



20 APR 2021

Tēnā koe

On 26 February 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) regional team, requesting the following information:

- *The number of MSD clients in Queenstown Lakes accessing the MSD provided counselling services, along with any breakdown of demographics, number of counselling sessions being accessed per client, and whether these are phone/online face to face?*

The Ministry's regional team forwarded your request to be answered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

On 16 March 2021, the Ministry contacted you to advise that the data contained in the requested information would be suppressed as the data could potentially breach individuals' privacy. The request was subsequently refined to the following:

- *The number of MSD clients that are receiving a Disability Allowance with the reason code being for counselling services, for the Otago District, along with any breakdown of demographics.*
- *The number of MSD clients that are using the phone counselling system (Puāwaitanga) that is provided by the Ministry, in the Queenstown Lakes District.*

Work and Income pays up to a maximum of \$65.36 a week for a Disability Allowance (DA). How much a client receives depends on the extra costs that client has because of his or her disability. As a part of the application for DA, clients are required to provide a Disability Certificate form – which is completed by a health practitioner – along with proof of their on-going disability-related costs (e.g. pharmacy and medical receipts and invoices, electricity bills and petrol receipts.)

A client is obliged to advise Work and Income of any changes in their circumstances that might affect their entitlement to a DA. Furthermore, a case manager may also review a DA to ensure a client is receiving the correct rate of payment. More information about DA can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/disability-allowance.html.

Counselling fees or assistance for transport to counselling may be included in a client's DA if they have a health condition or disability that is likely to last at least six months from when they were diagnosed, require counselling because of their health condition or disability, and their regular ongoing counselling costs are not covered by another agency. Furthermore, they must be seeing an approved counsellor or psychologist.

Generally, a client can apply to include counselling fees or associated travel in their DA for up to 10 counselling sessions, but the Ministry may consider assistance for further sessions with a health practitioner's recommendation, or in exceptional circumstances. More information can be found at the following link:
www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/counselling.html#null

Please see enclosed **Appendix A** which contains the following three tables:

Table One: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by ethnicity.

Table two: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by Age Group.

Table three: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by gender.

The Ministry contracts many specialised service providers, such as Homecare Medical, to partner for greater impact and outcomes. The Ministry works with Homecare Medical, who run the national telehealth services, to offer virtual health and wellbeing services to New Zealanders, including Puāwaitanga.

Puāwaitanga is a free, voluntary, phone and online counselling service available to anybody on a main benefit or at risk of coming on to benefit. It is provided by qualified and registered counsellors. People can self-refer themselves to the service by calling the self-referral number 0800 782 999.

People calling the Ministry's Contact Centres are currently played an introduction message about Puāwaitanga through the interactive voice response messaging system. This is the main way the Ministry lets people know about how to access the service through self-referral.

Puāwaitanga was created to provide support to those who may have barriers to attending traditional face to face counselling services. As the service is self-referred, the Ministry does not have standard reporting on the service. As such the Ministry cannot provide you with information relating to how many clients in Queenstown Lakes District are using the service as the information is not held by the Ministry. As such this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information requested does not exist.

The Ministry, however, does receive monthly reports from Homecare Medical on the number of clients that have been referred to the Puāwaitanga service from the Ministry. Please see enclosed **Appendix B** which shows the statistics that were received from Homecare Medical for February 2021. Further information about Puāwaitanga can be found at the following link: <https://whakarongorau.nz/puawaitanga>.

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. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter 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, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PIP OSGW', is written over the typed name.

Jayne Russell
**Group General Manager
Employment**

Appendix A

Table One: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by ethnicity.

Ethnic Group	Disability Allowances
Māori	9
Pacific Peoples	3
NZ European	60
Other	15
Unspecified	3
Total	87

Table two: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by Age Group.

Age Group	Disability Allowances
20-24	21
25-29	18
30-34	3
35-39	9
40-44	6
45-49	3
50-54	6
55-59	6
60-64	9
65+	6
Total	87

Table three: The number of Disability Allowances with Counselling Services included as a cost for clients in the Otago based Territorial Local Authorities (TLA) as at the end of February 2021, broken down by gender.

Gender	Disability Allowances
Female	69
Male	21
Total	87

Notes for all tables:

- This is a number of Disability Allowances, a client may receive one or more DA.
- A client may be receiving DA for themselves, their partner or a dependent child, in which case they are counted more than once.
- Territorial Local Authority is estimated based on the clients address at the end of the period.
- Please note the ethnicity classification that is used to construct this table does not necessarily align with the current Statistics New Zealand classification of ethnicity. Ethnicity details recorded by the Ministry have been gathered under a varied of classification methods as clients come into contact with the Ministry. The ethnicity data may be self-identified based on an individual's preference or self-construct. While the Ministry collects multiple ethnicities from clients, we only report a unique form of 'prioritised' ethnicity for core benefit data (one ethnic group per person with Māori coming first, Pacific groups second followed by other groups ending with NZ European).
- To protect confidentiality the Ministry of Social Development uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three. The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.