



Focus

Blind Citizens NZ

Publication of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc Volume 62 No 1 – March 2026

- In this edition, by Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive pg 2
- Can we afford to be all things to everyone?
From the President pg 3
- Advocacy | Leadership Workshop – We're calling for
expressions of interest pg 6
- Blind Citizens NZ 2026 Scheduled Election pg 8
- Blind Citizens NZ 2026 AGM and Conference | Times are
changing – Are we surviving or thriving pg 12
- Blind Citizens NZ is re-registered under the
Incorporated Societies Act 2022 pg 14
- 2026 Award Nomination Timeline pg 15
- Special Interest Network Highlights pg 17
- Online sessions with the President pg 20
- Ways to Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income
Generation Efforts pg 20
- Blind Citizens NZ Board | National Office Contacts pg 23
- Acknowledgement of financial support. Pg 24

In this Edition

Rose Wilkinson, Chief Executive

Welcome to our very first Focus issue for 2026.

There's a lot ahead for Blind Citizens NZ this year. At its first meeting in February, the Board took time at the end of its first day to reflect on the year ahead and is confident it can continue working cohesively together into the future. At its February meeting, the Board began working on the organisation's new Strategic Plan, which may well be a topic in our June Focus.

In this issue, you will read a little more about plans for this year's AGM and Conference, which are well underway. Then, if advocacy and leadership are top of mind, we hope the item promoting our workshop in May this year, will be of interest. Timeframes for this year's election and nominations for annual awards are provided, and you'll find ways to subscribe to and | or join our Special Interest Networks.

There are regular opportunities for members to join online sessions with the National President, and we highlight these.

While we have your attention, we are looking for contributions for guest editorials. Additionally, we welcome letters to the editor. If you are interested, contact our National Office or send an email to the Chief Executive (contact details at the end of this Focus issue).

Can we afford to be all things to everyone?

Jonathan Godfrey, President

I asked myself this question over the summer while taking a break — although some people might think my idea of a break hardly counts. I minimised the time I spent on my laptop doing what I call work. I deprioritised emails not addressed to me personally and stepped back to take a good look at a few things in life.

My simple answer? I can't be all things to everyone, and that shouldn't be a surprise. When I meet the person who is successfully being all things to everyone, I'll bow to their superiority — and acknowledge them in a future column. None of us can be all things to everyone. We have to draw the line somewhere.

So, if we as individuals can't be everything to everyone, can we ask any organisation to be? I don't think so. Let me tease this out a little, because it has consequences — starting with how I'm approaching 2026.

It began with a realisation: I was burning out by trying to do too much for too many people in 2025. And I decided that this extends, perhaps starts, with my employment.

My New Year's resolutions include putting a person using their voice ahead of anyone using their keyboard. That got an early shot at success. Summer means no school for the kids, and this summer that meant board games and lambs. Whether it was kids wanting a game of Ludo or lambs needing a cuddle on the farm, the laptop and the outside world it connects me to were quickly relegated.

Yes, I know lambs aren't people, but they do have a voice — and it's hard to ignore them.

In 2026, I'll prioritise reading — and possibly responding to — emails sent to me individually over those sent to a group. I'm enjoying this more than I expected. It requires discipline, but part of that was made easier by leaving my mobile phone in the lounge overnight. No temptation to doom-scroll social media when insomnia calls.

I've also decided to feel less guilty about ignoring people who aren't reaching out as much as I reach out to them. If I wasn't the last person to contact a friend or family member, it's on me to reconnect. Some of my volunteer work gives me personal affirmation; the rest might end up on a cull list.

Once I made decisions for myself, I turned to the bigger picture: the future of Blind Citizens NZ.

In my AGM address last year, I said that our organisation cannot continue as we have in recent years. We must change. I didn't offer too many answers then, but I believe it is time for a fundamental shift — so we don't just drift along. The world has changed. We must, too.

If we needed evidence that Blind Citizens NZ must exist, it comes from the Shining a Light on Blindness report released at the end of February. Published by BLVNZ, it uses administrative data collected by government agencies and fed into the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) at Stats NZ.

