



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

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In this Edition

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Welcome to our June Focus issue, which brings together a selection of updates, opportunities, and key information for members, supporters, and stakeholders of Blind Citizens NZ.

Amongst the items featured in this edition, the President reflects on the implications of rushed Disability Support Services legislation and its impact on disabled people across Aotearoa New Zealand. You will also find the full draft of Blind Citizens NZ's proposed Strategic Plan 2027–2030, along with an invitation and timeline to provide feedback to the Board. The final notice of this year's scheduled election of Board Members includes a statement from Andrea Courtney, as her current term comes to an end.

We share plans for this year's AGM and Conference, centred on the theme 'Times are changing – Are we surviving or thriving'. There is information about organisational awards and the closing date for nominations, highlights of our Special Interest Networks and how to get involved, a reminder about membership renewal, and an opportunity to participate in a Blind Citizens NZ trial for online voting in our election.

This issue also acknowledges recipients of the 2026 King's Birthday Honours. To round things out, we recognise the valuable financial support that helps sustain our work.

The Tale that Wags the Dog

Jonathan Godfrey, President

Editorial Note: This article reflects the President's personal views. These perspectives may overlap at times and inform and | or be reflected in Blind Citizens NZ's formal submission. However, the organisation's submission is a separate document. In brief, it focuses on reasons we do not support the Disability Support Services Bill, and on areas where the Government is in breach | inconsistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes placing the burden of support on families, whānau, carers, and others. Our submission is available on request.

Article begins...

I love Parliament, its processes, and its rules, both formal and moral. I will have Parliament TV going in the background while I supposedly work on other things. I especially enjoy Question Time, and I attend in person when I'm in Wellington and time allows. I write submissions as an individual, and of course, I contribute to submissions made by Blind Citizens NZ. There are some things I don't like about Parliament. Without exception, those dislikes relate to the conduct of MPs, the way some speak to each other and the trivial and sometimes inane comments they make about topics they clearly do not understand.

I've seldom read Hansard, but it has proven useful when I've needed to check that I really did hear what I thought I heard, such as comments made by MPs in the first reading of a bill being introduced. It's that first reading and the subsequent referral debate that tells me so much about the level of engagement MPs have with the subject matter of the bill. One thing I've often wondered is how often MPs check the Hansard when they've used homonyms in their speeches. Let me be clear, I've intentionally misspelt the word "tail" in the familiar phrase used in the title of this column.

So, for this column, I've decided to tell you a tale about a tail that wags the dog. There is a tiny bit of speculation, but practically everything I am about to say is a verifiable fact.

Before we get into it all, I'll just quickly state that I believe disabled people in need should never become a political football.

And, my track record suggests I've criticised Governments and Ministers of all flavours for not doing the right thing for disabled people and our families. We do not need one Government to enact legislation that underserves us. Nor do we want another Government to kick disabled people and their families while they're down, but this is what we have seen. Sustainable processes, especially any legislation that puts core principles into law, must have broad support across political parties of all kinds.

In the case of matters affecting disabled people and our families, it must also have support from disabled people and our families.

OK, let's get into the tale.

On Monday, 22nd May, I was part of a group of people who were told by the Minister for Disability Issues, Hon. Louise Upston, that a bill was about to be introduced into the House. We were informed what the bill does and its rationale. It was then given its first reading in Parliament on Thursday, 25 May, immediately followed by its referral to Select Committee. There's nothing sinister about the process as I've described it thus far, but the devil is in the detail. First of all, this Bill is a rush job. All processes from the point of introduction have been shortened considerably compared to the normal Parliamentary practice.

I will submit on this bill, and so will Blind Citizens NZ, but I suspect many others will not manage to meet the deadline of 12 June.

The bill seeks to "lay a foundation" for how Disability Support Services will be managed by the Government. This legislation is needed because it establishes the legal basis for funding the provision of the services that disabled people and their families are relying on today.

I will come back to this "foundation" soon, but it is what else the Bill does that I believe is the tail wagging the dog.

In late 2025, the Supreme Court made a decision that found two family members were in fact, employees of the State (Ministry of Social Development, to be specific) when they were paid to provide necessary support to their disabled family members.

The new Bill stops anyone else other than these two people from gaining this recognition through the courts. The response to this employment situation and limiting the ability of the judiciary to have a role in interpreting the legislation is in keeping with the current Government's track record. My opinion is that the Government's response is consistent with its broader approach to judicial decisions it disagrees with, and would have happened sooner if there had been a way to do so.

