

# Foundation North feedback on Whaikaha's Draft Disability Strategy

September 2025



## Introduction

Foundation North was established in 1988 as one of twelve regional community trusts. Our purpose is to enhance lives through responsible guardianship of our investments and focused funding, anchored by our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The value of Foundation North's funds under management on 31 March 2025 was over \$1.79 billion, with almost \$1.3 billion returned in grants since our inception to not-for-profit initiatives in Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Tai Tokerau.

## Our interest in this consultation

1. Our interest in this consultation is driven by our communities, who are at the heart of everything we do. We are privileged to occupy an enabling role, with our funding and other support empowering community mahi and projects that make positive differences to our region, both now and for future generations.
2. Our strategic plan is our pathway to the achievement of our vision of enhanced lives. We are committed to increasing equity (Hāpai te ōritetanga); enhancing social inclusion (Whakauru mai); regenerating the environment (Whakahou taiao) and enabling community support (Hāpori awhina) across our rohe.
3. For many years we have been contributing to initiatives aiming to enhance the lives of people living with a disability across the region of Te Tai Tokerau and Tāmaki Makaurau. To give insight into the breadth and depth of Foundation North support, over the last three years (FY 2023 to 2025), we have approved funding to disability-related initiatives totaling just over \$10 million (\$10,003,269).

We increasingly work in partnering ways with other funders to co-fund in areas of mutual strategic alignment – this is the case

in the disability space, where we have been pleased to contribute alongside Spectrum Foundation, JR McKenzie Trust and Todd Foundation to enable support of greater scale at regional and national level.

In April 2025, the Foundation joined forces with Le Va, a Pacific-for-Pacific organisation, for the creation of a new devolved funding model, their 'Inasi Fund. We acknowledge Le Va's work in partnership with Whaikaha to ensure Pacific voices and experiences are channeled into policy, particularly their thoughtful mahi in leading out the community consultation for the development of Whaikaha's Atoatoali'o – National Pacific Disability Approach, which we understand will feed into the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

## Our feedback

In providing feedback on Whaikaha's Draft Disability Strategy, we do so not from a position as subject matter experts, rather as allies with individuals and organisations who are – disabled people, and those who advocate with them.

Our feedback is based on considerations we believe are important, and is informed by conversations we have been part of with disability advocacy organisations and co-funders, leading up to and during this consultation process.

We carry their voices into our feedback as we continue to learn what is effective and enabling when supporting and advocating in this space eg. convening networks of common interest, leading from behind to amplify community voices, and action for systems change.

In particular, we tautoko the feedback Spectrum Foundation and Access Matters Aotearoa are contributing into this process.

## We are pleased to note in the Strategy:

- Proactive seeking of community input into the Draft Disability Strategy, and Whaikaha's efforts to consult widely and accessibly
- The inclusion of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a Principle of the Strategy, further we would like to see Te Tiriti o Waitangi elevated here, as a lens through which access and diversity can be approached, for all peoples
- The inclusion in the Draft Strategy of the importance of how New Zealand gives effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Suggested areas for greater emphasis

In preparing this feedback, Foundation North has sought to channel the perspective of other funders in the disability space. Together with the JR McKenzie Trust, we are of the broad view that there could be greater emphasis in the Strategy on:

- Action to counter ableism eg. work aimed at shifting mindsets and narratives towards more positively framed notions of disability, as exemplified by the mahi of The D\*List, a national kaupapa supported by Foundation North, JR McKenzie Trust, Todd Foundation and Spectrum Foundation
- Articulating goals and targets for the Strategy to achieve, and mechanisms through which to implement it – as funders we see ourselves as having a supporting and enabling role
- Focus on providing pathways to grow disabled people's leadership and active, open participation in civil society, most importantly where issues affect the community

- Drawing on existing frameworks co-designed between Whaikaha and forums mandated to represent disabled people and their whānau. The Enabling Good Lives Principles are already well embedded and could have been drawn through into Whaikaha's Strategy to authentically lift the voice of disabled people
- Language and clarity - through our engagements with disability advocacy organisations, we are hearing persistent calls for agencies and organisations (including Foundation North) to provide clarity and plain language in their communications. Language matters, and we understand that the meaning of terms like 'control, choice and independence' can take on quite different nuances when applied from a disabled person's perspective.

## Closing remarks

As the community trust for Tāmaki Makaurau and Te Tai Tokerau, Foundation North is privileged to play an enabling role to support our disabled communities. This involves listening actively and well to the wishes and aspirations of disabled people, reducing barriers and holding space for their leadership.

We relish opportunities to work collaboratively with other funders and agencies to bring these wishes and aspirations to life, and value the chance to participate in future public consultation processes.

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