It focuses on 15 to 64-year-olds receiving a service indicating some level of vision impairment. That group contains 4,623 people.

The report compares them with a much larger group who report difficulty with vision and with the rest of New Zealanders of the same age.

Expand the age range, and the total identified as having a “severe visual impairment” rises to 7,911. I’m not a fan of that label, but let’s leave that aside.

Even using just the 4,623, the data is stark. Only 1,185 have a wage or salary, and only 543 earn what might be considered a good wage — \$60,000 or more. That leaves 3,438 with no salary at all. Some may not want employment, but I think we should ask how many have given up seeking work entirely.

The report also highlights outcomes vastly different from the general population. Life expectancy is lower. Home ownership rates are far lower. Educational achievement is lower. And 473 of us required mental health support in 2023 alone — over 10% in what should be the prime of life.

I’m not surprised that people need support, but the numbers are startling. And the real figure is likely higher, given service backlogs across the general population.

Shining a Light on Blindness is a prototype for understanding our community. It also reveals opportunities. The ethnic make-up of these 4,623 people is increasingly Māori, Pasifika, or other non-Pākehā. And every census question could potentially be compared “us and them”: Te Reo proficiency, imprisonment, victimisation, and so on. These are difficult topics, but important. Answering them requires better administrative data, improved decision rules for identifying “severe visual impairment,” and perhaps even a chance to improve the language in reports about us.

I've always known that with the right data in the IDI, such analysis is possible. It's part of what has kept me working with Stats NZ and other agencies for over a decade. My time and energy improving disability data and evidence haven't been wasted — even if I'm dropping some other commitments in 2026.

Prioritisation in my life is certain. This year, you need to help our collective effort to decide what Blind Citizens NZ will be in the future. That means exposing our priorities and deciding what matters most as a community. Only then will the Board know what to give the highest priority.

Shining a Light on Blindness shows that Blind Citizens NZ still has a role. Our voice will take such reports and do the hard yards with government officials. I also want more of those 4,623 people to know we're on their side — and that it's our work that makes a blind bit of difference for their futures.

Advocacy | Leadership Workshop

We're calling for expressions of interest

From 18 to 20 May 2026 inclusive, Blind Citizens NZ is holding our next combined Advocacy | Leadership Workshop at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington. The workshop will have a strong focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, linking to advocacy and leadership.

Board Member Maria Stevens and Chief Executive Rose Wilkinson will be co-facilitating this workshop, and we will have guest presenters.

Are you interested in developing your advocacy and leadership skills and knowledge? If so, and you are a financial Ordinary Member of Blind Citizens NZ, we encourage you to send through an expression of interest for the workshop. Highlight the skills and | or knowledge you bring. We would also love to hear what you hope to achieve from the workshop.

If successful with your expression of interest, expenses for travel and accommodation will be Blind Citizens NZ's responsibility. You will arrive on Sunday, 17 May, and return home late afternoon | early evening, Wednesday, 20 May.

Details for the workshop, which will include up to eight participants, will be finalised in early April 2026. In the meantime, expressions of interest are welcome. These must be received by 9 am, Monday, 30 March 2026. Please send your expression of interest for the attention of the Chief Executive to:

- **Email:** admin@blindcitizensnz.org.nz and put "Expression of Interest, Advocacy | Leadership Workshop" in the subject line; or
- **Post:** PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242;
- **Fax:** 04-389-0033

Blind Citizens NZ 2026 Scheduled Election

From Rose Wilkinson, Returning Officer

Two Board Member positions are up for election in this year's Blind Citizens NZ Board election. The current terms for these positions end at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting and Conference (9–10 October). The positions currently held by Andrea Courtney and Paula Waby are the ones open for election.

Call for nominations

Rule 14 Elections, clause 14.2 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. 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:

- are an employee of, or contractor to Blind Citizens NZ;
- 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 who is found to have breached any qualifying criteria for office in this Constitution.

Of note is that:

- people currently in these positions are eligible for re-election;

- the term of office for each of the two 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.