The problem is that without any foundation legislation in place for how Disability Support Services will be managed, there was no existing legislation to amend in order to progress the Government's response to the Supreme Court decision. I won't unpick the merits of the court decision or the finer details of employment law. I'd be foolish to try because I'm not a lawyer trained in such matters. I'm a statistician, so I deal in probabilities, data, and evidence.

I'm left asking, "Would we have this Bill and the associated timeframes for its passing through Parliament if the Supreme Court decision were different?" I think not.

So, there's the tale of the tail. Let's take a look at the dog.

It is my opinion that the "foundation" aspects of the Bill are a dog. I'll put it bluntly: In my view, the legislation is inconsistent with the intent and principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which the NZ Government ratified in September 2008. It aims to do two things in laying a foundation.

1. It says Government support is a "contribution" towards disabled people living an everyday life.
2. It states quite categorically that responsibility for caring for disabled people is the responsibility of the family first.

This shift of responsibility can be challenged on both legal and moral grounds. First, let's look at the law of New Zealand.

In September 2008, the Government bound itself (and all future Governments) to progressing the UNCRPD. Article 19 of the UNCRPD is about "living independently". Article 19 is so important that in 2017, the UN Committee responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention issued additional guidance in General Comment No. 5, which elaborates on what independent living and community inclusion mean in practice.

Article 19 and General Comment 5 place the disabled person in the position of making decisions, make it clear that the Government is responsible for their support needs, and also that the Government is responsible for helping families.

Nowhere in the UNCPRD or any of the General Comments (there are eight in total) does it say a Government can move its responsibilities onto anyone else, let alone families. Nowhere is the responsibility of the State to provide a "contribution".

It is therefore my opinion that this Bill is contradictory to the UNCPRD. It is inconsistent with the efforts of past Governments (of both kinds) to empower disabled people to live independently, and it demonstrates the worst possible way to create legislation that affects so many disabled people and their families. The Minister herself admitted on Facebook that there was no proper engagement with disabled people or their families. She should know, therefore, that the Government is in breach of Article 4(3) of the UNCPRD.

I suggest to you that there is no excuse for the foundation elements of this Bill failing to meet NZ's obligations under the UNCPRD. Except that in rushing to respond to the Supreme Court decision, there was not adequate consideration of the legal or moral rationale for the foundational aspects of the proposed new DSS system. Maybe the foundations would be better if there had been more time, and some actual engagement with disabled people and our families through our respective representative organisations.

Over the years, I've been accused of not acknowledging the plight of families when advocating for the needs of disabled people.

I'm not about to apologise for my disabled-person-centric approach to advocacy, because that's my role. I am, however, very aware of the situation faced by many families whose lives are turned upside down when someone in the medical world presents a diagnosis for their loved one. It happened for my parents over fifty years ago, and it is still happening today. Gaining independence was a key mission my father had for me when I was a child.

Not because he wanted me out of the family home, but because he knew blind people could have a decent life if we had the right skills and sufficient opportunities. He had the same hopes and expectations for me as for any of his other children. I'm sure many among us can say the same thing about one or both of our parents.

Even as an adult, I am materially interdependent on my family, but it is a choice I have as an adult, not a state imposition.

I've put professional time and energy into the plight of households in which a disabled person is living by working with researchers to show that poverty affects our households at an alarming rate. Households with a disabled person are twice as likely to be in material hardship, and three times as likely to be in severe material hardship, using Government data and Government-defined hardship measures. This analysis used data collected before the recent geopolitical turmoil we are inheriting from offshore.

It was collected when things were supposedly better than before, but now, I suspect it is worse. I further suggest that households with disabled family members are doing it tougher today than households with no disabled family members.

Disabled people do not want to be a burden on their families. Even feeling like a burden devalues us as people because we put ourselves out. We might allow our needs to become secondary to keep the peace, and we might even pull back on developing meaningful relationships because it questions our hard-fought independence and autonomy. I suggest to you that the current Bill therefore devalues disabled people. But it also adds a burden to families who are already our natural supports.

When I meet parents of disabled people, I am often confronted by the decisions they've made in the best interests of their disabled loved one. The first and often most obvious one is the reduction of what would otherwise be a two-income household to a household where one person works and the other has to support their disabled younger (or older) family member. This is just not sustainable. If the burden is too great, families will burn out. For example, I've had interactions with a taxi driver in recent times who "looks after" his brother all day and then drives taxis in the evening. He's putting so much time into the care of his loved one that he does not have a life of his own for more than a handful of hours each week.

