



Special Olympics
New Zealand

Special Olympics New Zealand
is Authorised and Accredited by
Special Olympics Inc. for the Benefit of
People with an Intellectual Disability.

8 August 2008

Rt Honourable Helen Clark
Prime Minister
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Prime Minister,

This letter has been sent to you and copied to each Member of Parliament. Special Olympics believe that you and every other Member of Parliament have a responsibility to rectify without further delay a situation that shames New Zealand. This is a bi-partisan issue and we want the support of every Member of Parliament to address it now.

Special Olympics New Zealand condemns the continuing neglect of the health needs of people with intellectual disability in New Zealand. Special Olympics has provided proof of this neglect.¹ A National Health Committee report in 2003 also identified this neglect and asked Ministers to take urgent action. There has been **no action** and the consequences of the neglect are now more serious than ever.

In the United Kingdom last month an independent inquiry into the NHS concluded that:

"For a variety of reasons, including the way society behaves towards them, adults and children with learning disabilities, especially those with severe disability and the most complex needs are some of the most vulnerable members of our society today. They also have significantly worse health than others. The Inquiry has found convincing evidence that people with learning disabilities have higher levels of unmet need and receive less effective treatment, despite the fact that the Disability Discrimination Act and Mental Capacity Act set out a clear legal framework for the delivery of equal treatment."²

The inquiry was triggered after six people died as a result of the neglect. That level of neglect may be happening in New Zealand but hopefully we will not wait until that is confirmed in order to take some action.

Opportunities in education, work, sport and recreation for people with intellectual disabilities cannot be realised if those people cannot see or hear properly or suffer from a number of easily treatable medical conditions.

¹ A copy of Special Olympics 2007 Submission to Government and the related correspondence is available on the Special Olympics New Zealand Website at <http://www.specialolympics.org.nz/documents/SONZSubmissiontoGovernmentFINAL20070620b.pdf>

² http://www.iahpld.org.uk/Healthcare_final.pdf Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Access to Healthcare for People with Learning Disability.

Tests again conducted by Special Olympics New Zealand in May 2008 show the consequences to athletes of this ongoing neglect is worsening because 61% of athletes failed hearing tests. As we have previously informed you, 41% of athletes screened failed hearing tests in December 2005. We have also provided data on hearing, dental health, feet and sight which evidences serious neglect.

You will be aware that New Zealand recently proudly applied for and won the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award saying that: "The steady momentum towards enabling New Zealanders with disabilities to live lives that are the same as other New Zealanders is evident in a transformation of attitudes and systems within New Zealand."

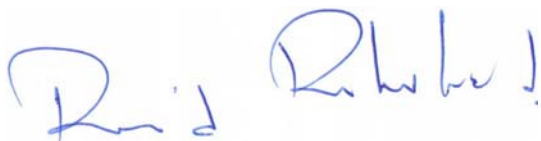
The New Zealand Disability Strategy was said to be "both a part of and a significant driver of a comprehensive, integrated and systemic response to the needs of New Zealanders with disabilities." There is in fact no comprehensive, integrated or systemic response from the state to the health needs of New Zealanders with intellectual disability and there must be one without further delay.

Special Olympics New Zealand and other NGO's are working with SPARC to provide opportunities for participation but our joint efforts in sport and recreation cannot be properly realised unless the health issue is addressed.

Special Olympics has previously made clear the small but important part it can play using its internationally acclaimed Healthy Athletes™ programme to address health needs by training volunteer medical professionals and conducting health screenings in addition to running over 150 events a year.

We are calling on the state to once and for all acknowledge and address this most shameful neglect. If New Zealand is not prepared to act it should hand back the award it so proudly received.

Yours faithfully



David Rutherford
Chairman
Special Olympics New Zealand

cc: Members of Parliament