



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

17 FEB 2021

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

- *All documents and information pertaining to how many people are being specifically case managed at WINZ (we know that everyone is assigned a case manager, but this is different to people who have been told they are case managed because of their high needs).*
- *I would like to know how MSD came to the decision about why people were going to be case managed.*
- *I would like to know what the process is for people who are case managed.*
- *I would like for this information to be broken down by region, ethnicity, gender and age.*

On 23 November 2020, the Ministry contacted you in order to advise you of the need to extend the time available to make a decision on your request to 23 December 2020.

On 16 December 2020, the Ministry contacted you in order to refine the scope of your request, as attempting to provide all of this information would constitute as substantial collation and research. You advised that you were specifically interested in clients who have been identified as receiving significantly higher hardship payments and are therefore being managed by a single case manager within the Intensive Case Management service. Furthermore, you agreed to clarify your request to the following:

- *Key reports, memos and advice pertaining specifically to Intensive Case Management at the Ministry.*
- *The Ministry's criteria around how the Ministry decides who will be under Intensive Case Management.*
- *The process around the way those who are under Intensive Case Management are managed (e.g. What happens at the WINZ offices? Do they need face-to-face-contact?).*
- *Does the Ministry have policies around whether specific groups of people treated differently under Intensive Case Management (e.g. Perhaps Maori and Pacific Islanders, or women)?*

On 22 December 2020, the Ministry contacted you to let you know that we intended to send the information to you by 24 February 2021.

The Integrated Services Case Management (ISCM) programme is a long-standing, more intensive case management service, where clients nationwide with high or exceptional needs, are assigned a dedicated case manager who delivers a personalised service that takes into account the complexity of a client's circumstances. This one-on-one contact with an experienced case manager results in a better understanding of

their needs, and other options for support could be offered. This is to ensure that the circumstances of such clients, who are often involved in more complex situations, are understood in full by the case manager, who can in turn, offer more tailored assistance to meet the client's individual needs. For example, it is important to check the client is receiving all the assistance they are entitled to, including supplementary allowances. As ISCM takes a tailored approach to assisting clients, there is no set process around the way clients are assisted. For example, although face-to-face contact with a case manager can be part of a client's service, this depends on the client's individual needs.

The Ministry identified a cohort of clients (approximately 2,600 clients) that are receiving a significantly higher than average number of hardship payments in the Auckland region, where they have applied for 30 or more hardship payments within a period of twelve months. Hardship payments fit into one of the four following categories: Special Needs Grants, Recoverable Assistance Payment, Advances, and Housing Support Products. Where a client demonstrates an immediate need for an essential service, they may qualify to receive a one-off hardship payment. It was determined that these people would benefit from receiving ISCM.

In regard to this Auckland cohort, clients are streamed to their service based purely on their individual needs and if they have been granted a high number of hardship payments. I can confirm that in regard to this cohort of clients receiving ISCM, the Ministry does not treat clients differently depending on their specific demographic group. Therefore, your request for this information is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as this information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

The Ministry undertook a search for key reports, memos and advice pertaining specifically to ISCM which has been offered to clients that are receiving significantly higher hardship payments in the Auckland region. One document was located that is determined to be within the scope of your request, and is attached to this letter:

- Memo – *Future planning for High Hardship Users in Auckland Regions*, dated 22 November 2019

The Ministry can confirm that the project described in the memo was approved and undertaken. The outcomes of this project were overall considered successful, with many clients being assisted through other products and services available.

Although the one-on-one case management services were suspended temporarily during the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand, it has recently resumed.

Please also note that clients may be streamed into this service for reasons other than being granted a high number of hardship payments.

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 and attachments 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 relating to Intensive Case Management, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kay Read', is positioned below the Māori phrase.