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 Blind Citizens NZ Board Member. 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 the National Office are at the end of this Focus issue.

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

Once nominations close, if only the maximum number needed for the two positions is received, no election will be required. Those candidates will be elected unopposed. If we receive more nominations than positions, an election will be held. If we receive fewer nominations than required, a vacancy will occur. In that case, the process in Rule 14.4 (Filling Elected Board Member Vacancies) will apply.

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**. No later than **11 September 2026**, 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 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.

TellMe 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

In our December Focus issue, we began promoting information in preparation for our 2026 AGM and Conference event. We aim to keep you updated via each of our Focus Issues as well as through our E-Bulletins for those on email, and our TellMe Bulletin, which will shortly be back up and running.

We hope that you will already have put the dates into your calendar as a placeholder, and that you are considering joining us. Registration costs (accommodation and all meals) will be finalised by the end of March (this month). 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. Then we work through to around 5pm on Saturday, 10 October, finishing with award presentations during the Conference Dinner that evening.

There is a hint of our theme 'Times are changing – Are we surviving or thriving?' in the President's contribution. You may recall mention in the December issue that this year's theme in part stems from the declining rate of Ordinary financial Members, and what Blind Citizens NZ needs to do to remain relevant and sustainable into the future. Key to the Board's thinking is shaping Blind Citizens NZ's next Strategic Plan. It gave significant attention to this topic during its February 2026 meeting. Although the Strategic Plan will likely be finalised before this year's AGM and Conference, member input when the draft becomes available is paramount. It will, of course, be a discussion topic during the AGM and Conference.

Our Southland Branch has established an excellent relationship with the Invercargill Council through its ongoing advocacy and submissions on local issues. Mindful that this is where we will be (staying at the Ascot Hotel), this paved the way to extend an invitation to Mayor Tom Campbell. He has welcomed the opportunity and will be opening our event. The Mayor, along with some of his colleagues, may well join us at different times throughout the two days.

The Board anticipates confirming its decision about the Thursday, 8 October side events by 30 May. We know how important it is to have this information early, as it assists with travel arrangements.

Registration costs will be shared with Branches, Geographical and Special Interest Networks and publicised on our TellMe Bulletin and other organisational social media, once finalised. You can also check in with our National Office for information at any time.

Blind Citizens NZ is re-registered under the Incorporated Societies Act 2022

In our December issue, we provided an update on the work that has been done to ensure Blind Citizens NZ meets the requirements of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022 (the Act). Our approach has been steady during the past two years and has involved:

- obtaining legal advice for amendments to the Constitution registered in 2019;
- engaging with members about proposed amendments to our Constitution and ensuring there is support for them;
- holding a Special Meeting of Members in December 2025 to formalise the adoption of a new Constitution;
- applying to the Company's Office to reregister under the Incorporated Societies Act 2022.

We are now at the end of our re-registration journey – Blind Citizens NZ's application for re-registration, including our new Constitution, has been accepted. This is important as there are consequences for societies that do nothing.

The outcome for Blind Citizens NZ is positive, and much has been achieved during the past two-plus years. A big thank you to our Branches, Networks, and members for your respective contributions and commitment to ensuring Blind Citizens NZ meets the requirements set out in the Act.

2026 Award Nomination Timeframes

For each of the awards, the opportunity to make a nomination is open to the Board, Branches, Networks, and Ordinary financial (voting) members. Read on for eligibility criteria for each of the awards. 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 to:

- 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: The purpose of this award is to recognise 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 an environment within Blind Citizens NZ that values leadership and encourages its members to undergo leadership training conducted 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.

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 our Networks meet online using Zoom. To join these meetings, the minimum requirement is a phone (mobile or landline).

If you have a laptop, iPad, computer, etc., that's great, as these are amongst the technology options that can be used to join meetings. Meetings are typically held from 6pm to 7pm. Any changes are advised on a case-by-case basis.

