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HEALTH & DISABILITY COMMISSIONER  
TE TOIHAU HAUORA, HAUĀTANGA

# Disabled People's Experiences of Health Services: report on complaints to HDC

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Adapted in 2026 by Accessible Formats Service,  
Blind Low Vision NZ, Auckland

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HDC Health & Disability Commissioner, Te Toihau  
Hauora, Hauātanga

# **Disabled People's Experiences of Health Services: report on complaints to HDC**

Disabled People's Experiences of Health Services: report on complaints to HDC

This report is about complaints disabled people have made to the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC) about health services.

We know:

- Aotearoa New Zealand's health system is under a lot of pressure.
- People in the health system work hard to care for everyone and usually do a very good job.
- Disabled people use health services more often than non-disabled people
- Some disabled people have worse health than non-disabled people.

People have the right to good health care. They should be treated with respect and listened to.

When things go wrong, people have the right to complain. Complaints help us understand what needs to change.

For this report, we looked at the complaints disabled people and their supporters made to the HDC between 2023 and 2025.

# What complaints told us

People who complained to HDC about health services said:

- Some disabled people and their supporters were not listened to when they were receiving health care
- Some disabled people did not get health services provided in the right way
- Some disabled people were restrained when they were using health services
- Some tāngata whaikaha Māori (disabled Māori) and Deaf people did not feel their culture or language was respected when they were receiving health care
- Some disabled people did not have accessible information when they needed it
- Some disabled people were not supported to make decisions about their bodies and their health care
- Some disabled people did not get the disability support they needed while they were in hospital
- Some medical staff did not know enough about some types of disability and some disabled people did not get the health care they needed
- Some young disabled people and their families did not get the information or support they needed while they were waiting for a diagnosis.

# Recommendations

We assessed complaints and made the following recommendations:

- Health NZ should create better communication tools for medical staff to use in hospitals, including in emergency and mental health services
- Health NZ should keep working towards stopping all restraint of disabled people in hospitals
- Health NZ should work with disabled people to develop training and guidance about disability for people who work in health services but especially for people who work in emergency departments and mental health services.

Many of the complaints from disabled people about health services also mentioned how not having the right support affects their health care.

We recommend that Health NZ and Disability Support Services (DSS) work together on issues across the health and disability system, including:

- Helping people understand which organisation pays for and provides disability support when disabled people are staying in hospital
- Making sure that disabled people have the right disability support in place when they are ready to leave hospital

- Helping people understand what support disabled people can get from health and disability agencies
- Coordinating care and support for disabled people who have different health and disability conditions
- Providing information and support for young disabled people and their whānau while they wait for a diagnosis.

Health NZ and DSS have told us that they agree with our recommendations. We will work with them to check they are making progress on our recommendations.

## **For more information**

To read the full version of this report:

<https://tinyurl.com/HealthExperiencesDisability>

For information about making a complaint to HDC:

<https://tinyurl.com/YourRightsHDC>

## **Contact HDC**

Email: [hdc@hdc.org.nz](mailto:hdc@hdc.org.nz)

Freephone: 0800 11 22 33, open Monday-Friday 8.30am-5pm

If you are Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or speech impaired, you can use the New Zealand Relay Service ([www.nzrelay.co.nz](http://www.nzrelay.co.nz)) and connect to 09 373 1060.

**End of Disabled People's Experiences of Health Services: report on complaints to HDC.**