



23 MAY 2016



Dear

On 31 March 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *In the past year, starting 31st of March 2015, how many benefit recipients with disability assistance have been penalized for not handing in a medical certificate by a due date?*
- *How many provided a medical certificate within a week of the deadline?*
- *What was the penalty of this lateness and how widely was the penalty implemented?*
- *Broken down by type of disability, broadly physical or mental*

Thank you for your collaboration with the Ministry on 7 April 2016 via both phone and email to refine your request to:

- *The number of individuals who have had their benefit expire due to a medical certificate expiring.*
- *The length of time between benefit expiry and reinstatement, broken down as one week, one to two weeks, and over two weeks.*

Jobseeker Support is a temporary benefit paid for up to 52 weeks while clients look for work, are in training for work or unable to work due to a health condition, injury or disability. If a client still requires Jobseeker Support after 52 weeks they will be asked to complete the "52 week reapplication process".

Clients who receive Jobseeker Support on the grounds of a health condition, injury or disability, must meet certain medical qualifications. As such they are required to regularly produce a current medical certificate which confirms their medical eligibility. If a new medical certificate is not provided before the expiry date of a current medical certificate, the Jobseeker Support will cease. If the medical certificate is not received within eight weeks of the benefit ceasing, or the client does not make contact to indicate they wish to be available for full-time employment, the Jobseeker Support will automatically cancel.

I can advise you that the number of Jobseeker Support benefits cancelled in 2015 for the reason "Lack of Medical Coverage" was 6,574. These clients may have moved to another more appropriate benefit, such as Supported Living Payment or may no longer need a benefit as they returned to work.

The table below shows that 54 per cent of beneficiaries who have a medical certificate expire resume benefit in a week or less (and are therefore unaffected financially as benefit is paid in arrears). 30 per cent of beneficiaries resume their benefit in 1-2 weeks and only 16 per cent take longer than two weeks. In addition the number of benefits cancelled for the reason "Lack of Medical Coverage" was

6,574 this is only 3 per cent of the combined total of benefits cancelled and resumed due to medical certificates expiring.

The table below shows the majority of clients have had a Jobseeker Support benefit resumed within one week of it expiring due to a lack of medical coverage. In such cases the client will most likely not experience any interruption of payments due to the benefit being paid in arrears.

Resumed Jobseeker Support benefits that expired for the reason "Lack of Medical Coverage" in 2015

Period in which the benefit was resumed	Number	Percentage breakdown
Up to 1 week	114,180	54
1-2 weeks	63,626	30
Over 2 weeks	34,531	16
Total	212,337	

Note

This is a count of benefits resumed not clients, a client may have a benefit resumed more than once in a year.

It is pertinent to note that there may be some occasions where a client may delay the return of a Medical Certificate for various reasons including illness. Any client of the Ministry of Social Development can nominate another person or organisation to officially act on their behalf for specific services and functions. Further information on this can be found on the Ministry website:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/brochures/appointment-of-agent-factsheet.html

In addition, it is worth noting that to avoid hardship, medical coverage may be extended for a short time beyond the benefit expiry date if there is good reason for the delay in producing the medical certificate.

In situations where clients need financial support to visit a doctor hardship assistance is available, this is assessed on a case by case basis.

We are not able to provide you with the number of clients receiving Supported Living Payment who have had a Medical Certificate expire as this is not recorded in a way that can be reported upon. This information is held in notes on individual files.

The Ministry does not report on a Disability Allowance which has stopped due to an expired medical certificate. Disability Allowance is a supplementary benefit. It expires in conjunction with a main benefit – because of this the Medical Certificate expiry may be for the benefit i.e. Job Seeker Support with a medical exemption, not for the Disability Allowance.

In order to provide you with the information you are seeking with regards to the Supported Living Payment and Disability Allowance, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files and any data provided would be approximations and therefore not robust. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your requests given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. We therefore intend to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public. We will do this by publishing this letter on our Ministry of Social Development website. We will however delete all your personal details and will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

I hope you find this information regarding Jobseeker Support and Medical Certificates helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ruth Bound'.

Ruth Bound
Deputy Chief Executive, Service Delivery