



17 JAN 2019

Dear [REDACTED]

On 16 November 2018, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The total number of Work and Income clients who received the accommodation supplement in the 2017-2018 year.*
- *The total number of rent-bond advances in the 2017-2018 year.*
- *The total number of letting fee payments included in those rent-bond advances in the 2017-2018 year.*

The Accommodation Supplement (AS) is a non-taxable benefit which provides financial assistance towards accommodation costs. It is available for people who rent, board or own their own home and a person does not have to be receiving a benefit to qualify. It is calculated using a formula that takes into account geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income and accommodation type.

The Ministry publishes Benefit Fact Sheets which contain quarterly statistics, including the number of Work and Income clients who received AS, as at the end of each quarter in 2017 and 2018 year. This information can be accessed at: [www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/).

Assistance may be available to help people pay rent or tenancy bond as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source. This hardship assistance includes Advance Payment of Benefit (Advance) or Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAP):

- Advance Payment of Benefit is a recoverable payment available to people receiving a main benefit that require assistance to meet a particular immediate need for an essential item.
- RAPs are recoverable financial assistance to non-beneficiaries to meet essential immediate needs for specific items or services.

Housing Support Products are also available to clients as a set of individual products that aim to address barriers to accessing or retaining housing by meeting needs not covered by other forms of assistance. This can include a Bond Grant, Moving Assistance, and prior to 12 December 2018, Letting Fees Assistance.

Additional information about Housing Support Products is available on the Work and Income website here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/housing-support-products/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/housing-support-products/index.html).

On 12 December 2018, the Ministry stopped providing assistance with letting fees for people with a signed tenancy agreement after this date, because of changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1986 that mean people can no longer be charged a letting fee to rent a property.

For tenancy agreements signed prior to 12 December 2018, the Ministry could assist in relation to letting fees in two ways:

- Advance Payment of Benefit and Recoverable Assistance Payment – payment of letting fees could be included in an advance or RAP for bond where a client cannot find rental accommodation through other sources.
- Letting Fees Assistance – a Housing Support Product that assisted clients who are moving into alternative housing; it was non-recoverable, with the maximum amount payable being one week’s rent plus GST.

The following table shows the number of Advance and RAP payments for bond and rent in advance granted and the amount approved in the 2017/18 financial year, broken down by reason.

Reason	Payment type				Total	
	Advance		RAP		Number granted	Amount approved
	Number granted	Amount approved	Number granted	Amount approved		
Tenancy Bond	35,470	\$28,890,489.50	6,138	\$5,515,172.30	41,608	\$34,405,661.80
Rent in Advance	32,220	\$10,784,000.80	5,277	\$2,001,066.83	37,497	\$12,785,067.63

**Notes:**

- This is number of grants and amounts approved, not number of clients.
- A client may have more than one grant approved for the same reason or for multiple reasons in the period reported.

The Ministry is unable to identify the amount of Advance Payments of Benefit that were made that relate to letting fees as there is no unique code for letting fees. I am therefore unable to advise you about the total number of Advances paid by Work and Income to support the payment of letting fees as it is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such your request for this information 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.

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.

The following table shows the number of Housing Support Product payments for bond and letting fees granted and the amount approved in the 2017/18 financial year, broken down by payment reason.

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number granted</b>	<b>Amount approved</b>
Bond Grant	1,248	\$1,647,475.91
Letting Fees Assistance	390	\$166,111.44

**Notes:**

- This is number of grants and amounts approved, not number of clients.
- A client may have more than one grant approved for the same reason or for multiple reasons in the period reported.

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 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response, 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

Kay Read   
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