



20 NOV 2017

Dear

On 4 October 2017 you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information regarding the mental health of Work and Income clients.

On 6 October 2017, that part of your request which relates to the number of Ministry clients who have committed suicide was transferred to the Office of the Chief Coroner, as this information is more closely connected with the functions of that office.

For the sake of clarity, I will address each of your questions in turn.

- *How many Work and Income payments were discontinued as a result of a death being suicide-related?*

Suicide is a serious concern for New Zealand communities, with around 500 New Zealanders taking their own lives every year, and many more attempting suicide. The Ministry is aware of the scale of this issue and this awareness informs all aspects of the Ministry's work. For example, Work and Income staff are being trained to help them relate to clients experiencing mental distress or mental illness.

There is also significant evidence showing that getting people into employment is a protective factor to reduce the risk of suicide. This adds to the importance of the work done by the Ministry to assist vulnerable people into stable and appropriate employment. The Work to Wellness service, for example, works with clients who have a diagnosed mental health condition to provide coaching and mentoring; job search services; and assistance to help clients into work.

When the Ministry is advised of the death of a client, payments will be discontinued as appropriate. However, the Ministry does not regularly record the cause of death, especially in instances of suspected suicide where a coroner's investigation is required which is unlikely to report its findings prior to the Ministry recording the death. The number of payments that have been discontinued as a result of a death being suicide-related is therefore not known. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as this information is not held by the Ministry and I have no reason to believe it is held by another department, Minister of the Crown, or organisation.

- *How many Work and Income beneficiaries are receiving payments in relation to mental-health treatment?*
- *How much money is being put towards beneficiaries' mental health treatment?*

Support for mental health treatment is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Social Development does not directly fund clients' mental health treatment. While some support provided by the Ministry may be used for mental health treatment, this takes a variety of forms and is not necessarily specifically recorded by the Ministry. Where this information is recorded, it is held on individual case files. In order to provide this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, your request for the number of clients receiving payments in relation to mental health treatment, and the value of such payments, is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

- *How much money is being put towards Supported Living Payments and Jobseeker Support – Health Condition or Disability where the client has an incapacity recorded as 'Psychological or Psychiatric Condition'?*

Jobseeker Support – Health Condition or Disability and the Supported Living Payment are provided to individuals whose ability to work is restricted by a health condition or disability, including a psychological or psychiatric condition. Please note that these payments are made in order to assist individuals in covering their living costs, not the costs of mental health treatment.

The table below shows the Ministry's weekly expenditure on those in receipt of Jobseeker Support and those in receipt of the Supported Living Payment where there is an incapacity recorded as "Psychological or Psychiatric Condition" as at the end of September 2017. Please note that these conditions vary significantly, including stress, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and more.

Benefit	Number of Clients	Total Value Paid
Supported Living Payment	29,334	\$7,947,508.06
Jobseeker Support – Health Condition or Disability	26,668	\$5,767,887.10
Total	56,002	\$13,715,395.16

Notes

- This table includes working age clients only (18 to 64 years).
- Supported Living Payment includes payments to New Zealanders who would otherwise receive the Disability Support Pension in Australia.
- Total value paid is the weekly net benefit amount paid to clients, and does not include any other support the client may receive.

Please note that the number and value of these payments can vary significantly from week to week, and thus this data cannot be extrapolated to provide a meaningful estimate of annual expenditure.

- *How much money is put towards hardship assistance for mental health treatment?*

Where clients have an immediate and essential need for which they require financial assistance, the Ministry may provide hardship assistance in the form of a lump sum payment. These payments include recoverable and non-recoverable Special Needs Grants, Recoverable Assistance Programme payments, or advance payments of main benefits. Further information regarding hardship assistance, including the number of grants and advances provided for health related costs, can be accessed on the Ministry's website here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-

[resources/statistics/statistical-report/statistical-report-2008/hardship-assistance/lump-sum.html](https://www.msd.govt.nz/resources/statistics/statistical-report/statistical-report-2008/hardship-assistance/lump-sum.html).

Information regarding the number of hardship assistance payments which were made for mental health treatment and related costs, and the value of these payments, is held on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service. Please note that where these payments occur they primarily relate to transport and other associated costs as the costs of treatment itself are funded by the Ministry of Health.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request 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.

In addition to the above supports for clients with mental health conditions, the Ministry may also provide the Disability Allowance to individuals where their conditions result in on-going costs. Please note that this is only payable where the costs are not fully covered by another agency, and therefore does not apply where the costs of mental health treatment are covered by the Ministry of Health or a District Health Board. Further information regarding the Disability Allowance is available on the Ministry's website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/disability-allowance.html.

Further information regarding the support provided by the Ministry to clients with mental health conditions is contained in the Ministry's Valuation of the Benefit System for Working-Age Adults as at 30 June 2016. This report is available on the Ministry's website here: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/media-releases/2017/valuation-of-the-benefit-system-for-working-age-adults-2016/valuation-of-the-benefit-system-for-working-age-adults-2016.pdf.

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

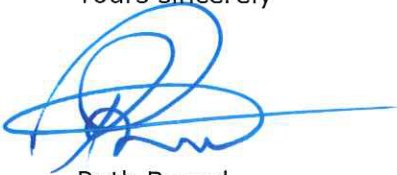
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding support for clients with mental health conditions, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Bound', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ruth Bound
Deputy Chief Executive, Service Delivery