

New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association

Speech-Language Therapy Assistant / Kaiāwhina

Position Paper

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All policy effective as above except where individually noted

Disclaimer: To the best of the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) ("the Association") knowledge, this information is valid at the time of publication.

This policy document may not fully adhere to the NZSTA Te Tiriti o Waitangi policy (currently under consultation). We commit to reviewing and revising this policy in collaboration with Māori stakeholders to address any shortcomings and uphold Te Tiriti's articles. We appreciate the importance of honouring the unique status of Māori as the tangata whenua (people of the land) and strive to build a relationship based on mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation.

Statement of Purpose

The New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association (NZSTA) defines speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina as any individual employed in a role supporting the delivery of speech-language therapy services AND receiving supervision in those delegated duties by a registered speech-language therapist.

The following NZSTA Position Paper provides clarity and direction to speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina, speech-language therapists, employers, administrators and other relevant stakeholders regarding the speech-language therapy assistant/kaiāwhina scope of practice, ethical practice, educational training and supervision.

Within the New Zealand context, speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina work under the supervision of registered speech-language therapists. The role exists across various contexts, including but not limited to hospitals, schools, kura, early childhood centres, kohanga reo, rehabilitation centres, and private residences. Speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina are employed to support SLTs in their practice and, in turn, contribute to better client and organisational outcomes (Snowdon et al., 2020).

Speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina are not registered with the NZSTA (the organisation that has developed this document). The supervising speech-language therapist and/or their organisation is responsible for creating a job description and providing specific guidelines to the speech-language therapy assistant/kaiāwhina based on their delegated tasks in the workplace. The NZSTA is responsible for ensuring these guidelines meet the needs of the speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina.

Terminology

Speech-language therapy assistants/kaiāwhina may also be known by other position titles, including but not limited to rehabilitation assistants, therapy assistants, allied health assistants, education support workers, communication support workers, teacher aides, and paraprofessionals. For the remainder of this document, the title used will be **SLT assistant/kaiāwhina**.

The person supervising the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina may be referred to by different position titles, including but not limited to a speech-language therapist, kaiwhakatika reo kōrero, and kaituku haumanu reo kōrero. For the remainder of this document, the title used will be **speech-language therapist (SLT)**.

The people supported by SLT assistants/kaiāwhina may also be referred to by different terms, including but not limited to students, patients, clients, residents, and people-we-support. For the remainder of this document, the title used will be **clients**.

Delegation is defined as transferring an activity to a speech-language therapy assistant/kaiāwhina with the appropriate education, knowledge and skills to undertake the activity safely.

Key Principles

SLTs remain responsible and accountable for the care provided by staff under their supervision.

SLTs must develop position descriptions, guidelines, protocols and competencies to guide the practice of the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina.

SLTs must ensure that the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina can access culturally appropriate support/training.

SLTs must establish the competency of an SLT assistant/kaiāwhina to complete a delegated task in a specific context.

SLTs must not delegate tasks outside the scope of practice of SLT assistant/kaiāwhina.

It is an expectation that the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina should have a development plan that is reviewed regularly.

Scope of Practice for SLT Assistants/Kaiāwhina

Clinical professional judgement remains at the core of any decision to assign responsibility for treatment and associated activities to SLT assistants/kaiāwhina. SLTs make this decision and remain accountable for the assigned activities.

Areas within the scope of practice

SLT assistants/kaiāwhina may engage in the following activities provided they have demonstrated competence in those areas and are supervised by an SLT:

1. *Direct Client Support*

- 1.1. Administering defined screening protocols, without interpretation, selected by the supervising SLT.
- 1.2. Assisting the SLT during assessments, including, but not limited to, preparing materials and collecting data.
- 1.3. Following and implementing documented treatment plans or protocols developed by the supervising SLT for clients in individual and group activities.
- 1.4. Documenting client performance during treatment and reporting the information to the supervising SLT.

- 1.5. Assisting with informal and formal documentation as the supervising SLT directs, including assisting clients in completing case history and other relevant forms or information.

2. *Indirect Client Support*

- 2.1. Preparing materials for use in assessments, therapy, home programmes, classrooms and other environments under the guidance of the supervising SLT.
- 2.2. Assisting with programme development under the guidance of the supervising SLT.
- 2.3. Programming and creating augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) resources when they have received appropriate training under the guidance of an SLT.
- 2.4. With appropriate training, assisting with departmental operations, for example, scheduling appointments, preparing charts, collecting data, documentation, safety procedures (including infection prevention and control), maintaining supplies and equipment and operating audio-visual equipment.

3. *Education/Promotion*

- 3.1. Assisting the SLT with research projects, in-service training and family or community education that the supervising SLT has approved.
- 3.2. Assisting in running courses within an SLT assistant educational programme if the course content is related to professional roles, responsibilities and issues of supportive personnel. Course content must be approved by an SLT involved in the educational programme.
- 3.3. Assisting with student work-integrated learning under the guidance of the supervising SLT.

Areas outside the scope of practice

SLT assistants/kaiāwhina may not engage in the following activities:

1. Representing themselves as an SLT.
2. Disclosing confidential information either orally or in writing to anyone without appropriate consent unless required by law.
3. Selecting or prioritising clients for service.
4. Having initial contact with clients without the approval or direction of the supervising SLT.
5. Conducting assessments independently, interpreting data or explaining client-related assessment results to clients, their whānau or other professionals.

