



31 MAY 2021

Tēnā koe

On 4 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), requesting information about the funeral grant. For the sake of clarity, your questions will be answered in turn.

1. When was the funeral grant established?

The funeral grant was established on 28 September 1982. The scheme was originally introduced as the "Lump Sum payment on Death". The provisions were as follows:

- continuation of income tested benefits and National Superannuation for two fortnightly instalments' following the death of the beneficiary, or four weekly instalments for benefits paid weekly
- a lump sum grant of up to \$1,000 (less any terminal benefit) plus \$500 for each dependent child for applicants (those living with the deceased prior to death as a spouse or dependent child) whose income would not preclude the grant of an income tested benefit, and the net value of the deceased's estate (excluding family home, car and chattels) was less than \$6,000;
- a lump sum grant of up to \$500 in respect of the death of a single adult to meet outstanding funeral expenses that could not be met from the estate; and
- a lump sum grant of \$500 in respect of the death of a dependent child providing the parent's income would not preclude the grant of an income-tested benefit and assets did not exceed \$6,000.

These provisions did not apply if a similar lump sum payment was available under the Accident Compensation legislation. More information about the Social Assistance Chronology can be found at the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/history/social-assistance-chronology-programme-history.html.

2. Can I please find out how many funeral grants were paid out broken up into the years - 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 so far, and the total cost for each of these years including 2021 so far?

Please see overleaf **Table One** which shows the number of Funeral Grants and amounts that were approved in calendar years 2017-2020, and the March quarter 2021.

Table One: The number of Funeral Grants and amount paid between 1 January 2017 – 31 March 2021, broken down by calendar years.

In the year	Number of grants	Total Amount
2017	4,950	\$9,244,281
2018	4,794	\$9,109,566
2019	5,235	\$10,089,430
2020	4,740	\$9,381,253
2021 (Up to March)	1,188	\$2,369,205

3. *Can I please find out how many funeral grant applications were received but were unsuccessful in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 so far?*

Please see below **Table Two** which shows the number of funeral grants granted and the number of funeral grants declined in the calendar years 2017-2020, and the March quarter 2021.

Table Two: The number of funeral grants approved, and declined between 1 January 2017 – 31 March 2021, broken down by calendar years.

In the year	Number of grants approved	Number of grants declined	Total number of applications received
2017	4,950	1,485	6,435
2018	4,794	1,470	6,261
2019	5,235	1,584	6,819
2020	4,740	1,497	6,237
2021 (Up to March)	1,188	360	1,548

Notes for table one and table two:

- The Funeral Grants helps with actual and reasonable funeral costs and is not intended to cover the whole costs of the funeral. There is a maximum amount that can be paid.
- There can be multiple grants during the period.
- To protect the 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 count.

4. *Can I please find out what the average individual funeral grant amount was in 2020 and also separately the average individual funeral grant amount in 2021?*

Those that receive the funeral grant normally receive the maximum amount that is available, which is \$2,152.66. However, the average can be found by dividing the amount approved by the number of grants that were provided in **Table One**.

5. *Can I please find out the lowest individual funeral grant amount paid out in 2020 and also separately the lowest individual funeral grant amount paid out in 2021?*

Depending on the individual circumstances for each grant, those that receive the funeral grant can receive multiple payments for one funeral grant application. For example the grant can be paid in two or more payments of different amounts within the entitlement limit. The Ministry's central reporting does not take into account these factors, therefore accurately determining the lowest amount paid for a funeral grant cannot be done without individually reviewing client 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.

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 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, 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



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