



NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF  
TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS

*Te Rōpū Kaiwhakamāori ā-waha, ā-tuhi o Aotearoa*

## Summary of the Te Whatu Ora Kōrero on 10 April 2025

On 10 April 2025, NZSTI hosted a national kōrero session to gather feedback from members about Te Whatu Ora's (TWO) decision to withdraw from the Language Assistance Services (LAS) contract. This summary presents the feedback gathered for NZSTI to advocate on interpreter's behalf in the upcoming meeting with TWO.

This summary includes:

<b>Interpreter's reactions to TWO's decision .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Common concerns shared by interpreters .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Feedback from different regions.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What members want NZSTI to push for.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Final reflections .....</b>	<b>5</b>



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### Interpreter's reactions to TWO's decision

- *"The jobs actually became fewer after I got NAATI certified... the same non-qualified interpreters continued dominating the work."* — Interpreter, Auckland
- *"They say they value experience, but they're using it as an excuse to avoid professionalising the workforce."* — Interpreter, Wellington
- *"They want to respect long-term interpreters, sure—but some of them have no training or understanding of ethics."* — Interpreter, National
- *"If NAATI is encouraged, why aren't the rates better for NAATI-certified interpreters?"* — Interpreter, Auckland

### Common concerns shared by interpreters

#### Stagnant or inadequate rates:

- *"The rates haven't been indexed in 18 years."* — Interpreter, Canterbury
- *"It doesn't make economic sense anymore to work at these rates."* — Interpreter, Christchurch
- *"We get paid less going direct than through an agency—and that's after the agency takes their cut!"* — Interpreter, Wellington
- *"They expect you to drive an hour in rush hour, find parking, and do 15 minutes of work for \$20 travel + \$30 for the first hour. That's not viable."* — Interpreter, Auckland

#### Poor job security and inconsistent booking conditions:

- *"Sometimes they cancel a surgery last minute and you're just left with nothing. But you still blocked off your whole morning."* — Interpreter, Manukau
- *"We often don't get paid on time because job sheets are processed manually."* — Interpreter, Canterbury
- *"If you complain about anything, you just stop getting calls."* — Interpreter, Christchurch

#### Members highlighted serious concerns around unqualified interpreters:



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- *“They’re hiring people through Facebook community groups/pages with no testing, no experience.”* — Interpreter, Canterbury
- *“One agency told me they send people with ‘60% proficiency’ because NAATI interpreters are too expensive.”* — Interpreter, National
- *“Refugees told me they had no idea what their interpreter was saying. They felt like victims.”* — Interpreter, Auckland
- *“Some medical staff use Google Translate or ask patients to bring a family member. That’s unethical and dangerous.”* — Interpreter, National
- *“I witnessed a doctor using Siri to communicate with a family while I was there interpreting for someone else.”* — Interpreter, Auckland

*“Children interpreting for their parents in medical settings... it’s happening. That’s traumatising.”* — Interpreter, Christchurch



**Figure 1.** Screenshot from a Facebook community group for the Russian speaking community



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### Feedback from different regions

#### Canterbury DHB

- *“You don’t even need a qualification to work for them. There’s no testing. Anyone who speaks a second language can get hired.”*
- *“They advertised for a Russian interpreter on a local Facebook page”*
- *“There’s no health and safety protocol. No policies. Nothing. If you raise concerns, you stop getting jobs.”*
- *“A coordinator wrote to me saying I shouldn’t apply again. They said I wasn’t the right ‘fit’ because I’m not Asian.” — Pākehā interpreter working with an Asian language, Christchurch*

#### Auckland DHB (ADHB)

- *“The interpreting team is incredibly hostile. I felt like I wasn’t welcome, just tolerated.”*
- *“Doctors and nurses are told interpreting costs a fortune, but we get paid peanuts.”*
- *“\$30 an hour for health, court-level interpreting? It’s a joke.”*

#### Counties Manukau / Waitemātā DHBs

- *“They actually hire some full-time in-house interpreters on \$70k salaries. That’s the dream.”*
- *“They won’t hire new people though, no new opportunities.”*



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### What members want NZSTI to push for

#### Short-Term:

- *“They need to review the rates now. 20 years with no increase? Come on.”*
- *“Minimum one-hour bookings, proper travel compensation, and cancellation protections should be non-negotiable.”*
- *“Stop hiring community members off Facebook. It’s not safe.”*

#### Medium-Term:

- *“They say they’ll stop using LAS, but what’s their alternative? What framework replaces the LAS quality control?”*
- *“They need a national register or database of qualified interpreters. Right now, it’s totally inconsistent across regions.”*
- *“On-demand-interpreting services are needed. I am working at ADHB and WDHB and often get feedback from patients that they need interpreting services when they contact the hospital directly for several reasons such as overdue appointments, cancellation, etc.”*

#### Long-Term:

- *“We want to work with them, not against them. But it has to be a partnership that values professionalism.”*
- *“TWO should co-design interpreter policy with us and implement centralized standards that still allow for regional flexibility.”*
- *“If we don’t raise the bar now, we’ll keep losing our best people. It’s already happening.”*

### Final reflections

While member feedback included frustration, there was also hope that NZSTI’s engagement with Te Whatu Ora could influence improvements. Many expressed willingness to contribute



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to shaping better systems, provided that respect, equity, and safety are at the heart of the changes.

*“We’re not asking for the moon. Just fairness, dignity, and to be treated like the professionals we are.” - Interpreter*