



# Climate change and disabled people

## What the national adaptation plan means for you

## Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient New Zealand

**The first national adaptation plan will help New Zealanders adapt to the effects of climate change now, and better protect us against changes to come.**

Many impacts are already with us, with unstable and unpredictable weather, worsening floods, droughts and storms, and rising sea levels. We can expect more will happen. Lowering emissions can reduce the impacts of climate change but won't eliminate them all.

The national adaptation plan sets out what actions the Government will take over the next six years to help all New Zealanders adapt and thrive in a changing climate.

It has actions relevant to every sector and community in New Zealand and addresses the priority risks that need action now.

Climate change risks and the costs of adapting will need to be shared across society, but through the actions in the plan we can reduce the long-term costs across the motu.

### Managing risk now and for the future

In 2020, the National Climate Change Risk Assessment set out the main risks New Zealanders face from the impacts of climate change up to 2026.

These include risks to people's health and property, risks to our infrastructure like roads and water supplies, and risks to our natural environment.

This national adaptation plan is the first in a series. It will be updated every six years to respond to changing climate risks.

# Impacts of climate change on disabled people

Everyone is affected by climate change. But some people are more vulnerable to the damaging effects than others.

For example, in heatwaves and severe storms, disabled people are more likely to suffer health problems or be vulnerable to power outages that disrupt life-supporting equipment.

If a community needs to evacuate or move, people with physical disabilities and limited mobility will need accessible housing and facilities, and may need help settling in.

Climate-related events and changes can also disrupt vital social networks and support services.

## What you've told us

During consultation on the draft adaptation plan, submitters who identified as disabled or who represent disabled people raised the importance of:

- more research into climate change effects and adaptation options for disabled people
- better access for disabled people to safe homes and transportation in emergency situations
- more accessible information and government communication on adaptation
- involving disabled people in implementing the plan's actions.

# How actions in the plan will help disabled people adapt to climate change

The plan outlines a programme of work to support and encourage all New Zealanders to adapt. It brings together existing actions and proposed future work.

## Enabling better risk-informed decisions

The plan includes actions that will provide information, tools and guidance about climate change threats and responses. Disabled people can use these to understand and assess the risks they face and decide how best to adapt. Key actions include:

- Action 3.2: Design and develop risk, resilience and climate adaptation information portals: this will explore opportunities to collect and make available data and information on social and equity risks. The portals will also help assess people's vulnerability to climate change, including disproportionately affected groups such as disabled people.
- Action 3.4: Raise awareness of climate hazards and how to prepare: this will deliver public education campaigns and provide information to help people get ready for emergencies. This will help ensure people know what to do and have what they need to get through. For example, the [Get Ready](#) website has targeted advice for disabled people.

## Driving climate-resilient development in the right locations

Buildings and infrastructure have a long lifespan. Decisions we make today about how and where we develop really matter.

The plan will improve planning, infrastructure and decision-making frameworks to guide climate-resilient development in the right locations. This includes taking account of changing risks, such as exposure to sea-level rise, flooding, heat stress, coastal inundation, and wildfire. For example, a key action relevant for disabled people is:

- Action 4.5: Reform institutional arrangements for water services: the reforms will establish new water entities to work with councils and communities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. This includes meeting the needs of disabled people, who are more vulnerable to the health effects of poor water quality.

## **Adaptation options including managed retreat**

Many communities are already under threat from natural hazards. Successfully adapting to these risks will be vital as climate impacts worsen. Some people and communities may have to change how and where they live.

One option is managed retreat, which may be necessary to reduce or eliminate exposure to intolerable risk. It's a carefully planned and managed process of relocating assets, activities, and sites of cultural significance away from at-risk areas.

A key action to support disabled people is:

- Action 5.1: Pass legislation to support managed retreat: the new law will address the complex issues around retreating from at-risk areas exposed to climate hazards. This includes addressing the unique challenges that managed retreat could cause for disabled people and others with accessibility needs.

## **Embedding climate resilience across government**

The Government will embed climate resilience across all its strategies and policies. The following chapters have actions relevant to disabled people.

The **communities chapter** sets out how the plan will support all communities around New Zealand, including disabled people, to adapt to climate change.

- Action 9.2: Develop the Health National Adaptation Plan: this will prepare the health sector to meet the needs of communities affected by climate change. Key steps include identifying and considering the needs of groups who are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- Action 9.5: Continue with the reform of the health and disability system: this will restructure the system to make it simpler and more coordinated. It will lead to better and more consistent care that is shaped by the voices of consumers, communities and whānau, and stronger partnerships with iwi and Māori.

The **infrastructure chapter** covers sectors like transport and energy. It sets out what we need to do to ensure physical infrastructure, like roads and water supply, can withstand the impacts of climate change.

- Action 3.8: Develop guidance for assessing risk and impact on physical assets and the services they provide: this will ensure the needs of disabled people (and others who may be disproportionately affected by climate events) are considered by infrastructure owners.

### **Future engagement during implementation**

As the plan is implemented, more targeted engagement with different groups, including disabled people, will take place.

Inclusive engagement, particularly with those disproportionately affected by climate change, will help ensure actions lead to equitable climate resilience.

We are taking the same approach with the implementation of the emissions reduction plan and encouraging engaged and active public participation.

## **Find out more**

Read [Aotearoa New Zealand's first national adaptation plan](#).

