



27 MAY 2021

Tēnā koe

On 29 April 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information regarding the Emergency Housing situation in Wairoa or Northern Hawke's Bay:

1. *Who are the emergency housing providers in the area?*
2. *How much does the government pay them on a weekly basis? How much was the amount for the last 5 years? (2016-present, separate data if possible)*
3. *Does MSD keep track of any wrongdoings done by the emergency housing clients, such as harassment/violence/drug abuse? How many such cases are reported on an average? How many were reported last year and how many so far this year?*
4. *How much does that cost? Repaying for any damages done to the property?*

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: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/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.

For the sake of clarity, I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. Who are the emergency housing providers in the area?

Please see enclosed in your response an Excel spreadsheet containing **Appendix A** which contains the list of suppliers with an EH SNG granted to clients residing in Wairoa District TLA.

2. How much does the government pay them on a weekly basis? How much was the amount for the last 5 years? (2016-present, separate data if possible)

The Ministry is unable to provide you with the amounts paid to Emergency Housing providers per week, per room as different clients and households receive different rates depending on the size of the accommodation/ room required and how soon the room is needed.

This information is recorded 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, this part of your request 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 Ministry has 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, the Ministry can provide you with the amount of EH SNGs paid in the Wairoa District TLA during the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021, by quarter, provider, number of EH SNGs granted and distinct clients. Please find this information attached in **Appendix A**, as mentioned to answer question one of your request.

please see the attached spreadsheet which outlines

3. Does MSD keep track of any wrongdoings done by the emergency housing clients, such as harassment/violence/drug abuse? How many such cases are reported on an average? How many were reported last year and how many so far this year?

The vast majority of our clients are respectful of the accommodation provided, other guests and the local community. Concerns are raised from time to time in parts of our community about the behaviour of a small number of people accessing support. Moteliers also have the right to ask guests to leave if they do not meet the moteliers' rules.

The Ministry takes any reports of EH SNG clients and their children being subjected to family harm very seriously, and they would be managed on a case by case basis and

referred to the appropriate authorities, including NZ Police and emergency services, where required. The Ministry also have Family Violence Coordinators who are skilled in supporting people in these situations and connecting them with agencies who can provide support.

The Ministry are in regular contact with our partner agencies, including Police, and work with them on how best to respond to any issues raised. Where particular complaints of criminal offending are raised, those are appropriate matters for the police. Some complaints may also be made to us and will be held on individual files.

Any information the Ministry may hold about family violence or substance abuse would be recorded in a client's individual file. 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, as it requires substantial collation. 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 Ministry has developed and implemented a new Emergency Housing complaint recording system from 28 April 2021.

4. How much does that cost? Repaying for any damages done to the property?

The Ministry expects our clients to get the same quality of service as any other guest, and that our clients observe the rules and conditions of the accommodation supplier. A security deposit is available to suppliers to contribute to any damage costs, beyond normal wear and tear. Damages or losses are charged to the client and they are required to pay it back to the Ministry at an agreed rate.

Where a client or motelier has concerns around the quality and/or service of a motel, including behaviour of clients, the Ministry's regional housing team address these issues at the time directly with the motelier.

To ensure providers for emergency housing are delivering accommodation to a suitable standard the Ministry:

- checks in regularly with clients on issues or concerns with their accommodation when approving subsequent EH SNGs
- escalates concerns or complaints to the housing team who follow up directly at that time with the motelier
- monitors all ongoing issues or complaints received in relation to EH SNG accommodation with moteliers.

In regard to question four of your request, damages to properties are classified and paid out as 'other emergency grants'. The Ministry cannot disaggregate payments regarding property damage or loss from other types of assistance granted under the 'other emergency grants' category. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to review thousands of individual files. As such, this part of

your request is also refused under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service. More information about 'other emergency grants' can be found at the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/other-emergency-grants-01.html.

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. The Ministry has concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The Ministry is currently improving our central reporting capability. Damages or losses occurring at Emergency Housing accommodations is included in this work.

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

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 Emergency Housing in the Wairoa or Northern Hawke's Bay area, 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**