



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Dear

On 28 August 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- 1. How many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reduction cases were reviewed and what were the outcomes from the FACE Taskforce commissioned by Minister Sepuloni?*
- 2. How many outstanding section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reviews are there still to be completed (what is the process for these and the expected timeframe for completing all of the reviews)?*
- 3. How many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 review of decisions have been lodged?*
- 4. Now that there isn't a specialised team working on these reviews, when will they be completed? Over what period?*
- 5. Are the new reviews around section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 being lodged as review of decisions, now that there isn't a specialised team to deal with the reviews?*
- 6. In total, how many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reviews are there waiting to be assessed?*

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

Until 1 April 2020, the benefit received by a sole parent was reduced for each dependent child for whom they did not seek child support, subject to some exemptions. These reductions were first set out in section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964 and later in section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018. In mid-2017, the then Minister for Social Development instructed the Ministry of Social Development to undertake research on section 70A, which eventually led to the repeal of this sanction on 1 April 2020.

Following a report sent to Minister Sepuloni on 26 October 2018 regarding the approach for proactively engaging with Sole Parent Support clients who have a reduction to their benefit under section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964 (now

replaced with section 192, Social Security Act 2018), it was identified that this group may not be receiving full and correct entitlement. As a result, on 7 November 2018, a request was made to broaden our focus to establish full and correct entitlement with clients within this cohort.

On 1 April 2019, the Ministry began a proactive outbound calling campaign to reach 11,355 clients, who had been identified as having a section 192 reduction imposed. The focus of the campaign was to establish full and correct entitlement. A team of 20 experienced staff were assembled from across the country, to complete engagement and reviews with these clients.

For the sake of clarity, I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. *How many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reduction cases were reviewed and what were the outcomes from the FACE Taskforce commissioned by Minister Sepuloni?*

The Ministry forecast that approximately 8,350 individual cases of the identified list would be completed by 31 March 2020. As at 30 June 2020, 8,595 individual cases had been completed. Of these:

- **5,827** clients have successfully been contacted, and the application of section 192 has been reviewed.
- **1,488** clients were uncontactable after five to ten attempts, 304 contact numbers were not valid.
- **1,274** clients no longer met the scope for the proactive campaign, i.e. the client was no longer in receipt of a benefit, or no longer had a section 192 reduction in place
- **6** clients records were historical reviews, 3 clients were contacted and reviewed, while 3 client records required no further actions.

It is important to note, for 55 of the above cases, a Review of Decision (RoD) process was also completed.

2. *How many outstanding section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reviews are there still to be completed (what is the process for these and the expected timeframe for completing all of the reviews)?*

As at 30 June 2020, 2,760 identified cases were not completed. The work stopped and staff were redeployed to support the Ministry's COVID-19 response. Due to increased demand for ongoing financial assistance and housing and employment needs, these cases are now being completed under a business as usual model. Clients are able to approach our contact centres and service centres to request a review of their section 192 case. This provision did not change while the campaign was in place and is available to date.

*3. How many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 review of decisions have been lodged?*

Of the cases identified for the FACE campaign, the Ministry also received RoD applications in 67 cases. 51 of these cases have been resolved, 16 remain unresolved to date.

Apart from these, the Ministry received 263 RoD applications from clients who were not covered by the FACE campaign. As at 30 June 2020,

- 161 were resolved,
- 79 were withdrawn,
- 23 remain unresolved.

*4. Now that there isn't a specialised team working on these reviews, when will they be completed? Over what period?*

The expected timeframe for completing these reviews is unknown due to increased demand for ongoing financial assistance, housing and employment needs. Clients, both current and past, can currently request a review of their section 192 reduction.

*5. Are the new reviews around section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 being lodged as review of decisions, now that there isn't a specialised team to deal with the reviews?*

New requests are to be treated as requests for a Section 304 of the Social Security Act 2018 review, formerly known as a Section 81 of the Social Security Act 1964.

Manager Regional Services and Benefit Review Committee coordinators have been reminded that:

- Every enquiry should be looked at, on a case by case basis.
- These do not need to be treated as Review of Decision.
- Instead, the client's enquiry can be reviewed as per Section 304 of the Social Security Act 2018 (formerly Section 81 of the Social Security Act 1964), this decision will have new review rights.

In situations where the enquiries predate some of the Ministry's records, the Ministry will need to make a judgement call, based on available evidence, keeping in mind the balance of probabilities.

*6. In total, how many section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reviews are there waiting to be assessed?*

As at 30 June 2020, 2,760 were not completed.

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 reviews of section 70A of the Social Security Act 1964/section 192 of the Social Security Act 2018 reduction cases, 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kay Read', is positioned above the typed name.

Kay Read  
**Group General Manager**  
**Client Service Delivery**