



23 JUN 2021

Tēnā koe

On 19 April 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- 1. The nationwide number of children being housed in emergency accommodation for the quarter ending December 2020.*
- 2. The nationwide number of children being housed in emergency accommodation for the quarter ending March 2021.*
- 3. A monthly breakdown of the number of children living in emergency accommodation by region and city from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
- 4. The average length of time spent in emergency accommodation by children nationwide for each month from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
- 5. The average length of time spent in accommodation by children for each region and city for each month from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
- 6. The longest length of time spent by children in emergency accommodation, along with the region/city it was in - from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
- 7. The number of clients with gang affiliations using emergency accommodation from April 2020 to current date.*
- 8. All correspondence between the Minister of Social Development and the Housing Minister regarding concerns about the number of people, including children, being housed in emergency accommodation - from April 2020.*
- 9. All correspondence from social agencies and local authorities to the Minister of Social Development (including replies) regarding concerns about emergency accommodation - from April 2020.*
- 10. All correspondence between the police and the Minister of Social Development regarding concerns about anti-social behaviour at emergency accommodation - from April 2020.*

On 21 April 2021, the Ministry emailed you to advise you that questions eight, nine and ten of your request are more closely connected to the functions of the Minister for Social Development and Employment, Hon Carmel Sepuloni, and have therefore been transferred to her office for response. You will hear from the Office of the Minister for Social Development and Employment in due course.

On 2 June 2021, a Notification of Decision was sent to you, advising you that the Ministry had decided to grant your request and that a response would be sent to you on or before 24 June 2021.

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 driving up house prices and rents. People on low incomes are most affected by rising housing costs and many seek financial help through the Ministry.

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 needs. The Ministry pays EH SNGs directly to the accommodation supplier and assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended depending on the individual's circumstances.

After these seven nights, Work and Income arrange another appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation and if another grant is required. The Ministry works hard to support people in emergency housing to secure a long-term housing solution, either through public housing or private rental accommodation. Other options including transitional housing can also be explored as an option depending on availability and the individual's circumstances.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term solution or the solution that we want to deliver for people who are potentially in a vulnerable situation. They provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed. More information about EH SNGs is available at the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/%20map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-housing.html.

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.

There has been a growing demand nationally for emergency housing, as the shortage of affordable housing and rising rents continues to impact low-income whānau, particularly those who are beneficiaries. The year 2020 saw a significant increase in demand for emergency housing, as the Ministry 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.

The Ministry is prioritising a dedicated case management service for all clients in Emergency Housing. Having a dedicated case manager means that clients will be able to access an integrated service that works to ensure that they are getting all the support available to them from the Ministry. If an individual or whānau requires further support, they can be referred to a Navigator. Navigators can help coordinate community, health and government services, and be hands-on in making sure those services are accessible to the client. Ministry staff and/or Navigators are in regular contact with all recipients of EH SNGs.

Information regarding children in emergency housing was released in the Ministry's 2019/20 Annual Review to the Social Services and Community Committee. The data used for the 2019/20 Annual Review was operational data. In the past, the Ministry has chosen to publish emergency housing data in line with other official reporting on hardship assistance. However, due to the increased public interest, the Ministry decided to publish operational data, which is at a point in time, or a snapshot, of children in emergency housing for the purposes of the Annual Review.

Operational data, taken at a point in time or as a snapshot, means that the data is taken from a narrow window and can fluctuate significantly from day to day. Any clients that are entering emergency housing on the day the reporting takes place will not be counted within the reported snapshot of data, resulting in a significant portion

of EH SNG clients that will be missed in this method of reporting. Standard reporting is based on quarterly data and thus, provides a clearer indication of the trends and patterns of the emergency housing population. This reporting aligns with the methods used across all government agencies, and is quality assured which ensures the data provided is as accurate as possible.

When a client applies for an EH SNG, the client will provide the appointed Case Manager or Housing Broker the total number of adults and children who will likely be staying the emergency accommodation with them. No other information that identifies the relationships of these adults and children to the applicant is recorded for an EH SNG application, nor is confirmation of whether the children and/or adults will be staying in emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG. EH SNG clients may have complex family or caregiver relationships, and it is not uncommon for children of one parent to stay with another family member or there could be scenarios where the same child is recorded in multiple EH SNG applications, (i.e, both parents are in separate emergency accommodation at the same time).

