



Thursday, August 13, 2020

Open Letter to:

Prime Minister, Rt.Hon Jacinda Ardern
Minister for Disability Issues, Hon Carmel Sepuloni
Minister for Broadcasting, Hon Kris Faafoi
Director General of Health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Cc NZ news media

The National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Deaf Aotearoa implore you to take immediate steps to ensure the inclusion of the Deaf and hard of hearing population as New Zealand is placed into elevated alert levels following detection and growth of Covid-19 community transmission.

While the mandatory wearing of face masks is imperative to help combat the spread of the virus, it presents a major communication barrier for people who are hard of hearing and rely on lip reading to assist them to fully understand conversations. The repercussions can include a reluctance to get tested if they are not going to understand what is happening, the potential for missing important information – and an impact on their mental health.

The Government is staging regular health updates, and while this includes NZSL interpreters, it does not provide suitable support for the thousands of others who do not use NZSL. We feel this is marginalisation, and will lead to heightened levels of distress due to isolation.

NFDHH and Deaf Aotearoa strongly believe it is imperative that closed captions are provided at all national media briefings, and that the Government requires all news outlets to provide closed captions on their Covid-19 broadcasts – irrespective of whether it is a scheduled bulletin. This will ensure the hard of hearing community is fully informed – even if watching bulletins through social media channels such as Facebook live services, or through OnDemand TV platforms.

Much of the hard of hearing community is excluded when reporters are wearing masks while interviewing others wearing masks, as the content is not supported by closed captions. NFDHH conducted a survey in 2018 that revealed that 68.3% of people with hearing loss relied on closed captions when watching television or streaming services.

We also ask that special mention is made in an upcoming briefing, where either the Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern or the Director General of Health, Dr Ashley Bloomfield, makes specific

reference to the 880,000 New Zealanders with hearing loss, and to ask mask wearers to speak clearly at all times.

Similarly, if placing print advertisements as you did in the Level 4 lockdown, we ask that you reference the specific needs of those with who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

New Zealand proudly leads the charge in terms of the pro-active way the Government and Ministry have front-footed the pandemic, there is also an opportunity to be a world leader is how we address Covid for those who are Deaf or hard of hearing – by providing mechanisms to communicate their needs when interacting with people wearing masks.

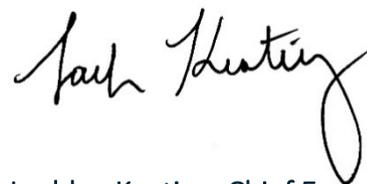
NFDHH has a “buddy card” that alerts people to the person’s hearing loss, and can provide the file to be printed and made available at places where the public will be – such as on public transport, airports, Covid-19 testing stations, supermarkets etc to assist with essential workers understanding the needs of our community, and those with hearing loss being able to seek support in a simple yet effective way.

Deaf Aotearoa has established a Covid-19 Hotline for Deaf people who use NZSL to ensure the Deaf community can have queries answered in NZSL and are working closely with government agencies to ensure essential information is translated into NZSL and accessible for the Deaf community.

Sincerely,



**Natasha Gallardo, Chief Executive
National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing**



**Lachlan Keating, Chief Executive
Deaf Aotearoa**