This burden will take its toll, perhaps not soon, but eventually.

We need to see foundation legislation for the way disabled people are seen by the State to uphold the UNCRPD. We must be seen as equal holders of rights in our communities and in our families. We do not need the State to portray us as a "responsibility for our family". That's just sugar coating a life of dependence for disabled people.

I'm going to close by reflecting on the speeches of MPs from the first reading. I felt, and the length of speeches in Hansard confirms this, that the current Government MPs had considerably shorter speeches than the opposition MPs. Government MPs wanted to get the "good legislation" to Select Committee as soon as possible.

Opposition MPs wanted to take stock of what the Bill was actually doing. Even opposition MP speeches, however, did not focus heavily enough, in my opinion, on the needs of disabled people or their families.

Too much time was spent on having a go at the Government for its track record against disabled people and on reducing the rights of people to pursue action through the court system. The question before Parliament is not simply how to respond to a Supreme Court decision. It is how New Zealand understands disability, independence, family responsibility, and the role of the State. Those foundations deserve careful thought, broad consultation, and enduring political support.

They are too important to be treated as an afterthought. I suspect that if more MPs in Parliament truly knew what disabled people want and how our families are faring, that maybe, just maybe, we'd get more sustainable legislation that will support us for years to come.

Blind Citizens NZ Draft Strategic Plan 2027-2030

Introduction, from the Board

The Board has completed its draft of Blind Citizens NZ's proposed Strategic Plan 2027-2030. This outlines opportunities for and expectations about how Branches and Geographic and Special Interest Networks will contribute to achieving our collective outcomes.

The Board genuinely wants and needs to hear from Ordinary (voting) Members, Branches, and Geographic and Special Interest Networks. Your feedback and insights are essential to shaping a Strategic Plan that reflects Blind Citizens NZ's priorities and aspirations.

As the Board will be finalising the document at its August meeting, all feedback must be received at National Office no later than 9am, Monday, 10 August 2026 (contact details are provided at the end of this Focus issue). The Board will consider all responses at its meeting and, from these, decide whether amendments to the draft Strategic Plan are needed.

Once finalised, the Strategic Plan 2027-2030 will be published in our September Focus issue. It will also be a topic for discussion at this year's AGM and Conference.

Here now is the Draft Strategic Plan, 2027-2030

Draft Strategic Plan – 2027-2030

Purpose

Blind Citizens NZ exists to give voice to the aspirations and lived experiences of blind, deafblind, low vision and vision-impaired people (blind people) living in New Zealand. We aim to achieve this by heightening awareness of our rights and removing the barriers that negate our ability to live in an accessible, equitable, and inclusive society.

Vision

Aotearoa is a nation where blind, deafblind, low vision and vision-impaired people are inspired and supported to live life independently and where we can participate fully.

Note: In the context of this document, the word “blind” includes all people who are blind, deafblind, low vision, vision-impaired, or who use any other blindness term to describe themselves. Additionally, unless otherwise stated, wherever reference is made to Networks, this includes both Geographic and Special Interest Networks.

Values

We value equally the following statements:

- As an organisation, we seek to maximise the self-worth and meaningful engagement of our people - He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata.
- Respect for the different ways each of us responds to the challenges of blindness.
- The shared learning and support received from the lived experiences of others.
- Commitment to democratic processes and inclusive practices that ensure our representations have a mandate from our members.
- Commitment to sustained effort in our advocacy.
- Constructive, cooperative, and mutually supportive relationships with other disability organisations;
- The principles of Te Tiriti O Waitangi with particular reference to Kāwanatanga (Governance), Rangatiratanga (Self Determination), Rite Tahi (Equality).
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the New Zealand Government's ratification of it.
- Our history and the role we have played in the lives of blind people since 1945.

Our Aspirations

We aspire to:

- Advocate that blind people are treated respectfully, our dignity is upheld, and that we are treated equitably.
- Develop the capability of blind people and the Blind Citizens NZ Branches and Networks in which we are active.
- Maximise the well-being and independence of our members.
- Improve society's awareness of issues affecting blind people.
- Strengthen the representation of Blind Citizens NZ as an active member and leader throughout the disability sector, both in New Zealand and internationally.

Our Strategic Imperative

To create a stronger, interconnected Disabled Peoples Organisation which promotes, resources, and fosters the well-being of blind people by increasing their participation in Blind Citizens NZ activities.