6. Interpreting treatment rationale to clients for whom the supervising SLT has created the treatment plan/programme.
7. Providing a diagnosis to clients, their whānau or other professionals.
8. Developing or modifying a treatment plan in any way without the consent or approval of the supervising SLT.
9. Interpreting the performance or progress of clients or discussing prognosis.
10. Undertaking clinical tasks that are considered within an advanced clinical scope of practice for SLTs
11. Counselling the client, their family or caregivers or others regarding a client's status or service.
12. Attending case or interprofessional team meetings in place of the supervising SLT.
13. Making decisions about referrals for additional assessment or treatment services.
14. Writing reports without the knowledge and consent of the supervising SLT.
15. Signing any documents in place of the supervising SLT (e.g., formal reports or treatment plans).
16. Discharging or transferring the care of clients from services.

Core Competencies for SLT Assistants/Kaiāwhina

Qualifications

SLT assistants/kaiāwhina are not required to have formal educational training. However, in some contexts, staff should gain the New Zealand Certificate in Health and Wellbeing (Level 3) Health Assistance Strand. SLT assistants/kaiāwhina must complete all mandatory training in their workplace. For example, health and safety training, first aid or CPR.

Basic core competencies

SLT assistants/kaiāwhina are expected to be competent at:

1. Demonstrating a working understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi with awareness and implementing tikanga to provide culturally responsive and appropriate care
2. Selecting, preparing and presenting materials consistent with the treatment plan designed by the supervising SLT.
3. Demonstrating an understanding of treatment objectives and the capacity to provide treatment consistent with these objectives.

4. Identifying environmental factors that may impact or interfere with the provision of services and taking action to remove these factors whenever possible.
5. Managing time effectively.
6. Responding effectively to the attitudes and behaviours of clients and their caregivers.
7. Relating to and interacting positively with supervisors, colleagues and the population being served.
8. Seeking advice from the supervising SLT when necessary.
9. Working under supervision and contributing positively to the client's care.
10. Demonstrating appropriate conduct (e.g., respecting and maintaining clients' confidentiality, maintaining a professional demeanour, evaluating own performance and recognising professional limitations).
11. Maintaining accurate documentation.
12. Using appropriate oral and written language, that is, proficiency in the language the client is being served, without communication characteristics that could negatively impact service delivery.
13. Being respectful and sensitive to individuals of various cultural backgrounds, abilities, socioeconomic and educational status, gender identities, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, etc.
14. Being adaptable when working with clients and their caregivers.

Guidelines for SLT Supervising SLT Assistants/Kaiāwhina

An SLT must have a supervisory role over all SLT clinical activities delegated to an SLT assistant/kaiāwhina (Munn et al., 2013). In this context, supervision is defined as guidance and oversight related to delivering SLT services. SLT assistants/kaiāwhina may be part of a multi-professional team supporting a range of professionals; however, it is not appropriate for a non-SLT to have a supervisory role over any SLT clinical activities delegated to an SLT assistant/kaiāwhina. The SLT assistant/kaiāwhina may also receive supervision from another professional with a different focus, including cultural supervision or professional growth and competence facilitation.

The SLT is ethically and professionally responsible for the delivery of services and must ensure delegated tasks are within the scope of the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina's education, training, competency, experience, and skill. The SLT must always consider safe practice, the delivery of appropriate, quality services, and the effectiveness of treatment.

Supervisory training

1. The supervising SLT should have at least one year of relevant clinical experience. If the supervising SLT has less than one year of relevant clinical experience, they must have access to an experienced SLT who is able to provide professional advice or mentoring as needed. The supervisor should be a registered member of NZSTA.
2. Supervising SLTs should strive to enhance their supervision skills. For example, the SLT should seek opportunities for professional development in this area if their knowledge and practical experience are limited. The supervising SLT must undertake training that meets their employer's requirements. Options could include informal mentoring, peer support, independent study and/or coursework in supervision.
3. The content of such training or experience should include but is not limited to
 - 3.1. The practice of speech-language therapy including knowledge of ethical and legal issues.
 - 3.2. Familiarity with best-practice supervision literature.
 - 3.3. Improving knowledge and understanding of the roles and relationship between SLTs and SLT assistants/kaiāwhina and the relationship between SLTs and clients.
 - 3.4. Strengthening the SLT's ability to provide efficient supervision. Topics may include times and conditions of supervision sessions, problem-solving ability and implementing supervisor treatments through a range of methods, including live, video/audio recordings and case reports.
 - 3.5. Knowledge of the scope of practice and expected competencies of SLT assistants/kaiāwhina.

Amount and type of supervision

1. The amount and type of supervision required should be based on the skills and experience of the supervising SLT, the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina, the client's needs, the service setting, the delegated tasks assigned and any other pertinent factors.
2. The supervising SLT's are responsible for ensuring that the amount and type of supervision matches the level of support that the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina requires. That is, the SLT may need to provide a greater amount of supervision depending on the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina's level of competence, especially when the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina is new to the role, working in a new clinical area or working with a more complex client. This includes appropriate cultural supervision and support/mentoring for Māori SLT assistants/kaiāwhina.
3. The supervising SLT will regularly review the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina's clinical documentation.

4. The number of SLT assistants/kaiāwhina an SLT is to supervise shall be based on the experience and professional judgement of the SLT and the training and experience of the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina.
5. The supervising SLT and/or SLT assistant/kaiāwhina must inform the client and their family or other caregivers about the SLT assistant/ kaiāwhina's role in providing services and the role of the SLT in overseeing this service provision.
6. SLT must escalate to the employer any concerns regarding the SLT assistant/kaiāwhina's level of proficiency or any violation of these guidelines

Review plan

NZSTA Position Papers are reviewed every five (5) years, and a review may also be conducted if a specified need arises.

Acknowledgements

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New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association Scope of Practice

New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association Principles and Rules of Ethics

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