

Community Providers and Disability Sector Guidance

Context

The focus of community providers and the disability sector is to support access for all people to testing services by enabling expanded access to, and acceptability of, COVID-19 testing services within Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly, those in difficult to reach areas (such as isolated or rural communities).

Barriers to access and disincentives

There are a range of barriers and disincentives to testing access and uptake. These are both perceived and real, across diverse population groups including Māori, Pacific and disabled peoples.

Continuing to identify and understand these barriers will support decisions and actions aimed at enhancing more equitable and widespread national access to COVID-19 testing across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Barriers and disincentives to testing vary by population groups, location, and type of testing modality, but may include:

- perceived need to test: self-assessment of severity or likelihood of COVID-19 or other viruses
- the process: expectations and experience of discomfort, inconvenience of isolating/staying home after testing
- financial: perceived and real costs of testing/visiting primary care facilities (getting to and from an appointment, the appointment itself, isolation after PCR testing or positive COVID-19 test result, lack of sick leave arrangements, financial hardship);
- visa status: new migrants, bridging and temporary visa holders may not realise they are eligible for free testing; and
- access for disabled people to get information on the time and method of testing, physical access to testing and health facilities, access to adequate transport and health facilities, and sensory environments.

The following sections provide guidance for community providers and for all providers when supporting our disabled community.

Community providers - Testing and Supply services

Community providers supply RAT kits and services for those who are unable to complete a test themselves. They also provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks and wipes, when available, throughout Aotearoa. The names and locations of community providers can be found on [healthpoint](#).

Community providers (including local Iwi and Pacific leadership groups) must be included in the design of local and regional testing services.

This will be achieved through collaboration and understanding the local community context, which will in turn support the needs of the whānau and communities by having optimal testing strategies in place. This approach will support better outcomes for these communities. Further information can be found on: [Inspiring Communities](#)

For information on obtaining RATs, follow this link [How to get RATs](#)

Disability community supporting access and care

Close engagement with disabled people, their representative organisations and whānau, Whaikaha along with providers, local advisory groups, carers, and support providers will provide advice on how national, regional, and local testing providers can best support the needs of disabled people and their whānau.

When testing disabled people, their access and support needs should be considered. Testing sites should use a universal design approach that reduces and/or eliminates the need for reasonable accommodation. For example, a universal design approach to a testing centre could involve step-free access to the main entrance of the building. No stairs or steps would mean that people with physical impairments as well as those pushing pushchairs and prams will be able to access and enter the testing centre. Community provider services which support RAT and access to supplies a tailored approach to testing for specific to disabled people, to enable accessible testing.

Service level

Due consideration should be given to ensuring inclusive testing environments that meet accessibility needs of disabled people and their whānau.

Service providers should consider the following strategies to ensure that COVID-19 testing is accessible to disabled people:

- information – there is a range of accessible resources to assist disabled people in improving their understanding of testing process and requirements
- lay-out of facilities – that consideration is given to the following:
 - *Booking* – information on the testing site and accessibility options to enhance the booking process
 - *Signage* – sufficient and clear, simple, and visible signage for finding one's way (large font, high contrast colours, and non-glare finish)
 - *Parking* – meets/exceeds standard parking accessibility requirements (including drop-off areas and covered seating for pick-ups)
 - *Entry* – clear and easy access to building and via doorways (non-slip surfaces with handrails and resting places if a long distance to entrance)
 - *Seating* – sufficient seating, with options to sit out of direct sunlight
 - *Lighting* – adequate lighting throughout
 - *Sensory considerations* – minimise stimuli/ offer a quiet space for people to sit
 - *Space* for disability assistance dogs, and comfort/guide animals; and
 - *Front-line staff* are trained to appropriately engage with disabled people, identify any accessibility issues, and support access.

Individual level

The following due consideration should be given to support disabled people in full access to testing services.

Communication

Communication considerations include:

- Talk directly to the person in a respectful and empathetic manner
- Ask if assistance is required – if yes, ask what type of assistance
- Provide sufficient time to explain the process, and respond to any potential anxieties
- Ask about the preferred method of communication (interpreter, gestures, signs, sounds, symbols, pictures etc.)
- Respectfully check if this information has been understood
- Check the process for receiving test results (texting, phone call, contact to a third party etc.) and the associated required support in place, e.g. whānau member, support person or carer; and
- Ensure that there is understanding of the actions to be taken before and following the result.

Support networks can identify and acknowledge whānau, carers, and support people as a valuable resource, and may be able to provide information on how to best support testing for the disabled people.

Community settings and gatherings

Community providers (Iwi, Māori, and Pacific-led groups) will be prioritised in local and regional tactical approaches. Collaboration and acknowledgement of community context will ensure that the needs of whānau and communities are central to the response. This approach will provide better outcomes for these communities based on a range of experiences by Māori (Māori in Tamaki Makaurau ([Māori Covid-Impact Report.pdf \(imsb.maori.nz\)](#)) and [the Northland Outbreak \(Nov 2021\)](#)) and Pacific people ([the AOG Church of Samoa cluster \(Oct 2021\)](#)).

During the period of high transmission, community testing strategies may be incorporated into a localised response to protect Māori, Pacific, and other priority population groups and their whānau.

Community groups and event planners should consider

- pre-event asymptomatic screening where a negative RAT result is required before attending, noting a single negative RAT result may not have detected the virus early in COVID-19 infection. Nor will it detect other important transmissible viral illnesses, but it may help to reduce the chance of significant spread at the event. To reduce the risk of viral spread, whānau should not attend events when unwell.
- providing masks
- public health messaging before the event - advising to stay at home if unwell, and conduct a RAT (provide details on obtaining RATs and locations of community provider testing sites).