



29 JAN 2021

On 11 December 2020, you contacted the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) via Twitter requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information relating to expenditure on the Accommodation Supplement, emergency accommodation and various benefit rates paid by the Ministry.

For the sake of clarity, I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. Total annual expenditure on the accommodation supplement and emergency accommodation.

The Accommodation Supplement is a non-taxable benefit that provides assistance towards accommodation costs. It is available for people who rent, board or own their own home and a person does not have to be receiving a benefit to qualify. It is calculated using a formula that takes into account the geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income and tenure type (renting, boarding or home ownership). More information around the Accommodation Supplement can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/accommodation-supplement.html.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place or residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for them or their family's need. Assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended, dependent on individual circumstances.

After these seven nights, Work and Income will arrange another appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation, and to determine if another grant is required. The Ministry works hard to support people receiving EH SNGs to secure a long-term housing solution, either through public housing or private rental accommodation.

Some people may struggle to access suitable housing due to a lack of available supply or they simply may not be able to meet the high cost of housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

The Ministry recognises that emergency housing is not a long-term solution, however, is a short-term solution for people who are potentially in a vulnerable situation. More information about EH SNGs is available on the Ministry's website at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/nowhere-to-stay/index.html.

The Ministry understands that demand for housing across New Zealand is growing, and more people are experiencing a severe and immediate need. This demand is generated by a shortage of affordable housing, rising house prices and rent growth. People on

low incomes are most affected by rising housing costs, and many seek financial help from the Ministry.

Across government, there is a wider programme of work underway aimed at increasing the supply of public housing and improving housing affordability and supply. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) leads the programme of work relating to New Zealand's housing.

HUD's work includes planning, and with Kāinga Ora, delivering more public housing, transitional housing, and services to tackle homelessness. HUD is also working to improve housing affordability and supply for aspiring homeowners. The Government Housing Programme Dashboard tracks progress on key parts of the Government's housing programme.

The Ministry's role is to assess eligibility for public housing, provide financial support to eligible people to access and sustain suitable housing, and to provide immediate assistance to meet emergency housing needs.

The year 2020, has seen a significant increase in demand for housing assistance as the Ministry has supported people through the COVID-19 pandemic period with accommodation where they could safely self-isolate. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, people also could not easily move out of emergency housing into long-term accommodation which contributed to longer durations of stay and higher costs.

Please find annual expenditure for Accommodation Supplement and amount granted for EH SNGs, respectively, in the tables below.

Table One: Total annual expenditure for Accommodation Supplement for financial years ending June 2018 to June 2020.

| Assistance type | Financial year ending | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | June 2018 | June 2019 | June 2020 |
| Accommodation Supplement | \$1,203,509,483 | \$1,160,528,376 | \$1,707,645,666 |

Table Two: Total amount granted for Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants for financial years ending June 2018 to June 2020.

| Assistance type | Financial year ending | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| | June 2018 | June 2019 | June 2020 |
| Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants | \$32,521,072 | \$92,844,310 | \$223,070,559 |

Notes:

- The Ministry's financial year commences on 1 July and ends at 30 June.
- The total amount granted on the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants may not be the same as the amount spent.

2. *Number of people on the various benefits paid by MSD and the rates of these benefits; both to the current date or nearest available date.*

The Ministry publishes quarterly Benefit Fact Sheets online. These provide a high-level view of trends in benefit receipt. Data for the quarter ending December 2020 can be found here: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/2020/benefit-fact-sheets/benefit-fact-sheets-snapshot-december-2020.pdf.

Information regarding benefit and entitlement rates can be found on the Ministry's website at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/benefit-rates/index.html.

As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(d) of the Official Information Act as the information you have requested is or will soon be publicly available. If you are interested in more specific information relating to the Ministry's benefits and products, please feel free to contact the Ministry to make another request.

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 annual expenditure for Accommodation Supplement, EH SNGs and other benefits rates, 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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