



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

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In this edition

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Welcome to our first 2025 Focus issue. We hope you enjoy this edition which includes several organisational and operational topics are publicised. You will find information about this year's election for the positions of National President and two Members-at-Large. We have a call for expressions of interest in the Coordinator role for our National Information Line and we ask for offers from amongst members to write 'guest editorials' for Focus for June, September, and December.

Dates and venue for this year's AGM and Conference Ka mua, Ka muri | Walking backwards into the future are provided. There is information about organisational awards and timeframes for making nominations. Additionally, the Board asks readers to consider putting nominations forward for people who meet the criteria to be inducted to Blind Citizens NZ's Memorial Hall of Honour.

Readers interested in advocacy will find information about two of World Blind Union's resources. Around our organisational work we promote opportunities. Amendments to Blind Citizens NZ Constitution are necessary to ensure we comply with the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. These must be completed by the end of March 2026 – we provide an overview of new content and amendments. Last but not least we are privileged to share, with permission from Clarice Anderson QSM and long-time member of Blind Citizens NZ, a poem she has recently written.

Urban Myths

Jonathan Godfrey, National President

According to the latest Household Disability Survey released by Stats NZ in February, an estimated one in six New Zealanders are disabled. This is, of course, an estimate - just as it was ten years ago when the figure was considerably different.

Back then, the estimate was 24% - one in four - or about 1.1 million New Zealanders. We used that figure year after year for a decade until the next estimate became available in 2025.

So, was that an urban myth? Did something go wrong with the way disability data was collected and analysed in 2013–2015 when the last Household Disability Survey was conducted?

The reality is that much has changed in the way we gather and interpret disability data. Over the past ten years, I have been involved in many of these developments. The way the New Zealand Census asks about impairments, conditions, or disabilities has fundamentally changed almost every year since disability-related questions were first introduced in 1996. In fact, only the 2018 and 2023 Censuses used the same core set of six questions - the Washington Group Short Set. However, in 2023, an additional question was introduced to capture people whose impairments or conditions were not covered within that framework. The way people answer the questions in the Census affects the likelihood of being included in the Household Disability Survey.

Back in 2015, many people felt that the 24% figure was a little high. Some disability sector advocates worried that such a large percentage trivialised disability - that it made it seem commonplace and included many people who did not experience the disadvantages that come with being disabled in New Zealand. Others, however, saw the large number as a crucial reminder to decision-makers: disabled people were a significant fraction of the population and could not be ignored.

Even with the latest estimate of one in six, I would argue that disabled people remain a substantial part of New Zealand's population. That is how I choose to interpret the latest prevalence statistics. Other people will wish to dig deeper, and might, for example, focus on the different prevalence rates for different ethnic groups.

That said, I am deeply concerned that too much focus is placed on the prevalence of disability rather than on understanding its impact. We now have an abundance of disability data that clearly shows disabled people experience poorer life outcomes than their non-disabled peers. Whether we are one in six or one in four does not change the stark reality reflected in official statistics. While the Household Disability Survey presents the latest snapshot of some issues specific to disabled people, other Stats NZ surveys canvas issues affecting all New Zealanders and then look at the difference between disabled and non-disabled people. In theory, we ought to see how the equity gaps between disabled and non-disabled people are tracking over time.

The 2025 estimate - based on data collected in late 2023 and analysed throughout 2024 represents a methodological improvement over previous efforts. We cannot realistically compare today's disability prevalence data with that from ten years ago. It would be like comparing apples to pears. Having said that, the big change in prevalence has not been reflected in the prevalence of people who are blind or sufficiently low-vision to meet the criteria chosen by Stats NZ. I hasten to add this criteria differs from the primary service provider definition, and does not link to other formal definitions accepted in New Zealand or internationally for the provision of services.

A major criticism of disability data collection is that some people feel the disability status indicator does not fit their personal circumstances. However, this should not be a concern. A statistical tool designed to estimate disability prevalence should never be used to determine an individual's eligibility for services or support.

Beyond statistics, I am increasingly troubled by the rise of urban myths - especially when it comes to who creates them and how they spread. There is a quote, often attributed to Winston Churchill: "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has time to put its pants on."

The more authoritative someone sounds, the more likely their opinion is treated as fact. We often hear phrases like "the reality is..." or "in actual fact..." - statements that assert a sense of certainty, regardless of whether they are based on evidence.

This week (yet again) I heard a news item which mentioned that a person was “legally blind”. I struggle with this term because there is no single legal definition of blindness in New Zealand. Different Acts of Parliament and associated regulations use different criteria. The phrase persists and has a life, even though it is relatively easy to present two different legal definitions for blindness.