We intend to achieve our aspirations and strategic imperative by addressing the following goals, which are to:

- increase and strengthen our membership year on year;
- increase the number of members who are actively participating in National, Branch, and | or Network activities;
- strengthen our Branches and Networks so they can advocate for their members;

- increase the collective capacity of our community to accept roles as leaders within Blind Citizens NZ and beyond;
- promote the voices of blind people, and their whanau, in advocating for an inclusive and fully accessible society.

Organisational procedures

1. Each year, the Board will invite Branches, Networks and Ordinary Members to propose advocacy projects they would like Blind Citizens NZ to prioritise in the coming year. The advocacy project's invitation will happen alongside the Remits process.
2. Branches and Networks will discuss all shared proposals at their AGM and report their level of support for the identified projects at Blind Citizens NZ's national AGM and Conference. Branches and Geographic Networks will also be asked to share how they would like to progress advocacy projects at a local level.
3. The Board remains responsible for assessing all feedback from discussions held at Branch, Network, and the national AGM and Conference, when finalising prioritised advocacy projects at its Annual Planning Meeting. The Board reserves the right to prioritise other advocacy work over the proposals received via this process.

4. The Board will provide regular updates on the progress and completion of agreed targets for the chosen advocacy projects. Branches and Networks that have worked on the selected advocacy projects are asked to report on their efforts as a part of their reporting to Blind Citizens NZ's national AGM and Conference.

Blind Citizens NZ 2026 Scheduled Election

From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

This is our final call for nominations for the 2026 Blind Citizens NZ Board election. Two Board Member positions are up for election this year, these being Andrea Courtney and Paula Waby. The current terms for these positions end at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting and Conference (9–10 October).

For the information of voting members, Andrea Courtney has advised that after serving the Board of Blind Citizens NZ for over 20 years, she has decided not to seek re-election in 2026. Andrea hopes that by announcing her decision early, people interested in joining the Board will put themselves forward at the upcoming election in the knowledge that a genuine vacancy exists.

Board members agreed that Andrea has kept the Board grounded, particularly in the realities of life for people with multiple impairments. The Board of Blind Citizens NZ wishes to take this small opportunity to thank Andrea for her service.

Andrea writes...

"I've really enjoyed my time on the Board, but it's time for someone new to bring fresh ideas to the table. I've had opportunities to be involved in some really important discussions and to attend key events, such as representing Blind Citizens NZ in meetings with Members of Parliament. I think I have served on every subcommittee over the years at one time or another."

Call for nominations

Rule 14 Elections, clause 14.2 directs Blind Citizens NZ in its election procedures. This is the second of two notices publicising this year's scheduled election and the call for nominations. Only those members who comply with the criteria provided in Rule 14.1 are eligible to participate in the election, i.e. you are unable to stand for election if you:

- have been removed as a Board Member following a process under this Constitution or any Bylaw;
- are disqualified under any of the factors for disqualification outlined in the Charities Act 2005 or the Act, or you have been found to have breached any qualifying criteria for office in this Constitution;
- are an employee of, or contractor to Blind Citizens NZ.

Please note that :

- people currently in these positions are eligible for re-election;
- the term of office for all positions is three years;
- successful candidates will commence their term immediately following the conclusion of this year's Annual General Meeting and Conference (9-10 October);
- the election of the two 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 the National Office.

The Board has the issue of succession planning “top of mind”, and it hopes that future Board members will possess some of the following qualities, these being that you:

- are financially savvy;
- would like to help Blind Citizens NZ modernise itself;
- like developing policy;
- understand how blind people outside our membership are faring in life;
- are prepared to stand up for our beliefs.

The Board meets face to face over five weekends per annum. Meetings are also held in between. Board members need to actively participate in a range of activities, including subcommittees and other irregular meetings held online.

There is substantial preparation time required to be ready for scheduled meetings. If you have any questions about the time commitment, please reach out to any current Board member. Contact details are provided at the end of this Focus issue.

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.

Now to details about timelines and the procedure for the election of all positions. Ordinary financial (voting) Members who are listed as financial on the Member Register | Database by **21 August 2026**, held at the National Office, are eligible to take part in the 2026 election of Board Members.

Nominations require two people to support the candidate, i.e. one to move and another to second the nomination. There are two ways nominations can be completed and submitted, i.e. using the 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.

The closing date for nominations is **4pm, 21 August 2026**.

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

If, when nominations close, there are two or fewer nominees for the two positions, no election will be held.

