



31 MAR 2021

On 15 February 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *The number of individuals approved for 10-30 counselling sessions (<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/counselling.html>) since 1 Jan 2011, by year.*
2. *The number of individuals approved for more than 30 counselling sessions since 1 Jan 2011, by year.*
3. *Any advice, guidance, or policies used by staff to determine whether an applicant is eligible for more than 30 counselling sessions.*

Disability Allowance (DA) provides non-taxable assistance to people who have on-going, additional costs because of a disability.

DA can be paid for counselling fees or transport to counselling if the client's registered medical practitioner or a nurse practitioner has confirmed that the need for counselling is directly related to the client's disability.

To be able to receive a Disability Allowance a client must:

- meet an income test
- have a disability which is likely to last at least 6 months
- have ongoing, additional costs arising from that disability
- be a New Zealand (NZ) citizen or permanent resident (ie not be in NZ unlawfully, here on a temporary entry visa or a temporary permit)
- deemed to hold a residence class visa in NZ under the Immigration Act 2009 (e.g. Australian citizens or residents), and
- generally be ordinarily resident in NZ.

For more information regarding DA please visit the following website:  
[www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/qualifications.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/qualifications.html)

For clarity, I will address your questions in turn.

1. *The number of individuals approved for 10-30 counselling sessions (<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/counselling.html>) since 1 Jan 2011, by year.*
2. *The number of individuals approved for more than 30 counselling sessions since 1 Jan 2011, by year.*

The Ministry is unable to answer question one and two of your request about the number of clients approved for more than 10 Counselling sessions as this information 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, the Ministry refuses these aspects of your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

In the spirit of being helpful, please find **Table One** below which outlines the total number of clients with counselling included as part of their Disability Allowance. Please note that this includes any clients with counselling paid as part of their Disability Allowance, regardless of the number of sessions approved.

**Table One: Number of clients with counselling included as part of their Disability Allowance as at the end of December from 2011 to 2020.**

<b>Month Ending</b>	<b>Total Number of Clients</b>
<b>December 2011</b>	2,211
<b>December 2012</b>	2,022
<b>December 2013</b>	2,016
<b>December 2014</b>	1,854
<b>December 2015</b>	1,539
<b>December 2016</b>	1,458
<b>December 2017</b>	1,515
<b>December 2018</b>	1,668
<b>December 2019</b>	1,749
<b>December 2020</b>	1,557

**Notes:**

- To protect confidentiality the Ministry of Social Development uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table.
- A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three.
- 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.
- A client may be receiving DA for themselves, their partner or a dependent child, in this case they are only counted once
- This will not match official stats as this is a count of Primary client not a count of Disability Allowance.

3. *Any advice, guidance, or policies used by staff to determine whether an applicant is eligible for more than 30 counselling sessions.*

Generally counselling assistance is limited to a maximum of 10 sessions on the first application. Assistance for up to 20 additional sessions can be considered on the recommendation of the client's medical practitioner or nurse practitioner. Assistance

for more than 30 sessions can be considered if the client has exceptional circumstances.

It should also be noted that counselling costs met by Primary Health Organisations are also limited to 10 sessions, based on Best-Practice guidelines.

In the event of more than 30 sessions being requested, advice is sought from the Regional Health and Disability Advisor team. Clients who need more than 30 sessions must have a significant mental health issue and therefore should be managed by the District Health Board (DHB) Mental Health services. If it is deemed that community-based support is appropriate we would expect that there is oversight by either a Clinical Psychologist or Psychiatrist.

For more information regarding counselling please visit the following website: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/counselling-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/counselling-01.html)

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 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 regarding the number of individuals approved for counselling sessions, 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

AP 

Bridget Saunders  
**Manager, Issues Resolution  
Service Delivery**