In contrast, I also see meaningless assertions. Many email messages I receive today are automatically tagged with "In Confidence", a label inserted by software rather than the sender. These disclaimers appear so frequently that they become meaningless because they are used whether the email is about a confidential document or just someone's coffee preference. This reminds me of the classic children's story, "The Boy Who Cried Wolf". The boy cries wolf so often that, when he finally tells the truth, no one believes him. **I used this story a lot when my children were young to teach them about the importance of telling the truth, and the consequences of misleading people.**

The greatest danger of urban myths is that when misinformation is repeated often enough, it becomes difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. As blind people, how do we verify the accuracy of claims, many of which will come from opinionated individuals who have an agenda? How easily can we tell statements of fact from assertions made in order to convince us to respond in a particular fashion?

How do we know whether what we hear or read is true, especially if we do not have access to factual information because it is not easily accessed in a form we can read? And if we rely on the internet, we risk relying on resources that are themselves based on urban myths.

The current urban myth I wish to pick on is that Generative AI is about to change our lives and that it will automatically lead to improved outcomes for us. Some Artificial Intelligence tools do show value for us, but there is also a huge danger that the AI gives us a completely misleading impression. These are called hallucinations.

I suspect many of us struggle with information provided on product packaging. I enjoy browsing online, but I would shop online more often if I could be confident that product descriptions were accurate and complete. Many of the products I want to buy lack sufficient detail, so I have to visit a store to check them in person. Once I am confident despite a product's inadequate description, I can buy it online. I've tested some AI solutions to this problem **and it has at times offered me some very interesting hallucinations**. While I have hopes that improvements will come along one day, I also can't see that day coming very soon.

There are many myths about disability, including those we create ourselves. I often hear people say, "Blind people can't do that."

But if I know a blind person who can do that particular task, then I have to wonder - is this person a rare exception with an extraordinary skillset, or are there more blind people out there who are also capable but simply overlooked?

Take chopsticks for example. I've frequently heard the claim that blind people cannot use them, but I can. So, is this myth true, or is it just another case of assuming limitations where none exist? I think I don't know anyone in NZ who is totally blind and uses chopsticks willingly or comfortably. Should I accept the claim that we can't use chopsticks? Should I decide that my unusual skill is somehow exceptional? Thankfully, I have met plenty of blind people from Asia who use chopsticks every day, so I do know that blind people can use them.

Ultimately, myths, whether about disability statistics or everyday abilities can shape perceptions in ways that are not always helpful or accurate. It is up to us to understand them and challenge the claims we believe are misleading or likely to diminish our right to live in our own country on an equitable basis with all other New Zealanders.

Blind Citizens NZ 2025 Scheduled Election

From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Three positions are due for election in this year's Blind Citizens NZ Board election i.e. National President and two Members-at-Large. The terms of office for all three positions conclude at the end of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference (3-4 October).

The two Member-at-Large positions for election are held by Chrissy Fern and Martine Abel-Williamson and the National President's is held by Jonathan Godfrey.

Call for nominations

Rule 10 Elections, clause 10.1, directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. This is the first of two notices publicising this year's scheduled election and the call for nominations. Of note is that :

- people currently in these positions are eligible for re-election;
- the term of office for each of the three positions is three years;
- successful candidates will commence their term immediately following the conclusion of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference (3-4 October);
- the election of all three positions happens at the same time by a ballot of all eligible Ordinary (voting) Members;
- nomination forms and | or email nomination procedures are available upon request from National Office.

Anyone standing for election is encouraged to take the time to become familiar with the duties and responsibilities of Blind Citizens NZ's Board Members. This information identifies the much-needed skills, experience and knowledge for a Board Member of Blind Citizens NZ. Additionally, details that identify specific skills and expertise required of candidates in this year's election will be published in our June Focus Issue. Contact details for National Office are at the end of this Focus issue.

Here are details about timelines and the procedure for the election of all positions. To be eligible for nomination for any position, you must:

- a. live in New Zealand; and
- b. for at least 24 months of the past five years up to and including 14 August 2025, have been a (financial) Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ.

Nominations require two people to support you i.e. one to move and another to second your nomination.

There are two ways nominations can be completed and submitted. You can use a paper form or the email process.

If using the paper form, signatures of all three members involved in the nomination are required. Email procedures similarly require the same people to confirm their respective roles in the nomination process. If choosing the email procedure, you are required to contact the Returning Officer at our National Office before commencing this process. This is important, as there are instructions unique to the email procedure that must be followed. The email procedure mirrors, as closely as possible, requirements for the paper-based option.

Ordinary Members, financial as of 14 August 2025, are eligible to stand for election to these three positions.

