



PARENTS OF VISION IMPAIRED (NZ) INC

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Providing a community to support parents of children with vision impairments

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Committee Secretariat
Finance and Expenditure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Tēnā koutou,

Please find attached Parents of Vision Impaired (NZ) Inc's submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee on the *Budget Policy Statement 2026*.

We wish to speak to our submission.

Ngā mihi,

Rebekah Graham

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ABOUT PARENTS OF VISION IMPAIRED NZ

Parents of Vision Impaired NZ (PVI) is a registered charity which supports parents who have blind, low vision, or vision-impaired children. There is no cost to enrol, and we provide a supportive community for parents who are overcoming challenges every day. We offer parents advice, information, and opportunities to meet other parents. We publish a quarterly newsletter (eVision) and have a members-only Facebook page for families and whānau to share information and to network. PVI also runs an annual conference which allows parents and whānau to get together face to face for a longer time to talk, listen and learn in a social setting. PVI takes an active part in the disability sector through making sure that the voice of visually impaired children and their parents is heard in consultations with government, schools, local councils, and other organisations.

THE BUDGET POLICY STATEMENT

The Budget Policy Statement 2026 (BPS) sets out the Government's priorities for the 2026 Budget. It explains the approach being used to develop the Budget and the broad parameters within which decisions will be made.

The current National-led government has stated that their overarching goals for its term are:

- Build a stronger, more productive economy that lifts real incomes and increases opportunities for New Zealanders.
- Deliver more efficient, effective and responsive public services to all who need and use them - in particular, to restore law and order and improve health outcomes and educational achievement.
- Get the government's books back in order and restore discipline to public spending.

In Budget 2026, the Government will focus on:

- Supporting the delivery of core public services such as health care, education and law and order.
- Keeping tight control of discretionary government spending while funding a limited number of priority Government policy commitments.
- Addressing New Zealand's longer-term productivity challenges.
- Developing a sustainable pipeline of infrastructure investments.

PVI'S APPROACH

Our submission focusses on the needs of blind, deafblind, low vision and vision impaired children and their families and whānau. Health and Education are core areas of concern for our families, followed by training and employment opportunities for their blind, deafblind, low vision or vision impaired young person.

We use the term disabled in our submission to include blind, deafblind, low vision and vision impaired persons as many of our children have additional disabilities alongside vision loss.

In our submission, we draw on several key documents. These are listed below, and we have identified the relevant components of each for this submission:

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act (1990). This Act states that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination from government and state officials, including on the grounds of disability.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child¹. In particular, Article 23, which recognizes that a mentally or physically *disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community*. This includes access to independent and dignifying forms of public transportation and housing.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)². This was ratified by the New Zealand government in March 2008. Particular articles of relevance:

Article 9 which states that, to enable people with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life:

States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to people with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

And *Article 29*, which states:

*Parties will ensure that persons with disabilities can **effectively and fully participate** in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected.*

Enabling Good Lives Approach³ and **Principles**⁴. This approach applies a set of disabled-led principles into disability support services. The following principles are particularly relevant to our submission:

- **Beginning early:** Invest early in families and whānau to support them; to be aspirational for their disabled child; to build community and natural supports; and to support disabled children to become independent, rather than waiting for a crisis before support is available.
- **Ordinary life outcomes:** Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places; and are regarded as citizens with opportunities for learning, employment, having a home and family, and social participation - like others at similar stages of life.
- **Mainstream first:** Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services before specialist disability services.
- **Easy to use:** Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible.

¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

² <https://www.odj.govt.nz/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/read-the-convention/>

³ <https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/enabling-good-lives-summary/>

⁴ <https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/>

KEY POLICY UPDATES FOR 2026

1. Fiscal and priority environment

- Government priorities in BPS26 emphasise *core public services* like education and health, *tight controls on discretionary spending*, and a *focus on productivity*.
- Budget 2025 (covering FY 2025/26) included boosts to disability support services and learning support in education.

2. Disability system changes

- From early 2026, **Disability Support Services (DSS)** will implement new flexible funding arrangements, more consistent NASC assessments, personal plans, and more choice/control in spending.
- The Government has increased funding for DSS, with an additional \$1B over four years, and extended the Disability Taskforce to mid-2026 to guide system improvement.

3. Disability strategy 2026–2030

- The **New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026–2030** has been approved. This Strategy sets out goals and actions across education, employment, housing, health and Justice, with inclusive access and early intervention central themes.

