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Plea from deaf community

WELLINGTON: The National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing is concerned people with hearing loss are being discriminated against and their needs overlooked in the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The organisation has teamed up with Deaf Aotearoa to urgently lobby the Government, ministers and the Ministry of Health to ensure inclusion of the deaf and hard of hearing communities in its approach to Covid-19.

National Foundation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing chief executive Natasha Gallardo said the communities were overlooked in the first lockdown and nothing had changed.

"We are still here asking to be listened to. It is really disappointing," she said.

The foundation and Deaf Aotearoa have sent letters to

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and senior ministers Carmel Sepuloni and Kris Faafoi, outlining their concern.

Ms Gallardo acknowledged the Government's recommendation to use face masks was imperative to help stop the spread of the virus, but she believed it presented a major communication barrier for the people who relied on lip reading for communication.

"As well as this, the outside of prime-time news bulletins are not required to have closed captions, so they fail to meet the needs of the deaf," she said.

Ms Gallardo said the foundation was calling on the Government for closed captions for all Covid-19 briefing sessions, New Zealand Sign Language interpreters at testing stations, and captions in places where public service announcements were played. — RNZ