Nominees will be elected unopposed. Any unfilled positions will be treated as vacancies under Rule 14.4 (Filling Elected Board Member Vacancies). If more than two nominations are received, an election will 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 Register | Database at National Office as at **21 August 2026**.

Ballot material will be distributed in the voting member's preferred format no later than 11 September 2026.

When does voting close? Completed ballots (votes cast by voting members) must be received at the National Office no later than **4.00 pm, 29 September 2026**. Vote counting will take place no later than **6 October 2026**.

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.

TellMe gives voters a fully independent, confidential, and empowering way to vote. You can listen to information about the candidates and cast your vote without assistance. Using TellMe also means you are in control and ensure your vote is received on time. There's no worrying about postal delays or whether your ballot will arrive before voting closes.

If you'd like to learn more about using TellMe to cast your vote, please contact our National Office (details at the end of this Focus issue).

Blind Citizens NZ 2026
AGM and Conference | Times are changing
Are we surviving or thriving?
From Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

This is another of those gentle reminders about this year's AGM and Conference – we hope you have put the dates into your calendar as a placeholder, and that you are considering joining us. This year, we are at the Ascot Park Hotel, Invercargill. All registrations are made through our National Office – details are a little further on.

Arrival for most will be Thursday, 8 October, ready for either the side events that day, and | or the 9am start on Friday, 9 October. The two days are full, but enjoyable, where business and guest presenters are interspersed. The work side of our event ends at approximately 5pm on Saturday, 10 October. That evening, award presentations are made during the Conference Dinner. As guest presenters are finalised, we will share this information as widely as possible.

As you will have noticed from the draft Strategic Plan 2027-2030, our theme 'Times are changing – Are we surviving or thriving?' is already a focus of our organisational work.

As mentioned in earlier Focus issues, this in part stems from the declining rate of Ordinary (voting) Members, and what Blind Citizens NZ needs to do to remain relevant and sustainable into the future.

Financial assistance for first-time attendees: For Ordinary (voting) Members who are coming to our event for the first time, there is the opportunity to receive financial assistance. To be eligible as a first-time attendee, in addition to this being the first time you would be attending a Blind Citizens NZ AGM and Conference, three requirements need to be met. You must:

- be in a position to make a financial contribution (each situation is determined on a case-by-case basis);
- be an Ordinary (financial voting) Member of Blind Citizens NZ; and
- commit to attending the full two days of the AGM and Conference, including the Conference Dinner (attendance can be daily, or staying at the Ascot Park Hotel).

If you meet the above requirements and would like to take advantage of this opportunity, please contact the Chief Executive for further information via one of the following options:

- Email: admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz and put “2026 first-time attendee” in the subject line;
- Post: PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242; or Phone: 0800 222 694.

Applications for financial assistance for first-time attendees close 9am, Monday, 10 August 2026. Final decisions about the number of members that can be supported will be made following the close of expressions of interest.

On Thursday evening, the President extends a standing invitation to all first-time attendees to join him for dinner. This is a relaxed opportunity to ask questions about the AGM and Conference and to learn how things are done. You will also hear about some of the unique features of Blind Citizens NZ's programme, and above all, be encouraged to participate fully.

As per recent AGMs and Conferences, side events will be happening, although there may be new ones that the Board has yet to finalise.

While times are yet to be firmed up, in the meantime, be assured that the following side events are happening:

- Guide Dog Handlers;
- Braille;
- Blind Women;
- Te Tiriti Advisory Group Aotearoa;
- World Blind Union.

Registration: Registering for our AGM and Conference is easy, and you can choose whichever option that suits you best. You're welcome to register online, download a form and send it in, or you can opt for registering using the paper form.

A quick heads-up that registrations close at 4pm, on Monday, 14 September 2026, so be sure to get yours in on time.

Registration details – you will find all the information you need, such as costs and registration categories, available when completing the relevant registration form online, downloading it or completing the hard-copy version. If paying the full registration cost all at once is a challenge, you are welcome to use our instalment option. To find out more and set up a payment plan, simply get in touch with the National Office. Each request is considered individually, and you'll receive support that fits your circumstances.

If you would prefer to have a paper copy of the registration form, or you'd like to talk things through and get more information, feel free to reach out to your Branch, Geographic or Special Interest Network, or our National Office. You will find National Office contact details at the end of this Focus issue.