We are heartened by the changes to Disability Support Services (DSS) and welcome the shift to flexible funding and support. We are hopeful that the settlement with IHC and the Ministry of Education, and the associated Framework for Action will lead to better provision of inclusive education to all children.

Nevertheless, the current state of affairs for disabled children remains grim⁵.

CHILD POVERTY, DISABILITY & NUTRITION

We remain concerned at the wide-reaching lifetime impacts from the intersection of poverty and disability:

- **13.4 % of New Zealand children (approx. 156,600) live in material hardship⁶.** This figure sees no significant improvement from the previous year. This means that families continue to struggle to afford basics such as food, warm clothing, healthcare, and educational costs.
- **Māori and Pacific children, and children in households with a disabled person**, face disproportionately high rates of material hardship - disabled children are **1.7x more likely to live in households experiencing material hardship** than non-disabled children, and

⁵ New Zealand Health Survey 2023. Summary of results. Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People. <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/news-and-events/news/child-disability-health-data-available-for-the-first-time>

⁶ Child Poverty Action Group. *2023/24 Child Poverty Statistics Released 20 February 2025*. <https://www.cpag.org.nz/statistics/20232024-child-poverty-statistics-released-20-feb-2025-awtwl-2z9nh>

1.9x more likely to live in severe hardship⁷, reflecting both lower household incomes and the additional costs associated with disability

- Households with a disabled member face additional financial pressures (e.g., disability-related costs) that **deepen material hardship** even when income statistics may appear similar⁸. Research commissioned by the *Ministry for Social Development* indicates that these households face extra costs for specialized equipment, services, and higher daily living expenses (such as heating or transport), which consume a greater proportion of their income⁹.
- Despite a range of available disability-related supports, these are piecemeal and consistently fail to meet the known needs and additional expenses of disabled people¹⁰. Substantial increases in income and/or direct supports for households with disabled people are needed to address the higher levels of deprivation for children in these households.
- Recent New Zealand research published in *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* demonstrates that children living in economically constrained households experience **poorer diet quality and food insecurity**¹¹, with direct implications for physical health, cognitive development, and learning outcomes. Poor nutrition in childhood is directly linked to poorer health, learning outcomes, growth, and long-term wellbeing.
- For disabled children, **inadequate nutrition compounds existing barriers**, increasing the risk of poorer health, reduced educational participation, and long-term disadvantage¹².
- Disability both **increases the risk of poverty** and **intensifies its impacts**^{13 14}. Families are forced to make trade-offs between food, housing, transport to services, and educational supports. Without addressing child poverty and nutrition, investments in education, health, and disability services will continue to fall short of their intended outcomes.

Implication: Disability is a *poverty-amplifying factor* that compounds inequity and limits full participation in society. This has long-term implications across the life-course for disabled children. Budget 2026 must explicitly address this issue by increasing funding and supports.

Poverty, nutrition and disability outcomes are interdependent dimensions that Budget 2026 must address to reduce inequities and improve life outcomes.

⁷ Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People. *Disabled children are more likely to live in material hardship*. <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/news/news/disabled-children-still-more-likely-to-live-in-material-hardship>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Katoa Limited (2024). In-depth study to understand costs and income support for Tāngata Whaikaha Māori me o rātou whānau, and Māori living with long-term health conditions. A report for the Ministry of Social Development. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/findings/reports/in-depth-study-to-understand-costs-and-income-support-for-t-ngata-whaikaha-m-ori-me-o-r-tou-wh-nau-and-m-ori-living-with-long-term-health-conditions.pdf>

¹⁰ Wilson, McLeod, and Godfery (2025). <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/article/view/9760/8605>

¹¹ BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health. *Diet quality of 12-year-olds is associated with sociodemographic disparities and food insecurity: Growing Up in New Zealand cohort*. 2025. <https://nutrition.bmj.com/content/early/2025/11/11/bmjnph-2025-001315>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People. *Disabled children are more likely to live in material hardship*. <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/news/news/disabled-children-still-more-likely-to-live-in-material-hardship>

¹⁴ Child Poverty Action Group. *2023/24 Child Poverty Statistics Released 20 February 2025*.