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



**Work and Income**  
Te Hiranga Tangata

*A service of the Ministry of Social Development*

# Memo

**To:** Mark Goldsmith Regional Commissioner Auckland Region

**CC:** Lynda Smardon Sandra Biggs; Meredith Nugent

**From:** Jo Anne O'Connor, Branch Manager; Lynmara Tuisaula Manager  
Regional Services

**Date:** 22 November 2019

**Security level:** IN CONFIDENCE

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## **Future planning for High Hardship Users in Auckland Regions**

**Action:** For Approval 25 November 2019

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this memo is to seek your approval to commission a project and project team to lead, manage and support approx. 2,600 clients requiring case management support services.

### **Background**

Auckland region is divided into three areas; North/West, Central and South. There are 31 Service centres in the region that currently deliver Employment, Financial and Housing.

In addition to the services above, clients can apply for third tier assistance consisting of Special Needs Grants and Advance Payment of Benefits; more commonly known as hardship grants. Clients can easily access these services through their MyMSD account, the Contact Centre, through phone-based case management or a face to face appointment.

- To understand how often clients access these grants and for what reasons, a deep dive of hardship data was recently undertaken. As a result, approx. 4000 clients were identified as having received 30 and more hardship grants in the last twelve months.

In response, Service Delivery National office commissioned further investigations to be undertaken alongside regions, including a plan to engage with immediate effect based on the high number of hardship grants accessed individually.

## Current state

Auckland Region is currently managing two cohorts of client, these are:

- 250 High Users – this cohort is being supported by 15 Integrated Service Case Managers (ISCM'S), each providing 1:1 support. These clients have been identified as having accessed 30 – 99 hardship grants in the last 12 months.
- Top Users – this cohort are made up of the highest users, having accessed more than 100 hardship grants in the last 12 months. These clients are receiving intensive 1:1 support from identified case Managers/ISCM'S in their home sites.
- The work undertaken to date with these cohorts has been primarily investigative i.e. to uncover the underlying causes of the high usage of hardship grants.

## Learnings

Through client engagements, we have gained great insights and rich learnings into the complex needs our clients have. The following examples have been discovered in both face to face engagements and through deep dives conducted on client records:

**Income inadequacy** - The client's outgoings are higher than in their income. This is after full and correct entitlements have been assessed and applied. It is common to find clients are paying multiple fines with other agencies such as the Ministry of Justice or Baycorp, and/or clients have personal loan deductions in place to meet their broader needs outside of the benefit payment.

**Housing** - For some client's emergency housing has been a long-term affair and for others high rental costs demand a high proportion of weekly benefit payments. Also, important to note, many clients spend a higher amount of their benefit payments on ready cooked foods per day as many motels do not have kitchen facilities for clients to cook meals. Nor do they have appliances such as full-size fridges, where clients can store perishable food.

**Fraud** – While only two cases have been referred to the Fraud and Integrity (F&I) team to date, there have been many occasions when staff have discovered 'untruths' through conversations held with clients. Due to the lack of sufficient evidence to refer on to F&I. Case managers generally work through these discrepancies directly with the client until a true and accurate picture of their circumstances is established and confirmed. From here a correct entitlement assessment is completed.

**Opportunity** – Many clients have been found to be taking advantage of the multiple channels available to them, to access hardship grants. By dealing with different staff i.e. case managers or customer service representatives each time, they tend to use the same story week after week to access support. This is exacerbated by the current level of demand.

**Issues with the CMS system** - There are generally very good notes re the previous decisions but when it may take 20 seconds or more to move between each CMS "page", the time factor is huge. i.e. a minimum of three pages must be opened for each grant.

**High and complex needs** - There are many genuine stories behind the reason's clients are in need. They include but are not limited to: Health, Trauma i.e. Domestic/Family Violence, Sexual Violence, Gangs, Addictions, Children in care, out of care etc.

## Managing hardship assistance in Auckland

National office recently released the total numbers to each region. As at today, Auckland has an additional 2,200 high user clients requiring engagement, bringing Auckland's total to 2457 clients.

We know South Auckland will inherit approx.1500 of these clients into their area. North West and Central will inherit approx. 450 clients each.

