

# New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) Submission on Disability Support Services Consultation

**Submission 24 March 2025**

To: Disability Support Services, Ministry of Social Development

Email: [DSS\\_submissions@msd.govt.nz](mailto:DSS_submissions@msd.govt.nz)

## **Introduction**

The New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on Disability Support Services (DSS). As the professional body representing speech-language therapists (SLTs) in Aotearoa New Zealand, NZSTA advocates for the communication and swallowing needs of disabled people across health, education, and disability support sectors.

We acknowledge the importance of ensuring that assessment and allocation tools for DSS are transparent, equitable, and culturally responsive. Our submission highlights the perspectives of speech-language therapists, who play a critical role in assessing and supporting disabled individuals with communication and swallowing needs.

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## **Consultation Topic 1: Needs Assessment and Service Allocation**

### **Question 1: Ensuring a Fair and Transparent Needs Assessment Process**

NZSTA supports the development of a consistent and equitable assessment process that ensures fairness and clarity for disabled people and their whānau. We recommend:

- The inclusion of speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) within all assessment frameworks.
- A holistic, person-centred approach that considers both functional and participation-based outcomes.
- Assessments conducted by trained professionals with expertise in communication disabilities.
- Clear communication of assessment processes and outcomes in accessible formats.

## **Question 2: Understanding Individual Support Needs**

To accurately assess and meet the needs of disabled individuals, assessments must include:

- Comprehensive communication assessments for those with suspected speech, language, and swallowing difficulties.
- Recognition of the impact of communication disabilities on social participation, education, and employment.
- Consideration of cultural and linguistic diversity, ensuring that Māori and Pasifika perspectives are included.

## **Question 3 & 4: Assessment of Whānau and Carer Needs**

NZSTA strongly supports the inclusion of whānau and carer needs in the assessment process. Carers play a vital role in communication support and should receive adequate training, respite, and resources. We suggest:

- Assessing carers' ability to support communication and swallowing needs.
- Providing access to speech-language therapy guidance and training for carers.

## **Questions 5-7: Review of Support Services**

NZSTA supports regular reviews to ensure services remain relevant. We recommend:

- Annual reviews for individuals with complex communication and swallowing needs.
- Immediate reassessments when significant changes in a person's communication abilities occur.

## **Question 8: Role of NASCs in Service Access**

NASC processes should ensure:

- Speech-language therapy services are appropriately included in support packages.
- Individuals and whānau receive clear guidance on how to access additional support services.

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## **Consultation Topic 2: Flexible Funding**

### **Questions 9-13: Enhancing Flexible Funding for Communication Support**

NZSTA supports greater flexibility in funding to ensure people with communication disabilities can access appropriate support. We recommend:

- Allowing flexible funding to cover alternative communication systems (e.g., augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices and training).

- Ensuring funding criteria explicitly include communication support needs.
  - Maintaining a balance between accountability and autonomy enabling individuals to make informed choices about their support needs.
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## **Conclusion**

NZSTA supports the proposed improvements to DSS while advocating for the specific needs of individuals with speech, language, and swallowing difficulties. We urge DSS to prioritise communication accessibility and ensure that speech-language therapy input is embedded in assessment and funding frameworks.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and look forward to ongoing collaboration to enhance DSS for all disabled people in Aotearoa.

**Ngā mihi nui,**

**New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA)**

## **\*Who is the New Zealand Speech-Language Therapists' Association**

The New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA), established in 1946, represents speech-language therapists (SLTs). NZSTA supports over 1,100 registered speech-language therapists nationally. Well over 90 per cent of the workforce are registered members.

The Association operates a self-regulatory process that provides for –

- annual practising certificates
- a clear scope of practice
- code of ethics
- complaints process
- programme accreditation of tertiary speech and language courses, and the approval of international speech-language therapy qualifications to ensure equivalency with New Zealand standards.
- a structured supervisory framework for new graduates or return-to-practice therapists
- continued quality assurance of its registered professionals.

Speech-language therapists study, diagnose and treat communication disorders, including difficulties with speaking, listening, understanding language, reading, writing, social skills, stuttering and using voice.

They work with people of all ages who have difficulty communicating because of developmental delays, stroke, brain injuries, learning disability, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, dementia and hearing loss, and other problems that affect speech and language.

A speech-language therapist can also help people who experience difficulties swallowing food and drinking safely.

Speech-language therapists work in various settings, including schools, hospitals, courts, prisons, childcare centres, or a client's home.

Speech-language therapists complete a four-year bachelor's degree or a master's in speech-language therapy.

**Contact person:** Siobhan Molloy - executive director NZSTA

[executivedirector@speechtherapy.org.nz](mailto:executivedirector@speechtherapy.org.nz)

[www.speechtherapy.org.nz](http://www.speechtherapy.org.nz)