

Halberg Language Reference Guide

The Halberg Foundation appreciates the ongoing efforts by New Zealanders, including the media, to promote and increase awareness of disabled people, disability sport and athletes. We are also aware that the correct disability language may be unclear.

We have produced this reference guide to assist when you are writing or talking with and about physically disabled people in New Zealand.

We don't suggest that this is definitive as the disability space is constantly evolving however we hope this guide proves valuable to you. The Halberg Foundation's vision is for an inclusive New Zealand and we appreciate your support in positively affecting the way New Zealanders think, feel and behave towards disabled people in general.

For more information about the Halberg Foundation go to www.halberg.co.nz

Halberg uses	Instead of	Description
Athlete Para athlete	Suffers from Afflicted with The disabled The blind Deformed Spastic Handicapped Invalid Crippled	All athletes in New Zealand from grassroots through to elite level are athletes first, so where possible, simply use athlete. A distinction does not always need to be made between a disabled athlete and an athlete. A Para athlete is a person with an eligible impairment who participates in Para sport. Specifically, the term is used for Para athletes who have not yet competed at a Paralympic Games.
Non-disabled Able-bodied	Normal Healthy	No one term has universal agreement, both are currently in use.
Wheelchair user Uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair bound	A wheelchair provides mobility and not restriction.
Blind Vision Impaired	Totally Blind Fully Blind	A blind person has no functional vision at all while a person with a visual impairment has some functional vision.
Significant impairment	Severe impairment High needs Severely disabled	A person's impairment may be significant while 'severe' is a term used to describe the medical implications of their impairment. A person should be described as having a significant impairment and not a severe impairment.
Non-verbal	Mute Dumb	Unable to speak.
Deaf Hearing impaired	Totally deaf	A deaf person has no functional hearing at all while a person with a hearing impairment has some functional hearing.
Short statured person Little person	Dwarf Midget Vertically Challenged	Midget or dwarf is outdated slang. Dwarfism is the medical term to describe the condition but the person is not a dwarf.
Person with a spinal cord injury	A paraplegic	A person should not be defined by their impairment or medical condition i.e. a person has paraplegia they are not a paraplegic.
Amputee	Stumps	Person with an amputation.
Acquired impairment	Disorder Defect	An impairment caused by an event/accident after birth rather than as part of a genetic or congenital impairment.
Congenital impairment	Birth defect Birth disorder Deformity	An impairment that is present at or before birth.



Some tips for referring to or communicating with a person with a physical disability:

Always check with the person as to how they like to be described when talking or writing about them. In the first instance, refer to someone as a person, not by their disability.

Assistance:

- If you feel a situation requires it, always offer assistance; keeping in mind it may not always be accepted.
- Your help may not be required but never feel awkward about offering. It is perfectly polite and acceptable to do so.
- If your assistance is declined on one occasion, do not be offended or put off asking in the future.

Communication:

- Always speak directly with the person rather than their companion, family member, assistant or interpreter.
- Remember to use your usual manner and speak in your normal tone – a person with a physical impairment does not necessarily have a hearing impairment or learning disability.

Wheelchair users:

- Be aware that a wheelchair is part of a person's personal space so do not lean on it or hold on to it unless the person offered permission to do so.

Behave naturally:

- Shake hands with a disabled person as you would any other person, even if they are wearing a prosthesis or have limited movement of their hand or arm. It is a universal sign of greeting.

Everyday phrases:

- There is no need to feel self-conscious about using everyday phrases as most phrases are perfectly acceptable. Some people who use wheelchairs will say '*I'm going for a walk*'. It is also perfectly acceptable to say to a visually impaired person. See you later' etc.
- If in doubt, ask. If you are unsure of what to do in a particular situation, ask
- When referring to a loss in body function or structure, or activity limitation, the term 'impairment' is now preferred to disability when describing athletes or physically disabled young people accessing sport and recreation opportunities. This shifts the focus more onto the young person's abilities and what they are able to achieve

Long term, the aspiration is that there is no need to use either word – impairment or disability. People who participate in sport are quite simply athletes, or participants. The message participants send every day through their sporting achievements can help bring about social change.

Other references:

In creating this guide the Halberg Foundation consulted official publications from the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), [The World Health Organisation](#), the [New Zealand Paralympic Committee](#), [International Paralympic Committee \(IPC\)](#) and the [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons](#).

1. **Paralympics New Zealand** has produced a [Para sport Terminology Guide](#) which is designed to help media with the language within Paralympic Sport.
2. **Human Rights Commission New Zealand** has a [Guide to Using Disability Rights Language](#). The guidelines have been developed as a practical tool to help when talking or writing to, and about, disabled people.

