

10/12/2024

Communications Policy  
Building, Resources and Markets  
Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment  
Hīkina Whakatutuki  
PO Box 1473  
Wellington 6140

## **Submission on: Moving towards a financially sustainable mail service**

Tēnā koe

Age Concern New Zealand (ACNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on proposed changes to NZ Post's minimum obligations under the Postal Deed of Understanding to move towards a financially sustainable mail service.

We are pleased to see acknowledgement in the Discussion Document about the importance of the mail service, particularly for “New Zealanders who do not have reliable access to broadband, are at risk of digital exclusion, rural communities and older people” (pages 5 and 6).

Age Concern New Zealand's feedback is focused particularly on the impact of proposed mail service changes for older people, a growing and increasingly diverse population group. Age Concerns focus on older people means that along with using email and social media we do use mail services, including for our fundraising campaigns.

### **About Age Concern New Zealand**

---

Age Concern New Zealand is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to support older people, their friends and whānau. We have 29 local Age Concerns operating in 40 locations throughout the country and a national office based in Wellington.

Our strategic goal is:

*Every older person feels connected, has positive choices and can age well.*

Our values of Dignity. Wellbeing. Equity and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do.

Our core services include advocacy and public awareness, social connection, health promotion, elder abuse and neglect prevention, and providing support through expert information, advice and referrals.

## Introduction

---

1. There are a growing number of people aged 65 years and older in Aotearoa New Zealand.
  - a. Within ten years the over 65 population is expected to reach 1.2 million, with the over 85 age group being the fastest growing. <sup>1</sup>
  - b. Over 65s are also increasingly diverse with Māori, Pasifika and Asian older populations growing at a faster rate than European / Pakeha seniors. Aotearoa also has increasing numbers of Middle Eastern, Latin American and African older people.
  - c. Older New Zealanders are over-represented in the group of people who still rely on postal services, for both sending and receiving mail.
  - d. An increasing number of people aged 65 and above live alone. Within 10 years, those 65+ are predicted to make up 55% of all people living alone.
  
2. Older people are more likely to be digitally excluded than other adults, even though they are increasingly using digital and online tools, particularly since the covid-19 pandemic and the withdrawal of cheques. However, The Office for Seniors states that <sup>2</sup>
  - a. 25% of those 65+ do not have access to the internet; and this increases to over 35% of people aged 75+.
  - b. Close to 20% of 60- to 69-year-olds do not feel confident using digital devices, this increases to over 30% for those aged 70+.
  - c. About 33% of 65-69 lack essential digital skills, this increases to 50% for 70–79-year-olds, and 79% for over 80-year-olds.
  - d. As people age, they may develop co-morbidities and conditions that mean they are no longer able to use the online skills they have previously enjoyed.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://officeforseniors.govt.nz/better-later-life-strategy/> po

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.officeforseniors.govt.nz/>

## Our comments:

---

1. We understand the need for the mail services to be sustainable but also consider that **universal delivery of mail throughout Aotearoa is a public good**. As such, this service must be maintained at a functional as well as sustainable level.
2. **Rural and provincial areas must not be further disadvantaged** if deliveries per week are reduced, and the minimum number of postal outlets is reduced from 880 to 500. Older people are over-represented in rural New Zealand, and the proportion is growing faster than in urban areas. Approximately 25% of Māori live in rural areas compared to 20% of NZ Europeans, 7% Pasifika and 5% Asian. Almost a third (32%) of those who live in the most remote areas of Aotearoa are Māori.<sup>3</sup> Given that Māori statistically have poorer outcomes across dimensions such as health, life expectancy, income, education, and employment etc, we must ensure postal changes do not worsen current inequities, especially regarding access to services.
3. **We do not support the proposal for NZ Post to convert existing delivery points into communal points at a rate of up to 5% per year.**

This proposal assumes that everyone has the mobility to be able to travel from their home to a more distant location, for example, a communal point. This would penalise older people and all people with disabilities which is unacceptable. Increasing age comes with increasing rates of disability and health need in the over 65 age group. **Forty-six percent have mobility problems, 28% agility problems, 11% have sight issues and 10% have trouble remembering.**<sup>4</sup> Among over 75-year-olds, 21% have ischemic heart disease, 11% have diabetes, 52% have arthritis and 15% have a mood or anxiety disorder. Collecting their own mail enables older people to live independent lives and to age in place. If older people are required to rely on others to collect their mail this impinges on their right to privacy and places them at risk of elder abuse.

We are aware that health professionals literally set “walking to the letterbox” as a physical target for older people with mobility issues. We are concerned that older people and people with disabilities would be the most impacted by the proposed changes.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://nzmj.org.nz/journal/vol-135-no-1565/the-long-road-to-good-care#>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.tewhātuora.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Health-status-reports/HNZ-TWO-Health-Status-Report\\_FULL.pdf](https://www.tewhātuora.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Health-status-reports/HNZ-TWO-Health-Status-Report_FULL.pdf)

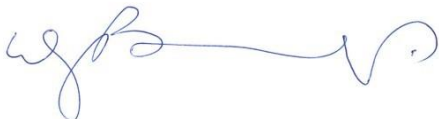
4. We note that specialist medical appointment notifications and some banking documents are always sent by mail rather than by email. It will be important for reduced mail deliveries per week to **not hinder people receiving urgent mail in a timely manner**.
5. It is essential to maintain mail service delivery at sufficient levels to ensure that posting physical mail does not become so discouraged that it extinguishes that behaviour and expectation. Online services of all kinds are convenient and cost effective, however they are also more prone to scams and cyber attacks. Older people, along with others, are aware of the risks posed by the internet and online services and act accordingly to reduce their risk. **Protecting the postal mail service is a positive alternative now and into the future.**

### Closing comment

---

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our feedback on the proposed changes to move towards a financially sustainable mail service. We would also be happy to meet to discuss our comments further.

Nāku Noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen  
Chief Executive  
Age Concern New Zealand