



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

7 APR 2021

Dear

On 19 February 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) referencing the data relating to children in emergency housing released in the Ministry's 2019/20 Annual Review, and requested under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Can I please confirm why I was told this information (on children in emergency housing) wasn't available for my OIA?*
- *Also refile the original request, this time for updated information through to 2021?*

On 17 March 2021, you were advised that the Ministry needed more time to provide you with the information you have requested.

Many of the people in emergency housing are vulnerable, have complex situations and high needs. They're often facing circumstances that may make it hard for them to get accommodation in the private sector and may be waiting for public housing.

While other agencies are working to address the lack of affordable housing supply across the country, our role at the Ministry is to ensure that those with no other housing options are supported into emergency accommodation, usually motels.

Emergency accommodation is not meant to be a permanent home and we offer a range of support to our clients to help them find and maintain suitable and sustainable accommodation. As part of this support we are in regular contact with them and we link families with children, and/or individuals with mental health needs in emergency housing with intensive case managers and contracted navigators to help them stay connected with their community, health services and other necessary support agencies.

Our role as an agency is to stay in touch with families, to understand what needs they may have, and to connect families with the wide range of specialist support available through partner agencies in the non-government and government sector, and to help families navigate these services. The support each family may need is different, and some families have their own support networks or may not want support. Our experience is many parents are doing their best in these difficult circumstances.

Your request was initially refused as standard Ministry reporting could not be used to provide the information you requested. As you know, there was information released in the Ministry's 2019/20 Annual Review to the Social Services and Community

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Committee, containing data on children in Emergency Housing. The data used for the 2019/20 Annual Review was operational data. In the past, the Ministry has chosen to publish emergency housing data in line with other official reporting on hardship assistance, however, due to the increased public interest, the Ministry decided to publish operational data, which is at a point in time, or a snapshot, of children in emergency housing for the purposes of the Annual Review. You will note that the Ministry provided information on household composition in emergency housing in your previous response. This was in line with existing Ministry reporting and gave a clear indication of the types of households staying in emergency housing.

To put it clearly, operational data is taken at a point in time or a snapshot, therefore the data is taken from a narrow window and can fluctuate significantly from day to day. Any clients that are entering emergency housing on the day the reporting takes place, will not be counted within the reported snapshot of data resulting in a significant portion of EH SNG clients that will be missed in this method of reporting. Standard reporting is based on quarterly data and thus, provides a clearer indication of the trends and patterns of the emergency housing population. This reporting aligns with the methods used across all government agencies, and is quality assured which ensures the data provided is as accurate as possible.

For the sake of clarity, I will answer the questions from your original request in turn.

- *How many children have been placed in emergency accommodation over the past six months?*

When a client applies for an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG), the client will provide the appointed Case Manager or Housing Broker the total number of adults and children who will likely be staying the emergency accommodation with them. No other information that identifies the relationships of these adults and children to the applicant is recorded for an EH SNG application, nor is confirmation of whether the children and/or adults will be staying in emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG. As mentioned above, EH SNG clients may have complex family or caregiver relationships and it is not uncommon for children of one parent to stay with another family member or there could be scenarios where the same child is recorded in multiple EH SNG applications, (i.e, both parents are in separate emergency accommodation at the same time).

Children may also be counted more than once, as the Ministry are unable to verify if the child/children are included in more than one household living in emergency housing.

The Ministry centrally records the total number of children, and separately, the total number of adults who are likely to be staying in emergency accommodation. This is recorded in the main applicant's EH SNG application.

As identifying information of any adults and children included in the EH SNG application is not required by the Ministry, and we cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation, your request for how many children have been placed in emergency accommodation over the past six months, is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request and the greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

- *How many children have been in emergency accommodation for longer than 3 months or longer than 6 months/ longer than one year?*

In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, we can provide you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children.

Please see **Table One** in the Excel Spreadsheet enclosed, which outlines the number of distinct applications for an EH SNG, broken down by households, households with children, number of children and their duration of stay, as at 31 December 2020.

Please note, **Table One** has been presented as at a point in time. Unlike standard emergency housing reporting, which is based on the date of the EH SNG, operational reporting is based on a point in time, using the recorded check in and check out details of the main applicant. As above, the Ministry cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG.

In addition, please see **Table Two** in the Excel Spreadsheet enclosed, which outlines the number of distinct applications for an EH SNG, broken down by household composition and duration of stay, as at 31 December 2020.

Please note that **Table Two** has been presented with the Ministry's standard emergency housing reporting.

- *In which regions are children staying in emergency accommodation?*

In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, we can provide you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children broken down by Territorial Land Authority (TLA).

Please see **Table Three** in the Excel Spreadsheet enclosed, which outlines the number of distinct applications for an EH SNG, broken down by households, households with children, number of children and TLA, as at 31 December 2020.

Please note, **Table Three** has been presented as at a point in time. Unlike standard emergency housing reporting, which is based on the date of the EH SNG, operational reporting is based on a point in time, using the recorded check in and check out details of the main applicant. As above, the Ministry cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG.

In addition, please see **Table Four** in the Excel Spreadsheet enclosed, which outlines the number of distinct applications for an EH SNG, broken down by household composition and TLA, as at 31 December 2020.

Please note that **Table Four** has been presented with the Ministry's standard emergency housing reporting.

In order to protect client privacy, some values in the tables attached are suppressed and are represented by 'S'. The Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As



such, this information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in the information.

- *What ages are the children staying in emergency accommodation?*

The Ministry cannot provide you with the ages of the children recorded as being in emergency housing, as this information is not recorded at the time of the application. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

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

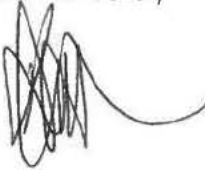
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

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 children in emergency accommodation, 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



Karen Hocking  
**General Manager, Housing  
Service Delivery**