



11 MAR 2021

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

- *Request to know the monthly breakdown from Jan 2020 and a yearly breakdown from 2016 of how many people have been denied the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant, the reasons why and by region.*

Emergency housing is short term accommodation for individuals and their immediate family who have an urgent need for accommodation. This may be because they are unable to remain in their usual place of residence (for example, because they have been asked to leave, or because of safety concerns), and they have no access to other accommodation adequate for their needs.

There has been a growing demand nationally for Emergency Housing as the shortage of affordable housing and rising rents continues to impact low-income whanau, particularly those who are beneficiaries.

The year 2020 has also seen a significant increase in demand for Emergency Housing, as the Ministry supported people through the COVID-19 pandemic period with accommodation in which they could safely self-isolate.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term solution, particularly for vulnerable people with complex needs. The need to provide Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EH SNGs) is, in addition to the shortage of affordable housing, a reflection of the Government's commitment to ensuring that those in need have somewhere to stay, so they are not sleeping in their cars or outside. EH SNGs provide a short-term solution whilst more sustainable options are progressed.

To be considered to have an immediate emergency housing need, the client must not be able to access any adequate accommodation for some or all of the next 7 nights from when they applied.

If a client has access to other accommodation adequate for their needs in the short-term, they do not have an immediate emergency housing need and do not qualify for an EHSNG.

To get a Special Needs Grant for emergency housing, the client must:

- meet an income and cash asset test (unless there are exceptional circumstances)
- meet residency and ordinarily resident requirements
- require payment for actual and reasonable costs of the emergency housing when not making the grant would:
 - worsen the client's position

- increase or create any risk to the life or welfare of the client or the client's immediate family or
 - cause serious hardship to the client or the client's immediate family
- have an immediate emergency housing need

You can access more general information about the Ministry's housing and support services, including EH SNGs, on the Ministry's website available at:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/nowhere-to-stay/emergency-housing.html.

An EH SNG is a discretionary hardship grant and there are circumstances when the Ministry can refuse to pay one. These circumstances include when the client:

- can meet their emergency housing need from their own resources or from other sources of assistance
- has caused or contributed to their immediate emergency housing need (generally only applied after the first 7 nights for the emergency housing event)
- refuses to pay the emergency housing contribution when applying for a grant, or
- has not paid the emergency housing contribution in full by the next available date for a grant or grants for an earlier period.

In most of these circumstances, the Ministry may still consider paying a recoverable EH SNG when declining to pay would either:

- worsen the client's position
- increase or create any risk to the welfare of the client or their immediate family, or
- cause serious hardship to the client or their immediate family.

For more information regarding circumstances in which the Ministry can refuse to pay an EH SNG, please visit the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/when-a-special-needs-grant-for-emergency-housing-may-not-be-paid.html.

Unfortunately, the Ministry is unable to provide the number of EH SNGs applications which were declined as this information is held on individual client files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of client files. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act as it would require substantial manual collation. The greater public interest is in the effect and efficient administration of the public service.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

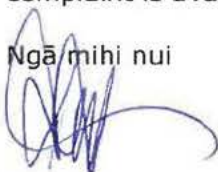
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter 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 the monthly breakdown from January 2020 and a yearly breakdown from 2016 of how many people have been denied the EHSNH, the reason why and by region, 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