



18 FEB 2021

On 20 January 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Ministry data that we can then analyse and include in our report regarding costs of back pain, including the direct healthcare costs of assessment and treatment. This includes broader costs such as compensation provided to individuals that are unable to work because of their back pain.*

On 20 January 2021, the Ministry contacted you to clarify your request to the following:

- *How much has the Ministry spent on people who are unable to work due to back pain or back injury? Can I have the most recent year's worth of information, broken down quarterly?*

I am unable to provide you with the total amount the Ministry has spent on people who are unable to work due to back pain or back injury within a period of time, as this information is held in the notes of 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 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.

However, the Ministry is able to provide you with point-in-time data, rather than a one-year total. Please see the following table attached to this response in an Excel spreadsheet:

- **Table One:** The number of working-age Jobseeker Support Health Condition and Disability (JS HC&D) and Supported Living Payment Health Condition and Disability (SLP HC&D) clients and the total weekly amount paid, where the primary incapacity is back pain or back injury, as at the end of March 2020, June 2020, September 2020 and December 2020.

There are two types of financial assistance which the Ministry can provide for clients who are unable to work due to health conditions or disabilities, Jobseeker Support and Supported Living Payment.

The Supported Living Payment (SLP) is available for people who are not able to work because they are permanently and severely restricted in their capacity for work because of a health condition, injury, or disability, or because they are totally blind.

To be eligible for SLP, a doctor must declare in a medical certificate that a person is unable to work for a period of more than two years. More information about the eligibility requirements for the SLP is available on the Ministry's website at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/supported-living-payment.html#null.

Jobseeker Support Health Condition and Disability (JS HC&D) is a temporary benefit paid for up to 52 weeks while clients look for work, are in training for work or are unable to work due to a health condition, injury or disability. If clients still require Jobseeker Support after 52 weeks they must complete the 52 week reapplication process. For more information about jobseeker support, please see the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/jobseeker-support.html.

Please note that although the table includes injuries, injuries are typically covered by funding through the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). You may receive a more complete picture of this data from ACC.

Further, I am unable to provide you data for clients whose back pain or injury is not their primary medical reason for receiving financial assistance, as this information is held in the notes of individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, if you were looking to receive this information, this request would be refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

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 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.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding assistance for back pain and injury, 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

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