Children may also be counted more than once, as the Ministry are unable to verify if the child/children are included in more than one household's EH SNG application.

The Ministry centrally records the total number of children, and separately, the total number of adults who are likely to be staying in emergency accommodation. This is recorded in the main applicant's EH SNG application. In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, the Ministry has provided you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children, for **Table One** and **Table Two**.

For the sake of clarity, your questions will be addressed in turn below.

- 1. The nationwide number of children being housed in emergency accommodation for the quarter ending December 2020.*
- 2. The nationwide number of children being housed in emergency accommodation for the quarter ending March 2021.*

Please see **Table One**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number clients and children who were in receipt of EH SNGs, as at the end of each quarter during the period 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, broken down by quarter and the client's duration in emergency housing.

Please note, **Table One** has been presented as at a point in time. Unlike standard emergency housing reporting, which is based on the date of the EH SNG, operational reporting is based on a point in time, using the recorded check in and check out details of the main applicant. The Ministry cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG.

- 3. A monthly breakdown of the number of children living in emergency accommodation by region and city from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*

In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, the Ministry can provide you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children.

Please see **Table Two**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of clients and children who were in receipt of EH SNGs as at the end of each quarter during the period 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, broken down by quarter and Territorial Local Authority.

Please note, **Table Two** has been presented as at a point in time. Unlike standard emergency housing reporting, which is based on the date of the EH SNG, operational reporting is based on a point in time, using the recorded check in and check out details of the main applicant. The Ministry cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG.

Furthermore, the lowest geographical boundary the Ministry reports on for clients receiving EH SNGs is TLA. The Ministry records the addresses of recipients at a local level, however, this information is kept on individual client records and is not part of the Ministry's standard reporting. The TLA is estimated based on the clients' address at the time of the grant. Where the client address is not recorded, the location of the Ministry's service centre case managing the client has been used to approximate which TLA a client resides in. However, as the Ministry has switched to working from national queues, EH SNGs and other hardship grants could be granted by a case manager working anywhere in New Zealand. Therefore, in such cases, the TLA may not reflect the actual client address or location. Due to the transient nature of people receiving EH SNGs, the recorded address for a client may also be that of a trusted family member or friend who receives mail on their behalf.

4. *The average length of time spent in emergency accommodation by children nationwide for each month from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
5. *The average length of time spent in accommodation by children for each region and city for each month from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*
6. *The longest length of time spent by children in emergency accommodation, along with the region/city it was in - from April 1st, 2020 to current date.*

The Ministry does not hold information regarding the length of time spent in emergency housing by children, therefore, I am refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act. When a client applies for an EH SNG, the Ministry records the household make-up as it has been advised by the client, including the number of children. However, in some cases, children may have alternative living arrangements, and may not necessarily be living in emergency housing for the entire duration of the EH SNG.

However, in order to meet the intent of your request, the Ministry has provided you with **Table One**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number clients and children who were in receipt of EH SNGs, as at the end of each quarter during the period 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, broken down by quarter and the client's duration in emergency housing.

Please note, **Table One** has been presented as at a point in time. Unlike standard emergency housing reporting, which is based on the date of the EH SNG, operational reporting is based on a point in time, using the recorded check in and check out details of the main applicant. The Ministry cannot confirm whether the additional adults and/or children are staying in the emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG.

7. The number of clients with gang affiliations using emergency accommodation from April 2020 to current date.

Clients are not required to inform the Ministry of any gang affiliation. Where that information is volunteered by the client, staff will take it into account when making decisions on the accommodation that will be suitable for the client. The Ministry endeavours to ensure, where possible, that members of gangs are not accommodated at the same location as members of other gangs, or other vulnerable people.

If gang affiliation information is provided by the client, this information is not centrally recorded, and it is held in notes on 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.

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 on the Ministry'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 children in emergency housing, 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



 Karen Hocking
**General Manager
Housing**