



26 MAR 2021

On 16 February 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information for the New Plymouth district and the Taranaki Region:

- 1) *The number of people or households currently on the waiting list for housing (including but not limited to Kāinga Ora housing), and any other list where MSD are working to assist in finding a home*
- 2) *The number of children currently on the waiting list for housing (including but not limited to Kāinga Ora housing), and any other list where MSD are working to assist in finding a home*
- 3) *The current average number of daily inquiries to MSD from people who do not have a place to sleep that night*
- 4) *The number of people or families currently in emergency housing*
- 5) *The number of pregnant women currently in emergency housing*
- 6) *The average monthly spend on emergency housing over the last 24 months*
- 7) *Historical data that will assist in showing a trend of demand for social and emergency housing, such as, but not limited to, numbers of people/households on waiting lists each six months (or year, or similar) since 2010.*

I will respond to your questions in turn.

- 1) *The number of people or households currently on the waiting list for housing (including but not limited to Kāinga Ora housing), and any other list where MSD are working to assist in finding a home*

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, which is 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.

When New Zealanders are in need of public housing, their needs are recorded on either the Housing Register or the Transfer Register. The combined register is referred to as the Public Housing Register. The Housing Register shows people who are not currently in public housing but who have been assessed as eligible for public housing. The Transfer Register shows people already in public housing but who have applied to be rehoused. While the Ministry completes the housing assessments which inform the Public Housing Register, responsibility for funding and supply sits with the Ministry of

Housing and Urban Development and Kāinga Ora, respectively. More information about the Housing Register is available here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/index.html.

Please find the information requested, broken down by Territorial Local Authority (TLA), in the attached spreadsheet in **Table One**: The number of primary applicants for selected TLA on the Public Housing Register during the period 1 October 2015 to 31 December 2020, broken down by quarter and household composition.

As you will be aware, the Stratford TLA partly belongs to the Taranaki Region and the Manawatu-Wanganui Region. Some of the numbers reported for Stratford can, therefore, not be attributed to the Taranaki Region. The Ministry is unable to break this down any further as this would require the Ministry to look into hundreds of client files. The exact number of applications for the Taranaki Region can, therefore, not be provided and is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as it would require substantial manual collation. This applies to all data tables provided in this response. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

The number of primary applicants on the Public Housing Register per TLA and Region can also be found on the website of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/follow-our-progress/ under 'Public Housing Regional factsheet'. Please note, HUD base their regional reporting off the Taranaki Region on the New Plymouth, Rangitikei, Ruapehu, South Taranaki and Stratford Districts.

- 2) *The number of children currently on the waiting list for housing (including but not limited to Kāinga Ora housing), and any other list where MSD are working to assist in finding a home*

Table One referenced above contains the household composition of all applications on the Public Housing Register in New Plymouth, South Taranaki and Stratford. The Ministry is unable to break this data down any further into 'the number of children' on the Public Housing Register as the Ministry does not identify distinct children included in a grant. This part of your request is, therefore, refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as this information is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- 3) *The current average number of daily inquiries to MSD from people who do not have a place to sleep that night*

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.

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 has seen 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.

With regard to question three of your request, the Ministry is unable to provide you with the information requested as 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 this part of 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.

However, in the spirit of being helpful, please find in the attached spreadsheet **Table Two:** The number of Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EH SNG), Clients and Amount Granted for the selected TLA during the period 1 October 2016 to 31 December 2020, broken down by quarter. This information allows you to calculate the average number of inquiries per day, as each grant is preceded by an inquiry from a client. Please note that some inquiries may also lead to declines; declines are not included in the attached table. Consequently, the number of inquiries per day is slightly higher than what can be concluded from the attached table.

Information dating back to 1 April 2018 is also publicly available on the HUD website at: www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/follow-our-progress.

4) The number of people or families currently in emergency housing

Please find in the attached spreadsheet **Table Three:** The number of Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants, Clients and Amount Granted for the selected TLA during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020, broken down by quarter and household composition.

We are unable to break this data down by 'family' as the Ministry does not register applicants under a category labelled 'family'. The existing categories are 'Couple no Children', 'Couple with Children', 'Single no Children', 'Single with Children', and 'Unknown'. 'Family' would come under one or more of these categories.

5) *The number of pregnant women currently in emergency housing*

The Ministry does not collect information on whether Emergency Housing applicants or any persons included in the application are pregnant. I am, therefore, refusing this part of your request under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

6) *The average monthly spend on emergency housing over the last 24 months*

Please refer to **Table Two** in the attached spreadsheet. The information can also be found on the HUD website at www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/follow-our-progress. **Table Two** and the data available online provide you with the amount granted for EH SNG each quarter over several years and allow you to calculate the average monthly spending.

7) *Historical data that will assist in showing a trend of demand for social and emergency housing, such as, but not limited to, numbers of people/households on waiting lists each six months (or year, or similar) since 2010.*

Please find a complete historical record of Public Housing Register data in New Plymouth, South Taranaki and Stratford in **Table One**, as publicly available data at www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/follow-our-progress/public-housing-reports-archive/ only reaches back to 1 April 2018. Please note that the Ministry is unable to provide data on the Public Housing Register prior to 1 October 2015 as this data was not collected prior to that date. This data is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as it is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that it is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

A complete historical record of Emergency Housing data in New Plymouth, South Taranaki and Stratford can be found in **Table Two**, as publicly available data at www.hud.govt.nz/community-and-public-housing/follow-our-progress/public-housing-reports-archive/ only reaches back to 1 April 2018 as well.

Table Three also provides EH SNG data, broken down by household composition. Household composition data is not available for the period before 1 April 2020 as the Ministry initiated the collation of this type of data from 1 April 2020. Data from before 1 April 2020 does not exist and is, therefore, refused under section 18(e) of the Act.

Please note, EH SNGs were introduced on 1 July 2016 in order to fund temporary accommodation at places such as hostels and motels to meet people's immediate housing needs. Prior to the 2016 December quarter, Emergency Housing grants were coded in the Ministry's IT system as 'other emergency grants', which includes hardship grants for various other emergency reasons. The Ministry cannot disaggregate Emergency Housing hardship payments from other types of assistance granted under the 'other emergency grants' category and any information regarding Emergency Housing grant payments prior to the December 2016 quarter is recorded in notes on individual case files. As such, information relating to the value of Emergency Housing prior to December 2016 is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

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
- 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 and attachments 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 statistics on the Public Housing Register and 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.

Yours sincerely



Karen Hocking
**General Manager
Housing**