There is an established email list for each of the Networks. Subscribing to the respective email list is the primary way of joining a Special Interest Network. However, if you do not have email and wish to join, 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 amongst members of each of the Networks in between meetings happens via email, and where necessary, the Coordinator will contact those members who are not on email.

Here are highlights of each of the three Networks, and 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, or you have retired your Guide Dog and remain 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. Meetings are scheduled for 28 May, 27 August (AGM), and 9 November. To join, you can contact our National Office, or you can 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 15 April, 17 June, 3 September (AGM), and 18 November. To join, you can contact our National Office, or you can send an email to BlindCitizensNZ-BrailleNetwork+subscribe@groups.io

Women: This is the newest of our Networks, formally established in February this year. 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 Women's Network next meets on 16 April, at 6pm. To join, you can contact our National Office, or you can send an email to WomensNetwork-BlindCitizensNZ+subscribe@groups.io

Online Sessions with the President

The President Jonathan Godfrey aims to regularly set aside time to engage with members on topics you might like to raise. These opportunities are quite separate from any others that might be offered for a specific reason.

These regular opportunities with the President are held via Zoom, where people can join by phone or using other technology. If you are uncertain about linking in to one of these sessions, why not come along and observe what happens, as the discussions, while blindness related, are really free-flowing.

The schedule of dates from March to December 2026, inclusive, follows. These are held from 5pm to 6pm on the following Tuesdays: 31 March, 12 May, 23 June, 4 August, 15 September, 27 October, 8 December.

Ways to Support Blind Citizens NZ's Income Generation Efforts

Blind Citizens NZ has both Charitable and Donee status. This is important for anyone thinking about the mutually beneficial outcomes of payroll giving and making us your charity of choice. Income received through donations, bequests, and payroll giving all play a big part in supporting our work, from advocacy and promotional campaigns to communication and community education and raising awareness.

Leaving a bequest or legacy to Blind Citizens NZ is another meaningful way to support what we do.

Making a Bequest: With your support, we're working to remove the barriers that blind, deafblind, low-vision, and vision-impaired people face every day.

We're deeply grateful for the legacies we've received over the years, and we take this opportunity to acknowledge the generosity of those individuals and their families. Their gifts have made a real and lasting difference.

Including Blind Citizens NZ in your Will is another powerful way to support our work into the future. If you're considering leaving a gift, the following information may help your legal advisor...

"I give and bequeath to the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Incorporated (CC41040):

- \$ (a specific dollar amount); or
- A specific percentage of my estate; or
- The whole or a specific percentage of the residue of my estate.

Free from all duties and charges, as a contribution to the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc to be applied for general purposes only, for which the receipt of the Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand Inc shall be sufficient discharge to my trustees."

Payroll Giving: This is an easy way for employees to donate to a charity they care about, like Blind Citizens NZ. When you donate through payroll, you get your tax refund straight away. With any other type of donation, you must wait until the end of the tax year.

With payroll giving, you can choose to donate your tax refund to the charity, too. Payroll giving is optional, and not all employers offer this. Blind Citizens NZ has Donee Status and is set up to receive payroll gifts. Steps to setting up payroll giving include:

1. Ask your employer if payroll giving is an employee benefit. You can advocate for Blind Citizens NZ and outline why you are passionate about the organisation.
2. If payroll giving is available, provide your employer with Blind Citizens NZ's bank account details.
3. Decide how much you can afford, and how frequently you will donate, considering the immediate tax benefit. For Blind Citizens NZ, every little helps us in our work to make a blind bit of difference for blind people.
4. Notify Blind Citizens NZ that you are making a payroll gift.

To find out how we inform those who have pledged their support to us, if you have questions, or if you wish to make a contribution, contact:

- Rose Wilkinson 021 222 6940 | 0800 222 694;or
- **Email:** bequest-info-blindcitizensnz@groups.io

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: paula.waby4@gmail.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 is appreciative of donations and bequests received from our members and supporters and for essential funding from Blind Low Vision NZ

If undelivered within 14 days please return to
Association of Blind Citizens of New Zealand inc.
PO Box 7144, Newtown, Wellington 6242.

New Zealand
Permit No. 114524