The closing date for nominations is 4pm Thursday 14 August 2025. Candidates are required to provide their CV at the same time as their nomination is submitted to the Returning Officer. Nominations and CVs should be sent to the Returning Officer at one of the following:

- **Post:** Blind Citizens NZ, PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- **Fax:** 04-389-0030;
- **Email:** election@blindcitizensnz.org.nz

Once nominations close, if the maximum number of nominations for the three positions is received, no election will be needed. Candidates will be declared elected unopposed. Should nominations exceed the number of positions being elected, an election will then be held.

Voting in the election

Ballot material (names of people standing for election, information they have provided about themselves etc.,) will be sent to all Ordinary Members recorded as financial on the member database at National Office as at **4pm, Thursday 14 August 2025**. No later than **Thursday 5 September 2025**, ballot material will be distributed in the voting member's preferred format.

When does voting close? Completed ballots (votes cast by voting members) must be received at National Office no later than **4.00 pm, Tuesday 23 September 2025**. Vote counting will take place no later than Wednesday 1 October 2025.

Ways to get election information for Blind Citizens NZ's elections: there are several options available for members to participate in the election process. Election (ballot) material about candidates standing for election is available in large print, audio, Braille, by email, and via our National Information Line bulletin on TellMe.

Choose your preferred voting option: When voting in Blind Citizens NZ elections, you can choose one of three options. It is important to remember that the way you vote, can be different from the way you choose to receive your election (ballot) material.

You can cast your vote using the large print form, the Braille-card option, or TellMe.

For many reasons, we encourage members to try TellMe. This offers a truly independent, confidential, and empowering voting experience. It means you can independently do all the things you need to do in an election – you hear about the candidates standing for election, and you cast your vote.

Casting your vote using TellMe means you are in control. It also gives you certainty that your vote will be received by the due date and time. You no longer need to worry about whether your postal ballot will reach its destination in time to be counted. We point out that there is no guarantee your postal vote will arrive by the close of voting. If you would like to know more about using TellMe and casting your vote using this option, please contact our National Office.

If you are in any doubt about what your preferred communication option is to receive information and vote in Blind Citizens NZ's election, please contact our National Office to check.

Guest Focus Editorials

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Through until and including the December Focus issue, there is an opportunity for members to be the focus (excuse the pun) of, and to provide a guest editorial. The aim is to have at least three people available to write a guest editorial for any one of the June, September or December Focus issues.

If you are interested in writing a 'Guest Editorial' and | or finding out more about this opportunity, please contact the Chief Executive via any of these options:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz | Please put 'Focus Editorial' in the subject line;
- **Phone:** 04-389-0039 | if reaching voice-mail leave a message and the Chief Executive will return your call.
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242

World Blind Union and Blind Citizens NZ Advocacy Resources

In November last year, the World Blind Union (WBU) funded Thomas Bryan in his role as Chair of WBU's Global Built Environment Working Group to attend the World Urban Forum¹² in Cairo. He is also one of Blind Citizens NZ's two country delegates to WBU. Martine Abel-Williamson, WBU Global President also attended. They were both involved in the WBU Workshop that promoted two valuable advocacy resources.

Thomas and Martine each shared with the Board of Blind Citizens NZ, the value of the resources they were involved in promoting during the World Urban Forum 12. Blind Citizens NZ is sharing details of these two documents for readers to check out. The resources are:

- **Accessibility - Go! A guide to action:** WBU in the same way as Blind Citizens NZ is doing, is raising awareness about the accessibility and inclusiveness of services and the environment to disabled people and within communities. This valuable open-source resource has been developed by WBU and CBM Global Disability Inclusion.

The following two links are where you will find this resource:

[Accessibility = Go! A Guide to Action](#) and

<https://tinyurl.com/4t2yaxdx>

▪ **Advocacy Brief | Inclusive and Accessible Urban**

Development: the following content is taken directly from this resource which “...offers information and guidance on the New Urban Agenda and why it’s important for cities to be inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities. It is designed to help World Blind Union (WBU) members and disability organisations in their efforts to adapt global development goals to local needs, following the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).”

Blind Citizens NZ is reviewing our public-facing advocacy material including briefs and position statements. So, while we are promoting WBU advocacy material, this is a call-out to members with a specific interest in and knowledge about issues such as accessible elections and websites, Total Mobility, and audio description to name but a few. Let us know by sending an email to admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz or call us on 0800-222-694.

Ka mua, ka muri

Walking backwards into the future

Blind Citizens NZ 2025 AGM and Conference

This year is a milestone celebration of 80 years for Blind Citizens NZ. The theme ‘Ka mua, ka muri | Walking backwards into the future’ is a whakatauki | Māori proverb that promotes the idea that we should look to the past to inform the future.

