



10 NOV 2020

On 1 October 2020 you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Would you be able to let me know how much has been paid, and to how many recipients, of the following benefits to New Zealanders stuck overseas due to COVID-19? (Those who left before March 26 and were still receiving payments on 20 April 2020)*
  - *NZ Superannuation*
  - *Veteran's Pension*
  - *Jobseeker Support*
  - *Sole Parent Support*
  - *Supported Living Payment*
  - *Youth Payment*
  - *Young Parent Payment*
  - *Emergency Benefit (includes Emergency Maintenance Allowance)*
- *Can you confirm this stops on October 20 and there's no extension?*

On 15 October 2020, the Ministry emailed you to clarify your request to which you responded on 19 October 2020 the following:

- *Ideally, I would like data for people/benefits that are still overseas to this day and a total amount paid since March 26?*

I would like to extend my apologies for the delay in responding to your request for information.

Clients overseas who intend to return to New Zealand may be unable to because of the effects of COVID-19. A Special Assistance Programme (SAP) is in place to continue or restart payments for eligible clients until they can return to New Zealand. We could not pay most of these clients under the normal absence rules, so the Ministry created the SAP which enables assistance to be paid at equivalent rates. More information can be found at the following link: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/stranded-overseas.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/stranded-overseas.html).

If a person left New Zealand before 26 March 2020 (the date NZ went into lockdown) and remains stranded overseas due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, there is discretion to consider resuming assistance or continuing payments on a case-by-case basis.

The Special Assistance Programme was originally due to end on 20 October 2020. This has been extended and will now end on 27 April 2021. Any clients who were already being paid Special Assistance are being extended automatically and have been contacted about this. Applications will remain open until the end of the Programme for eligible clients who may not have applied yet.

Under the SAP, most payment types can be paid beyond the usual allowable days of absence from New Zealand while a client is temporarily overseas and unable to return due to COVID-19. These payments include:

- Main benefits, as listed below:
  - Emergency Benefit
  - Emergency Maintenance Allowance
  - Jobseeker Support
  - Sole Parent Support
  - Supported Living Payment
  - Youth Payment
  - Young Parent Payment
- Orphan's Benefit (OB) and Unsupported Child's Benefit (UCB)
- Supplementary assistance (excluding all types of childcare assistance)
- New Zealand Superannuation (NZS) and Veteran's Pension (VP)

In response to your request, please see **Table One**, which provides a breakdown of the number of clients who left New Zealand prior to 26 March 2020 and have not returned, as of 30 September 2020, the number of payments that have been made to these clients and the total amount paid to these clients. Please note, that in many instances benefit payments can continue to be paid for a certain period while a person is absent from New Zealand and this will depend on a number of factors such as the type of payment they receive, their individual obligations, the reason for travel and the length of the period of absence. The total amount paid in the table below therefore includes both the client's regular benefit payments, that would have usually been paid to them while absent from New Zealand, and their continued benefit payments made under the SAP.

**Table One: Number of clients who have left New Zealand prior to 26 March 2020 and have not returned, as of 30 September 2020, the number of payments and the amount provided to these clients.**

Unique clients	Number of payments	Total amount paid
3,135	102,633	\$28,043,348.10

Notes:

- The total amount of benefit or pension includes the basic benefit rate and supplementary payments.
- These payments also include payments to a partner.
- Some clients may have returned after 30 September 2020.

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
- 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. 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 regarding New Zealanders still receiving their benefit payments as their return is delayed due to COVID-19, 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



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