

# Access To Information

*Statement adopted by the Council of the New Zealand Library Association, May 11, 1978.*

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The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa asserts that:

1. Free circulation of information safeguards our democratic society.
2. The members of our society have a fundamental right of access to information.

A basic right of citizens in a democratic society is access to information on matters which affect their lives. At times the interests of the individual have to be subordinated to the interests of the community in such matters as development of energy and mineral resources, industry, town planning, transportation etc. Citizens have a right to be informed of the facts involved and to participate in the decision-making process, e.g. when activities such as massive alterations to the landscape and its use are proposed. The right to be informed, to be consulted, and to intervene is essential and fundamental to the democratic process. The Association recommends that web based information should comply with W3C guidelines (1). <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT>

3. Equally, members of our society have a right to privacy and to protection from misuse and exploitation of information.

A balancing right to that of access to information is that of the community as a whole, and of its members, not to suffer from the misuse and exploitation of the freedom of access to information. There is a growing trend to store information relating to individuals in centralised computer data bases. This undoubtedly facilitates the activities of administration, law enforcement, commerce, and industry, but citizens must be assured that information relating to them is not detrimental to their interests through inaccuracy or through exposure to the scrutiny of those who have no proper interest in it.

4. It is a basic function of democratic government to ensure and balance these at times contradictory rights: that citizens are not denied access to information and that their privacy is protected.

Those who govern must ensure that citizens are not impeded in access to information touching themselves as individuals or as members of the community, and that they are protected from inaccuracy and improper exploitation of information.

5. Information providers should demonstrate a commitment to responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi. Staff providing information should be familiar with basic protocol and tikanga and have some understanding of te reo Māori.
6. Libraries, and particularly public libraries, are prime agencies for the dissemination of information. Librarians have a duty to acquire, organise, and provide access to information freely to the communities they serve.

The basic aim of library services is the acquisition, organisation, and circulation of information. Librarians have a duty to fulfill this aim, particularly as it relates to the collection, organisation, and circulation of information on matters which affect individual members of the community or the community as a whole. The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa

supports all measures which will improve the ability of libraries to serve as public access points for information.

7. Funders of information providers should provide adequate financial support to ensure that the special needs of disabled people, when accessing information, are met.
8. Government agencies – national and local, Parliament, State Departments, public corporations, and other authorities – have a duty to make reports and other documents widely available for consideration by all citizens free of charge. The key way of doing this is to use the existing nationwide network of public libraries, which are open for all to use. It is not enough to send a selection of government publications to some libraries weeks after they have been released. If the public is to participate meaningfully and effectively, there must be quick and complete supply of new laws, reports and documents to public libraries as soon as they become available. Citizens requiring this type of information should not have to rely solely on news media reports, especially if they live outside Wellington.
9. The Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa recognises that it may be difficult at times to reconcile these principles of access to information and protection against the misuse of that access, but it insists that the right to be informed should be the chief consideration.
10. This statement should be read in combination with other Statements of the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa on Intellectual Freedom, Confidentiality of Library Records, and Displays in Public Libraries.

**Footnote 1.** The guidelines discuss accessibility issues and provide accessible design solutions. They address typical scenarios that may pose problems for users with disabilities such as vision, hearing, physical disability, etc.