



10 JUN 2021

Tēnā koe

On 12 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The number of over 65s getting some form of emergency benefit, such as help with paying unexpected costs.*

On 21 May 2021, the Ministry emailed you to clarify your request. As you did not reply to that email, the Ministry has proceeded with your original request. As you did not specify a timeframe, the Ministry has decided to provide data for the most recent quarter to give you the most up to date information possible.

In your email dated 12 May 2021, you inquired into emergency benefits, and provided a link to the Work and Income website page for help with urgent or unexpected costs. Help with urgent or unexpected costs usually takes the form of a one-off payments, such as a Special Needs Grant, Advance Payment of Benefit, or a Recoverable Assistance Payment. However, because your request mentioned the Emergency Benefit as well as support with unexpected costs, we have provided you with data relating to both forms of assistance.

The Emergency Benefit is an income and asset tested benefit payable to people who are in hardship and who are unable to earn enough income for themselves (and any dependent family) and are not eligible for a main benefit. As New Zealand Superannuation (NZS) is a main benefit, NZS recipients are ineligible for the Emergency Benefit. More information about Emergency Benefit can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/emergency-benefit/index.html.

As already indicated, help with urgent or unexpected costs are usually one-off payments such as a Special Needs Grant (SNG), an Advance Payment of Benefit (ADV), or a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP). They are provided to clients in financial hardship and are available only for costs considered essential; it is often known as 'hardship assistance.' SNGs can be recoverable or non-recoverable, depending on the need of the client, whereas an ADV and RAP are always granted as recoverable payments (i.e. they will need to be repaid to the Ministry).

More information about one-off payments for unexpected and essential costs can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/index.html.

We understand that it can be difficult for some superannuitants to manage financially when they rely on NZS alone, which is why targeted assistance is available to support those who need it. Additional support includes the Winter Energy Payment, low-cost general practitioner fees for Community Services Card holders, and rates rebates through local councils. Furthermore, clients aged 65 years and over who are struggling to meet their essential costs can contact the Work and Income Seniors freephone line on 0800 552 002. Eligibility for assistance can also be checked online, here: check.msd.govt.nz/.

In response to your question, we have provided **Table One** below, which shows the number of hardship grants paid to clients aged 65 years and over during the period 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021, broken down by hardship reason.

Hardship Reason	Total Grants
Accommodation	1,440
Affected by benefit standdown	3
Driver Licence	15
Electricity	429
Health related	132
Medical and associated costs	4,686
Re-establishment grants	27
School costs	207
Car Repairs	1,224
Dental Treatment Advance	1,455
Emergency Housing Grant	993
Food	10,698
Other	6,039
Total	27,345

Notes for **Table One**:

- The 'total grants' heading refers to the number of hardship grants, not the number of clients.
- Clients can be counted more than once if they had multiple hardship grants in a period.
- Grants include Special Needs Grants, Advance Payment of Benefit grants, and Recoverable Assistance Payments.
- To protect confidentiality the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- This data table has had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table.
- 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.

You may be interested to know that the total number of grants for hardship assistance to clients of all ages, broken down by yearly quarters, is publicly available on the Ministry's website and can be found here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html.

In response to the second part of your question, the Ministry can confirm that, as at 31 March 2021, there were 3,483 Emergency Benefit clients aged 65 years and over. For the sake of comparison, as at the same date there were 831,951 clients in receipt of NZS. These figures have been randomly rounded to base three to protect privacy. Please note that a small number of the NZS recipients referenced above are under the age of 65 but receiving NZS as non-qualified partners.

The principles and purposes of the Act 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 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 Emergency Benefit and hardship assistance for over 65s, 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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