



22 December 2021

Tēnā koe

On 4 November 2021, you emailed Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister of Social Development and Employment requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Since the pandemic began in March 2020, how many Disability Allowances have been cut or suspended per month? Please include the total number of people who have had their Disability Allowance cut or suspended. Please include a monthly financial total for these cuts or suspensions to people's Disability Allowances?*

On 5 November 2021, this request was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) for response as the information you request is more closely aligned with the Ministry.

On 2 December 2021, the Ministry advised you that more time was required to respond to this request. The reason for the extension is that consultations necessary to make a decision on the request are such that a proper response to the request cannot reasonably be made within the original time limit.

Disability Allowance (DA) provides non-taxable assistance to people who have on-going, additional costs because of a disability. To be able to receive DA a client must:

- meet an income test
- have a disability which is likely to last at least 6 months
- have ongoing, additional costs arising from that disability
- be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident, or
- deemed to hold a residence class visa in New Zealand; and
- generally be ordinarily resident in New Zealand.

Further details about DA can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/index.html

When the qualifications described above are no longer met, DA may be suspended or cancelled. The Ministry groups cancellations by the following reason groups:

- Excess Income/Assets
- Left/Ceased Course
- Child Left Care/No Longer Dependent

- Change in Marital Status
- Died
- Transferred to Another Benefit
- Obtained Work
- In Prison
- Left NZ
- Non-Renewal of Declaration/Renewal
- Non-Payment >8 Weeks
- Unspecified
- Other

Please note that when a client's DA is suspended and it is later shown that a client remained eligible for DA for the suspended period, the Ministry will backpay the client for the eligible period and resume the DA if necessary.

Please find attached to this response, **Table One** in **the attached Excel spreadsheet**, which outlines the number of DA cancellations for the period March 2020 to October 2021 broken down by month and cancellation reason.

To satisfy the intent of your request, the table contains cancellations for the reason 'Non-Payment >8 Weeks' which represents cancellations which occurred as a result of a suspension (a pause in financial assistance) for greater than eight weeks. As noted above, a suspended DA which is resumed is backpaid for the period suspended, therefore reporting suspensions in isolation would not accurately represent a decrease in financial assistance for clients.

Please note that during lockdown periods, the Ministry extended the deadlines for which clients had to provide evidence for their DA application or renewal due to the effects of COVID-19. The Ministry recognised that clients would not be able to easily access the resources required to complete their application or renewal, therefore a decrease in cancellations is shown during periods of lockdown, and an increase when lockdowns were lifted, and business returned to usual. These changes were effective during the periods stated below:

Topic	Change description	Date change took effect	Date we returned to BAU
Granting Disability Allowance without medical certificates	Disability Allowance could be granted, and new costs added without an initial medical verification.	Auckland from 28 February 2021 Auckland from 15 February 2021 Auckland from 17 August 2020 20 April 2020	7 March 2021 17 February 2021 30 August 2020 14 June 2020
Verification of Disability Allowance costs	Applicants could provide verbal information about the new cost. They did not need to provide written verification of the costs during this period.	20 April 2020	21 October 2020

Annual reviews (including Disability Allowance)	Annual reviews of client circumstances and income due between 30 March 2020 and 29 March 2021 were extended. This included ACL, confirming your circumstances, DA reviews, review of income and life certificates.	30 March 2020	30 March 2021
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The Ministry is also unable to provide monthly financial totals of DA cancellations and suspensions as the information 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, I refuse this part of your request under section 18(f) of the 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 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 on the Ministry'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 regarding DA suspensions, 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

Natalie Hansen

pp Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**