Dates and venue for the AGM and Conference have been set. We will be at the Brentwood Hotel in Kilbirnie, Wellington. Key points are that we start at 9am Friday 3 October and go through to Saturday 4 October when we end with our Conference Dinner that evening and presentation of organisational awards. On Thursday 2 October there will be the usual face-to-face side-events, the timing for which is yet to be finalised. These include our Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group, and the Braille, and Guide Dog Handlers' Special Interest Networks.

We will be publicising registration costs no later than the end of April. In the meantime, we hope you will save the dates in your diary | calendar.

National Information Line Coordinator Expressions of Interest

The National Information Line Coordinator position is currently vacant. Expressions of interest in this position are called for, from amongst Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ.

Regular callers to Blind Citizens NZ's national bulletin will know that Vaughan Dodd was the coordinator for several years until he needed to resign due to ill health. Aside from coordinating the Information Line, Vaughan Dodd's contributions included his love of music, Braille, reading, etc. Above all, as Coordinator he upheld the purpose of the Information Line which is to:

- Keep members and potential members of Blind Citizens NZ informed of the work of Blind Citizens NZ at a national level; and

- Provide an open forum for members and potential members of Blind Citizens NZ to discuss blindness-related issues.

Guidelines for this position are available upon request. If you are interested in finding out more, please send an email to admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz with “National Information Line” in the subject line. Or, phone 0800-222-694.

Awards and Nominations

Blind Citizens NZ has several opportunities for Branches, Networks, and Ordinary Members to recognise and acknowledge the work and achievements of people within the blind community. Depending on the criteria for a specific award, this may mean there is an individual, organisation, or a business that could be recognised. A summary of these opportunities follow.

All nominations require detailed supporting information to be provided. For three of these opportunities, nominations and supporting information must be received by midnight, Sunday 10 August. This applies to: Extra Touch Award, Beamish Memorial Medal, and Johnston Cup for Leadership.

Details for each of these three awards follows...

- 1. Beamish Memorial Award:** The Beamish Memorial Award is the most prestigious award Blind Citizens NZ has the honour and privilege of awarding to anyone within the organisation. Only Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ who have made an outstanding contribution to society in their particular field of service to the community, are eligible.

Perhaps you know of someone you believe meets the criteria, and whose outstanding efforts should be recognised.

2. **Extra Touch Award:** This award recognises an individual or organisation where, as part of the process of providing service to the public, there is an outstanding contribution towards improving access or services to blind and vision impaired people. There are many opportunities to recognise these contributions, including access to: information, society, technology, transport and pedestrian safety, everyday equipment, educational, vocational or recreational opportunities, shops and customer service, and services in general.

When making a nomination, be sure to include the nominee's name and contact details. Include information that tells the Board how the nomination meets the Extra Touch Award criteria.

3. **Johnston Cup for Leadership:** Blind Citizens NZ aims to encourage members to accept leadership responsibilities inside and outside the blindness community; and to develop an environment that recognises them for their leadership wherever and whatever that might be or mean for them.

The Johnston Cup for Leadership encourages and recognises leadership potential from amongst Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ.

There may well be people who meet the criteria who have contributed in some demonstrable way to the betterment of the community by way of their leadership. Or they may have assumed leadership responsibilities that are far more than the role they hold.

Memorial Hall of Honour | Call for nominations

The Board is calling for nominations for inductees to Blind Citizens NZ's Memorial Hall of Honour. Nomination criteria include that an inductee to the Memorial Hall of Honour:

- can be for any blind, deafblind, low vision or vision-impaired individual who was born or has lived in New Zealand (they do not need to have been a member of Blind Citizens NZ);
- has passed away at the time the nomination is made;
- must be someone who either:
 - ✓ has made a substantial and outstanding contribution over many years towards the advancement of the interests and well-being of blind people in New Zealand; or
 - ✓ has, through their trail-blazing efforts or personal example, inspired others in the blind community to overcome the barriers to participation in a sighted world.

Nominations, with supporting information, must be received at Blind Citizens NZ's national office no later than 5pm, Monday 2 June. Nominations should be sent to:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz; or
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington.

Of note is that the Board is responsible for making all decisions regarding the suitability of proposed inductees following thorough research of their credentials. The Board must, when proposing inductees, bring its recommendation and supporting information to the 2025 Annual General Meeting and Conference for endorsement.