We will also be sharing registration costs | forms, and updates with Branches, Geographic and Special Interest Networks and updates will be posted on our TellMe Bulletin and other organisational social media options. You can also check in with our National Office any time for information for the latest information.

2026 Award Nomination Timeframes

For each of Blind Citizens NZ's organisational awards, the opportunity to make a nomination is open to the Board, Branches, Geographic and Special Interest Networks, and Ordinary financial (voting) members. Eligibility criteria for each of the awards are provided further on. When awards are made, these are usually planned for presentation during the evening of the Conference Dinner. Anyone planning to make a nomination for the Board's consideration should ensure that, along with supporting details, this is received at the National Office no later than **5 pm, Wednesday 5 August 2026**. This applies to the following awards...

Beamish Memorial Medal: This award may be made to an Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ who has made an outstanding contribution to society in their particular field of service to the community.

Extra Touch Award: This award recognises an individual, organisation or business that, in working to meet the needs of the general public, makes an outstanding contribution towards improving access or services to blind, deafblind, low vision or vision-impaired people. Access is broadly defined and includes:

- information;
- buildings and public facilities;
- transport and pedestrian safety;

- technology and communications;
- educational, vocational or recreational opportunities;
- everyday equipment;
- shops and customer service;
- services in general.

Johnston Cup for Leadership: This award recognises Ordinary Members of Blind Citizens NZ whose ability to lead and influence others in a particular direction has been clearly demonstrated, either inside or outside the blind community. This award fosters a culture within Blind Citizens NZ that recognises and values the importance of leadership.

It is intended to motivate members to participate in leadership training offered or supported by Blind Citizens NZ.

Anyone nominated for this award must have met one or more of the following:

- demonstrated leadership in a specific field of endeavour;
- assumed leadership responsibilities beyond what might have been expected in the role;
- contributed in some demonstrable way to the betterment of the community by way of leadership.

Memorial Hall of Honour: Nominations for Blind Citizens NZ's Memorial Hall of Honour must be for a blind, deafblind, low-vision, or vision-impaired person who was born in New Zealand or has lived here.

The nominee does not need to have been a member of Blind Citizens NZ, but they must be deceased. Nominees must also be someone who has:

- made a substantial and outstanding contribution over many years towards the advancement of the interests and well-being of the blind in New Zealand; or
- through their trail-blazing efforts or personal example, inspired others in the blind community to overcome the barriers to participation in a sighted world.

If you're making or endorsing a nomination, it is your responsibility to ensure the nominee meets the award criteria.

Consultation on Health and Disability Commission Advocacy Guidelines

The Health and Disability Commission (HDC) is refreshing its advocacy guidelines, last updated in 2005. Consultation on the draft Advocacy Guidelines is open until 30 June 2026.

You can engage in the consultation process online at this link [Advocacy Guidelines consultation Survey](#)

Alternately you can email your response to guidelines@hdc.org.nz Survey questions include:

- Do the guidelines meet your expectations (yes or no)?
- If no, what would strengthen the Guidelines for you | your organisation?
- Have we left anything out? Does anything need more emphasis?

About the Advocacy Service: The HDC Act 1994 enables the establishment of a nationwide free advocacy service, the [Nationwide Health and Disability Advocacy Service](#). It is mandated under the Act to promote the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights 1996 ([the Code of Rights](#)) and to support consumers (and whānau) to resolve concerns directly with a health or disability service. The service operates independently of HDC. Advocates use an empowerment, strengths-based advocacy model to support whānau and to work alongside consumers.

Advocates do not determine if there is a breach under the Code of Rights. Serious or unresolved complaints are referred to the office of the HDC.

Volunteers Needed for our Online Voting Trial

Blind Citizens NZ is exploring how to make our voting in our organisational elections more accessible for everyone. An activity we are planning is a practice online election. We

already know the system works well for confident blind tech users. Now we need to hear from financial (voting) members who do not usually feel comfortable with online systems.

If this sounds like you, or if you've ever thought, "I'm not very techy", then we'd love you to take part. We need around 20 volunteers. You'll be part of a simple, safe, fake election designed only for testing. There are no real candidates, no real political issues, and no impact on any official organisational processes. We'll be asking you to tell us what worked and what didn't. Your feedback will help shape a more accessible voting experience for our members.