<https://www.cpag.org.nz/statistics/20232024-child-poverty-statistics-released-20-feb-2025-awtwl-2z9nh>

DISABILITY, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT

The employment and education outcomes for disabled young people remain poor¹⁵. For disabled people aged 15 to 64 years, in the June 2025 quarter:

- the labour force participation rate was 44.4%, compared with 82.8% for non-disabled people
- the employment rate was at 38.2%, compared with 78.5% for non-disabled people
- the unemployment rate was 14.1%, compared with 5.2% for non-disabled people
- disabled people aged 15 to 64 years were almost twice as likely as non-disabled people to be underutilised (underutilisation rates of 24.4% and 12.6%, respectively)

The median weekly income from all sources collected: \$526 disabled and \$1,151 non-disabled. The weekly income gap is \$625.

None of these gaps, or the rates for disabled people, **have changed significantly since the series began in 2017**.

Similarly for disabled young people In the June 2025 quarter¹⁶:

- Disabled young people aged 15 to 24 years were much less likely than non-disabled people to be working or in education.
- The NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) rate for disabled young people was 45.9%, **more than four times the NEET rate** for non-disabled young people (11.3%) - the June 2017 figure was 42.3% NEET disabled youth.
- Nearly a third of disabled young people (31.5%) had no qualification, compared with 13.3% of non-disabled people in the same age group.
- Disabled people were much less likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher than non-disabled people in that age group (16.3% and 34.4%, respectively)

Implication: The persistent gaps in education and employment outcomes for disabled young people are not isolated labour market failures; they are the **predictable life-course consequences of childhood poverty, inadequate nutrition, and systemic exclusion within education systems**. Disabled children are more likely to grow up in material hardship, experience food insecurity, and face unmet disability-related costs. These factors directly affect health, cognitive development, school attendance, learning engagement, and qualification attainment.

The result is **compounding disadvantage**: lower rates of school completion and tertiary participation, higher rates of NEET status, and significantly reduced employment and income outcomes in adulthood. The persistence of these gaps since measures began in 2017 demonstrates that current policy settings and funding levels are insufficient to disrupt this cycle.

In essence, disability operates as a *poverty-amplifying factor across the life course*, entrenching inequities that extend from early childhood through to adulthood. Without addressing these wider factors (poverty, nutrition, inclusion), efforts to improve employment outcomes for disabled people will continue to be fragmented and ineffective.

¹⁵ Labour market activity by disability status – people aged 15–64 years, June 2025 quarter.

<https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/news/news/labour-market-statistics-for-disabled-people-june-2025-quarter>

¹⁶ Ibid

RECOMMENDATIONS

The **Budget Policy Statement 2026** prioritises *efficiency in core services, and long-term productivity*. Addressing the poverty and material hardship experienced by children living in disabled households directly improves **education access/outcomes, health equity, and long-term economic participation**. This strongly aligns with the 2026 Budget priorities and *supports multiple government goals simultaneously* (social, economic, and human rights obligations).

PVI recommends that Budget 2026 prioritises and funds the following:

1. **Adequate and sustained investment in supports and services for disabled children** across education, health, and disability systems, including supports for parents and whānau.
2. **Addresses chronic and historical underfunding** affecting disabled children, recognising the cumulative impact of unmet need over time.
3. **Reduces child poverty and material hardship**, particularly for families with disabled children, through adequate income support and targeted cost-of-living interventions.
4. **Implement the Government's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, including the most recent Concluding Observations already agreed to by Cabinet.
5. **Resource and embed the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) approach** across the disability system, ensuring reforms align with its principles and are properly funded.
6. **Whole-of-government investment in accessibility and inclusion**, so disabled children can participate as a matter of course, not exception.
7. **Strengthen public sector capability**, ensuring disability perspectives are embedded in policy design, delivery, and evaluation.

We strongly urge the explicit incorporation of child poverty reduction into the Government's Budget 2026 priorities, and that this is linked to disability policy outcomes. This means targeted investments that:

1. **Strengthen social security and income supports**
 - e.g., increasing benefit levels/thresholds, inflation indexing, and targeted payments for families with disabled children.
 - Ensure families are not forced into material hardship due to inadequate income support.
2. **Boost access to affordable, nutritious food**
 - Properly fund and expand **universal free school meals** and **community food assistance programmes**, with emphasis on accessibility for disabled households.
3. **Prioritise food security and healthy nutrition within disability and child wellbeing strategies**
 - Include outcomes for dietary quality and food security in cross-government reporting on child wellbeing and disability inclusion.