



21 JUN 2021

Tēnā koe

On 21 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *I would like provided the history of the dental payment that is an annual payment of \$300 - when was it first offered, what protocols did staff have on offering this allowance. What reasoning or official legislation supported or didn't support information given to clients, how was information on the dental allowance given to clients, was there a brochure describing it available at the reception areas? etc.*

s9(2)(a)

Special Needs Grants (SNG) are discretionary hardship assistance payments, which function as a safety net to help meet unexpected or emergency costs. The Ministry provides recoverable and non-recoverable SNGs to people to meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs (including medical and dental costs), power and other costs. A person does not have to be getting a benefit to qualify for an SNG but they must meet an income and asset test.

The Emergency Dental Grant payment recognises that individuals receiving a benefit or on low income may not be able to budget for unexpected dental costs and provides support for those who meet the criteria for Hardship Assistance to help with the cost of dental work.

The maximum amount for health-related grants including the Emergency Dental Grant was increased on 1 July 1996 from \$200 to \$300 over a 52-week period. Where exceptional circumstances apply, this amount may be exceeded, or more than one payment may be made. In situations where there are no exceptional circumstances, or where individuals do not meet the qualifying criteria for a SNG, they may qualify for an Advance Payment of Benefit and Recoverable Assistance Programme to meet any or all remaining costs.

All dental treatments funded through the Ministry must be provided by a health agency or registered dental practitioner. Examples of a qualifying dental situation include, but are not limited to, root treatment, tooth extraction, tooth restoration and treatment of infection.

The Government also has a manifesto commitment to increase the total dental related grant from \$300 to \$1000 as a part of the ongoing welfare overhaul.

The SNG programme was initially introduced as Supplementary Assistance in 1951.

The Ministry has attempted to find the date the Emergency Dental Grant was introduced however, there is very little information available about the policy possibly due to the length of time the SNG Programme has existed for.

More information about SNGs and dental care assistance can be found in the Social Assistance Chronology, which outlines social assistance policy and programmes in New Zealand, from 1844 to 2020. This can be accessed at the following link: [www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/history/social-assistance-chronology-programme-history.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/history/social-assistance-chronology-programme-history.html).

In regard to protocols, the financial help paid by Work and Income to working age clients is granted based on categories of need arising from an individual's particular circumstances. The rules and principles for entitlement to these payments are outlined in the Social Security Act 2018.

Work and Income will assess that a client applying for hardship assistance meets the following eligibility criteria:

- meet an income and cash asset test
- have an essential need, emergency need or need a payment for specific circumstances
- not be able to meet the need from their own resources or through other sources
- have met any hardship obligations that have been applied to them
- be a New Zealand citizen or permanent resident (i.e. not be in New Zealand unlawfully, or here on a temporary entry visa or a temporary permit) or
- be considered to hold a residence class visa in New Zealand under the Immigration Act 2009 (eg Australian citizens or residents)
- generally be ordinarily resident in New Zealand and
- purchase goods and services from a preferred supplier when there is an arrangement in place.

Clients are able to obtain information on the Emergency Dental Grant by disclosing their need in discussion with their Case Manager, phoning the Work and Income contact centre or via the Ministry's website. Information about the Emergency Dental Grant can be found on the Ministry's website here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/dental-treatment.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/dental-treatment.html).

In regard to your request for a brochure, the Ministry has conducted a search however has not been able to locate brochures on the Emergency Dental Treatment grant. As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(e), on the basis that the requested information does not exist.

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 to your request for information regarding the Emergency Dental Payment 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 to your request for information regarding the Emergency Dental Grant, 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



*PP.* Bridget Saunders  
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