To be considered, please provide your expression of interest by 9am, Wednesday, 15 July 2026, using one of the following options:

- Email: admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
(put volunteer online voting in the subject line); or
- Phone: 0800 222 694

Honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi – Reflecting on the Journey and the Mahi Ahead

The establishment of Blind Citizens NZ's Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group marks an important milestone in our organisation's ongoing commitment to honouring Te Tiriti and strengthening relationships with tāngata whenua | whanāu hauā. This journey has unfolded over several years, shaped by collective aspiration, member advocacy, and a clear call for action via a Remit in 2021 to our AGM and Conference. The outcome set the direction for meaningful, sustained action.

The Board established the Te Tiriti o Waitangi Advisory Group in 2022, appointing six members to begin this mahi. Their early work, guided by Te Huia Bill Hamilton, laid the foundations for Blind Citizens NZ's growth in cultural capability and understanding. We acknowledge with gratitude the leadership and commitment of the inaugural members: Daniel Phillips (Kaumātua), Harete Phillips (Kuia), Joe and Francie Twomey, Victor West, John Puhara, Maria Stevens, and Tewai Halatau. Their willingness to shape the kaupapa from the ground up has been invaluable.

The mahi continues with clear priorities for the next phase. Current members are Victor West, John Puhara, Peter Allen, Russell Lowry and Maria Stevens. Following the Advisory Group's recommendations, the Board co-opted Peter Allen and Russell Lowry in August 2025, each serving a two-year term.

This strengthens the presence of Kāpō Tāngata Whenua within our governance structure and ensures their perspectives are embedded across the organisation's mahi before decisions are made.

Recently renamed Te Tiriti Advisory Group Aotearoa, the group is progressing plans for a national hui to bring our Kāpō Tāngata Whenua and Haka pono ki te kaupapa community together for kōrero and shared learning. This includes taking a transparent and inclusive approach to selecting or electing Kāpō Tāngata Whenua to the Board of Blind Citizens NZ. The Advisory Group is also developing an organisational Karakia that reflects our identity and values. They are also exploring ways to strengthen the use of te reo Māori within Blind Citizens NZ, including reo that reflects the experiences of Kāpō tāngata whenua - blind, deafblind, low-vision and vision-impaired Māori.

This mahi is about embedding Te Tiriti values at the heart of our organisation. It is ongoing, evolving, and essential to ensuring that Kāpō Tāngata Whenua see their language, tikanga, and perspectives reflected in who we are and how we operate.

As we look ahead, we acknowledge both the progress made and the responsibility still before us. The Advisory Group's leadership continues to guide Blind Citizens NZ toward a future that more fully honours the spirit and intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Special Interest Network Highlights

Currently, Blind Citizens NZ has three Special Interest Networks (Networks). The purpose of these Networks is for people from the blind community (blind, deafblind, low vision and vision-impaired) to come together because they:

- have a common interest;
- share the values and causes of the organisation; and
- wish to participate through peer support.

You do not need to be a member of Blind Citizens NZ to join our Special Interest Networks. All Networks meet online via Zoom. To take part, the minimum requirement is a phone (mobile or landline). Devices such as a laptop, iPad, or computer can also be used. Meetings are usually held 6pm to 7pm. Any changes are advised on a case-by-case basis.

Each Network has its own email list, and subscribing to that list is the main way to join. If you do not have email, but wish to participate, contact our National Office (details at the end of this Focus issue), and arrangements will be made for you to join and be kept up to date with happenings.

Communication within each Network between meetings happens via email. Where necessary, the Coordinator will contact members who are not on email. Below are highlights of each of the three Networks, along with details about how to join.

Guide Dog Handlers: Membership of this Network is broad. It is open to: Guide Dog Handlers, anyone on a waiting list for a Guide Dog, anyone who has retired their Guide Dog and remains interested in what's happening, or you aspire to have a Guide Dog in the future and want to know more about this Network.

Beverley Duncan is the Coordinator. This Network meets a minimum of four times a year and may have guests from time to time. The remainder of this year's scheduled meetings are on 27 August (AGM) and 9 November. To join, send an email to guidedoghandlers-blindcitizensnz+subscribe@groups.io

Braille: If you are a Braille user, regardless of how and | or where you use Braille, or you aspire to learn Braille, this Network is for you. Chantelle Griffith is the Coordinator.

