, and services, Recreation Aotearoa urges the strategy to explicitly address accessibility within public recreation infrastructure, specifically parks, play, open spaces, and aquatic facilities.
14. Accessible recreation infrastructure—which local government is the single largest investor in—is vital for increasing physical activity.
15. The NZDS Housing section aims for success where Urban design and planning is fully accessible, enabling disabled people to easily access their neighbourhoods, local amenities, and transport. Recreation Aotearoa submits that our work on Outdoor Accessibility Design Guidelines and advice regarding barriers on trails directly contributes to achieving this success statement, ensuring that the spaces around accessible homes are also non-disabling.
16. Recreation Aotearoa submits that effective implementation of the NZDS relies heavily on local government and community infrastructure.
17. Local government is the primary provider of recreation infrastructure. If the legislative framework or fiscal environment constrains councils, investments in critical accessibility and recreation initiatives may be seen as "discretionary". Thus NZDS must provide a clear mandate that requires

government agencies, including local authorities, to implement strategies that enhance recreation accessibility.

### **Recommendations**

18. Recreation Aotearoa supports the Draft Refresh of the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030 and submits the following recommendations to strengthen its impact in the recreation sector
19. Explicitly include Accessible Recreation Infrastructure: The final strategy should explicitly recognise accessible parks, play areas, outdoor spaces, and aquatic facilities as a key component under the Accessibility cross-cutting theme and as a crucial element in achieving successful outcomes under the Health and Housing priority areas.
20. Promote utilisation of Sector Guidance: Government agencies, including local government, should be encouraged to incorporate and promote established industry guidance, such as the Recreation Aotearoa Outdoor Accessibility Design Guidelines and guidelines for providing accessibility information for Aquatic Facilities, into their infrastructure planning and operations.
21. Target Physical Activity Outcomes: An action should be added, potentially within the Health priority outcome area, dedicated to increasing physical activity rates among disabled people, leveraging partnerships with the recreation sector to address the inequity identified in current health data (32% physical activity rate).
22. Accountability for Public Spaces: Encourage government agencies responsible for public spaces and assets to report on their progress in improving accessibility and inclusion, aligning with the NZDS mechanism for measuring progress against actions and system-level indicators.

### **Conclusion**

23. Active recreation, play, and access to public open space are vital to New Zealanders' wellbeing. Recreation Aotearoa is dedicated to ensuring these opportunities are inclusive and accessible for all people of Aotearoa. By incorporating the needs of accessible recreation into the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026-2030, the Government can significantly strengthen

pathways for disabled people to thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life. We urge the Ministry of Disabled People – Whaikaha to ensure that the recreation sector's contribution to accessibility and inclusion is fully realised in the final strategy