Amending Blind Citizens NZ's Constitution

By Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

The Board of Blind Citizens NZ began working through mandatory changes required to the organisation's Constitution some time ago. These changes are necessary to ensure Blind Citizens NZ is compliant with the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. This work is guided by Gibson Sheat Lawyers. This is the same law firm that worked with Blind Citizens NZ in 2019 when changes were made to the current Constitution.

An opportunity is taken with this Focus issue to share with readers, areas where changes must be made to Blind Citizens NZ's Constitution. There will be opportunities for members, Branches and Networks to discuss proposed changes as these are worked through. In the meantime, we highlight areas that must be amended, or where new content is required. This includes:

- how someone ceases to be a member of Blind Citizens NZ i.e. resigning as a member (this is a new requirement);
- requirement for keeping Blind Citizens NZ's register of members up-to-date;

- showing how a person becomes a member of Blind Citizens NZ, including a requirement that they must consent to be a member. This considers all membership categories i.e. Ordinary Member, Junior Member, Member-for-Life, Associate Member, Honorary Life Member, and Affiliate Organisations;
- grounds for removing an ‘Officer’ from their position (this is a new requirement);
- procedures for resolving disputes, including providing for how a complaint may be made;
- intervals between annual general meetings (this relates to the national AGM and Conference);
- the time and manner in which notices of general meetings and notices of motion must be notified (this refers to Special General Meetings).

Opportunities to engage with the National President By Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

There are regular opportunities for members to engage online with the National President Jonathan Godfrey. These happen regularly and there is no specific topic allocated. Members can raise topics for discussion, and clarification etc.

The schedule of dates from April to December 2025 inclusive follows. These are held from 5pm to 6pm on the following Tuesdays: 1 April, 13 May, 24 June, 5 August, 16 September, 28 October, and 9 December.

Revolting

By Clarice Anderson

Note to readers: Clarice has shared that this poem was written as a joke because she was ‘fed up’ with critics in her retirement village complaining all the time instead of appreciating what they have. Enjoy...

While the staff were gathered enjoying morning tea,
We locked them in the staffroom and threw away the key.

Vic rushed to the kitchen to make a super meal,
Pat went to the office searching cheaper deals.

We opened all the doors, including Wakelin Wing,
Oh how those happy people did gayly dance and sing.

There was cricket on the front lawn, and footy on the back,
David opened DJ Café so we could go there for a snack.

With visitors arriving creating such a din,
We tried to defend ourselves with patience running thin.

As alarm bells all were ringing and a dreadful scream,
I crashed into the wall – and woke!
Thank God, it was all a dream

Large Print Calendars for sale
Produced by Blind Citizens NZ

We still have some of our 2025 Large Print Calendars available. These are ideal for anyone needing, or preferring to have larger-sized print for checking dates. The calendars are approximately 59 cm wide and 42 cm long. The price is reduced to \$5 from \$12. They are available from our National Office, or your local Blind Citizens NZ Branch or Network. When posted from our National Office there will be additional costs.

Phone our National Office on 0800 222 694 if you want to purchase one of our Large Print Calendars. We can put you in touch with your local Branch or Network, or we can arrange delivery to you directly. Here is the first month for 2025... While somewhat smaller, this indicates what our Calendars look like.

JANUARY				2025		
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1st New Year's Day 2nd Day after New Year's Day 27th School Term 1 commences			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

For information about **Blind Citizens NZ**
contact our National Office on **04-389-0033** or **0800-222-694**
Fax 04-389-0030 Website: www.abcnz.org.nz

Ground Floor, 113 Adelaide Road, Newtown, Wellington
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We have branches and networks around the country.

Your support for our voice is vital to ensure we can play our full part in the community.



Blind Citizens NZ

NOTES

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

Board

- **National President:** Jonathan Godfrey:
a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz
- **Members-at-Large:**
 - ✓ Martine Abel-Williamson: martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
 - ✓ Andrea Courtney: andycoute@gmail.com
 - ✓ Beverley Duncan: bev.d.duncan@gmail.com
 - ✓ Chrissy Fern (appointed Vice President by the Board):
fernmeek@gmail.com
 - ✓ Maria Stevens: mariastevens31060@gmail.com
 - ✓ Paula Waby: paula.waby4@gmail.com

Focus | Items for publication

- **Email** articles to: admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
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- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
- **Phone:** 04 389 0033; 0800 222 694.
- **Fax:** 04 389 0030.
- **Website:** <http://www.blindcitizensnz.org.nz>
- **Facebook Page:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensNZ/>
- **Chief Executive:** Rose Wilkinson:
rwilkinson@blindcitizensnz.org.nz

Blind Citizens NZ is appreciative of donations and bequests received from our members and supporters and for essential funding from Blind Low Vision NZ

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