The distribution of hardship users across region is:

South	1531 Clients
Central	492 Clients
North/West	434 Clients

The case manager FTE allocation across the three Auckland Regions totals 569, and is distributed as:

South	222 Case Managers
Central	181 Case Managers
North/West	166 Case Managers

Having this information alongside current capability and capacity of staff, sites and areas, it is imperative the region look beyond the Integrated Services Case Manager (ISCM) staffs used in the investigative stages. We are seeking to implement a case management support service model across all 31 sites.

Given the levels of complexities identified in the learnings, the media interest of hardship grants overall, the continued presence of Impact Days by Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAP) in South Auckland sites and the recent recruitment of a new Regional Director into South Auckland; we are seeking to commission a dedicated team to lead, manage and support Service Centre Managers and site teams to successfully establish initial engagement with this cohort, then to implement case management support services.

The proposed team will consist of:

- 1 x Regional Director
- 2 x Regional Leads

Please note Regional Director Lynda Smardon, Manager Regional Services Lynmara Tuisaula and Branch Manager Jo Anne O'Connor are already leading, managing and supporting this work. Their combined knowledge of the hardship legislation and policy, best practices and personal leadership has led to purposeful and proactive meets with the Service Centre Managers and Service Centre Trainers groups.

The aim:

- to equip sites and case managers with resources that encourage better, broader quality conversations with clients
- to connect clients with other providers and services where needed
- to apply discretion with a greater level of confidence
- to reach decisions and outcomes with clients that are right for their situations

For North/West and the Central areas, work is underway to assign and engage each of their 400 high user cohort.

For South Auckland, a broader plan has been discussed with Regional Director Nephi Baucke to determine the volume of clients they are able to assign and engage, given the current FTE capability and capacity in this area is made up of new staff under training and development as a result of recent recruitment, existing FTE working at full capacity to meet operational excellence outcomes as well as the day to day appointments and transactions.

There is also shortfall of current forecast FTE in South Auckland. To mitigate this, an additional 25 temporary staff will be hired to support transactional demands, including hardship grants, that increase at this time of the year, through to the new year.

Please note, we have less than 4 weeks to implement this case management model in place.

Also, important to factor in:

The Christmas/New Year period is traditionally a time of increased hardship assistance;

- school holidays seeing many children moving to parents without the financial support
- school uniforms and stationery costs
- additional expenses (not necessarily immediate or essential but none the less real)
- We know from the pilots to date that clients in EH not only receive 1 EH-SNG grant, but generally also receive:
  - Additional food in recognition that cooking facilities in EH are not conducive to cheaper eating
  - Additional Petrol / Hop Card top ups / are required to travel to fulfil their obligations to search for private rental accommodation.

### **Recommended approach**

It is expected every client in this cohort will be engaged with through the case management support service, the only way to achieve this is to ensure the following knowledge and practices are a focus of all staff:

- clients in the 100+ group are already case managed 1:1 with regional oversight
- as clients move into this group they will be assigned a case manager
- clients in the current 250 cohort will be transitioned to the case management support service
- will need to understand what is required to deliver effective case management; and where appropriate connect clients with employment and community wrap around services
- Each Service Centre Manager (SCM) will attend an introduction workshop and will receive a resource pack of tools they can use themselves, as well as hand out to staff on site
- align with Operational Excellence
- staff will receive weekly reporting through Briefcase, by site. This ensures SCMs and the dedicated team to this work can maintain oversight of this function.

- Service Centre Managers will be directly accountable for both assigning and engaging clients into the case management support service. This way we can ensure that all hardship applications are dealt with consistently.
- Service Centre Managers are responsible for identifying appropriately skilled Case Managers to undertake this work and upskill others over time so all case managers operate with the same case management intent.
- managing the total clients by ensuring the numbers per site are visible and easy to oversee through effective governance in sites and to report on (by SCMs).
- improved Mana Manaaki for every client presenting at a service centre
- to have as many of these clients as possible return within acceptable ranges of hardship use because the right supports, and decisions are being made

**AGREE**

**DISAGREE**

**MORE INFORMATION REQUIRED**

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**Mark Goldsmith**

Regional Commissioner  
Auckland

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Date