Meetings are scheduled for 17 June, 3 September (AGM), and 18 November. To join, send an email to BlindCitizensNZ-BrailleNetwork+subscribe@groups.io

Women: Established in February this year, our Blind Women's Network is the newest of our Special Interest Networks. If you're a blind, deafblind, low-vision or vision-impaired woman, or you identify as feminine, this is a welcoming space. The Coordinator is Judy Small. The schedule of meetings is 6pm-7pm on 18 June, 20 August (AGM), 1 October and 10 December. To join, send an email to WomensNetwork-BlindCitizensNZ+subscribe@groups.io

Acknowledging 2026 King's Birthday Honour Recipients

Blind Citizens NZ applauds and congratulates all King's Birthday Honours recipients. We especially recognise all those for their mahi and services to disabled people, many of whom we work with and alongside.

We acknowledge our Patron, Peter Boshier, knighted for his services to the State and the judiciary. During his time as Chief Ombudsman, Peter played a key role in the Independent Monitoring Mechanism, working with the Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) Coalition and the Human Rights Commission. He has also been a valued guest presenter at our AGM and Conferences, including last year when he was announced as our Patron. We take this opportunity to also acknowledge:

- Hamish Taverner ONZM for services to people with a learning disability;
- Ronelle Baker ONZM for services to children and disabled people;
- Daniel (Dan) Buckingham MNZM for services to disabled people and wheelchair rugby; and
- Robyn Hunt KSO for services to disabled people and the arts.

Membership Renewal Reminder

This is a generic reminder to subscription-paying members about membership renewals for 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. Membership subscriptions can be paid in person at a Branch or Geographic Network event. If these options are not suitable, we have alternate, safe options to replace the in-person approach. You can ask your bank to assist by making a one-off payment to the National Office bank account. You could consider setting up your membership renewal payment so that this happens at the same time each year.

Otherwise, internet and phone banking are options to pay your annual subscription.

The base amount for subscriptions for Ordinary (voting) Members and Associate Members is \$10 per year, or \$30 per year for those who can afford it. There is no longer the \$20 rate that differentiates between working and non-working members. You get to choose the rate that best suits your situation. For Ordinary (voting) Members, remaining financial ensures you have the choice to be involved in Blind Citizens NZ elections, and all other democratic processes. The Member-for-Life subscription is for Ordinary (voting) Members and remains \$300.

A renewal form follows for anyone wishing to take advantage of this reminder.

Blind Citizens NZ, Membership Renewal Form | Financial to 30 June 2027

When depositing funds into Blind Citizens NZ's bank account to renew your membership, please let our National Office know. You can post this form to PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242, phone us on 0800 222 694 or email us at admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz

As a reference, please include the first letter of your Christian name and full surname, and the reference "MembSubs". Blind Citizens NZ's bank account details are: 06-0230-0002634-00.

Full Name: (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms): _____

Address: _____

Email _____ **Phone No:** _____

Date of Birth: _____ **Ethnicity:** _____

I prefer to receive information (select preferred format):

Braille | Audio | Large Print | Email

Membership subscriptions for Ordinary and Associate Members are \$10 per year, or \$30 per year for those who can afford it. Please select and indicate the amount you are paying from the options below.

- **Ordinary Membership** – for blind | deafblind | low vision and vision impaired members registered with or eligible to receive full services from Blind Low Vision NZ: **\$10 or \$30**.
- **Associate Membership** -for family | friends | whanau: **\$10 or \$30**
- **Membership for Life** is available for blind individuals: **\$300.00**

I include a **donation** \$_____ for National Office | Branch | Network.

Blind Citizens NZ – Board and National Office

Board

- **President:** Jonathan Godfrey: a.j.godfrey@massey.ac.nz
- **Board Members**
 - ✓ Martine Abel-Williamson: martine.the1@xtra.co.nz
 - ✓ Peter Allen: Peter.VIDP@outlook.com
 - ✓ Andrea Courtney: andycoute@gmail.com
 - ✓ Beverley Duncan: bev.d.duncan@gmail.com
 - ✓ Russell Lowry: rglowry@xtra.co.nz
 - ✓ Maria Stevens: mariastevens31060@gmail.com
 - ✓ Paula Waby: Vice President (appointed by the Board)
paula.blindsight@outlook.com
 - ✓ Juanita Willems: willems2022@gmail.com

National Office

- **Chief Executive:** Rose Wilkinson:
rwilkinson@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
- **Physical:** Ground Floor, 113 Adelaide Road, Mount Cook, Wellington.
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242.
- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz
- **Phone:** 04 389 0033; 0800 222 694.
- **Website:** <http://www.blindcitizensnz.org.nz>
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensNZ/>

Blind Citizens NZ deeply appreciates the donations and bequests from our members and supporters, for the grant from the Lotteries Grants Board, and the essential funding from Blind Low Vision NZ