



Dear

On 9 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *How many children are in emergency housing across NZ as of the latest date and how many children were in emergency housing in NZ at the same time last year?*
- *How many children are on the waiting list for emergency housing across NZ as of the latest date and how many children were on the waiting list for emergency housing in NZ at the same time last year?*
- *How many children are in emergency housing in Auckland as of the latest date and how many children were in emergency housing in Auckland at the same time last year?*
- *What is the number of children in emergency housing broken down by suburb or district of Auckland as of the latest date? What was the number of children in emergency housing at the same time last year broken down by suburb or district of Auckland?*
- *What is the number of children in emergency housing in each of the main centres of Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, Rotorua, New Plymouth, Napier-Hastings, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill as of the latest date? What was the number of children in emergency housing at the same time last year in each of the main centres of Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, Rotorua, New Plymouth, Napier-Hastings, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill?*
- *What is the number of children in emergency housing broken down by each district of New Zealand as of the latest date? What was the number of children in emergency housing at the same time last year broken down by each district of New Zealand?*

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 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.

Information regarding children in emergency housing was released in the Ministry's 2019/20 Annual Review to the Social Services and Community Committee. The data used for the 2019/20 Annual Review was operational data. In the past, the Ministry has chosen to publish emergency housing data in line with other official reporting on hardship assistance. However, due to the increased public interest, the Ministry decided to publish operational data, which is at a point in time, or a snapshot, of children in emergency housing for the purposes of the Annual Review.

Operational data, taken at a point in time or as a snapshot, means that the data is taken from a narrow window and can fluctuate significantly from day to day. Any clients that are entering emergency housing on the day the reporting takes place will not be counted within the reported snapshot of data, resulting in a significant portion of EH SNG clients that will be missed in this method of reporting.

When a client applies for an EH SNG, the client will provide the appointed Case Manager the total number of adults and children who will likely be staying the emergency accommodation with them. No other information that identifies the relationships of these adults and children to the applicant is recorded for an EH SNG application, nor is confirmation of whether the children and/or adults will be staying in emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG. EH SNG clients may have complex family or caregiver relationships, and it is not uncommon for children of one parent to stay with another family member or there could be scenarios where the same child is recorded in multiple EH SNG applications, (i.e, both parents are in separate emergency accommodation at the same time).

I will now respond to each of your questions in turn.

- *How many children are in emergency housing across NZ as of the latest date and how many children were in emergency housing in NZ at the same time last year?*
- *How many children are in emergency housing in Auckland as of the latest date and how many children were in emergency housing in Auckland at the same time last year?*

The Ministry centrally records the total number of children, and separately, the total number of adults who are likely to be staying in emergency accommodation. This is recorded in the main applicant's EH SNG application. In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, the Ministry has provided you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children, in **Table One**.

Please see **Table One**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of clients and children who were in receipt of EH SNGs, as at the end of the quarters 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2021, broken down by Territorial Local Authority (TLA). Please note that TLA is the standard regional geographical boundary used by the Ministry for EH SNG reporting and the data has been provided at this regional level to satisfy the intent of your request.

Please note that the lowest geographical boundary the Ministry reports on for clients receiving EH SNGs is TLA. The Ministry records the addresses of recipients at a local level; however, this information is kept on individual client records and is not part of the Ministry's standard reporting. The TLA is estimated based on the clients' address at the time of the grant. Where the client address is not recorded, the location of the Ministry's service centre case managing the client has been used to approximate which TLA a client resides in. However, as the Ministry has switched to working from national queues, EH SNGs and other hardship grants could be granted by a case manager working anywhere in New Zealand. Therefore, in such cases, the TLA may not reflect the actual client address or location. Due to the transient nature of people receiving EH SNGs, the recorded address for a client may also be that of a trusted family member or friend who receives mail on their behalf.

Furthermore, when a client applies for an EH SNG, the Ministry records the household make-up as it has been advised by the client, including the number of children. However, in some cases, children may have alternative living arrangements, and may not necessarily be living in emergency housing for the entire duration of the EH SNG.

- *How many children are on the waiting list for emergency housing across NZ as of the latest date and how many children were on the waiting list for emergency housing in NZ at the same time last year?*

As stated earlier, an 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 as such, there is no waiting list for emergency housing in New Zealand. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act. as this information does not exist.

- *What is the number of children in emergency housing broken down by suburb or district of Auckland as of the latest date? What was the number of children in emergency housing at the same time last year broken down by suburb or district of Auckland?*
- *What is the number of children in emergency housing broken down by each district of New Zealand as of the latest date? What was the number of children in emergency housing at the same time last year broken down by each district of New Zealand?*

In response to your questions above, the Ministry is unable to provide you with information, because the Ministry only reports on clients preferred letting areas and placements at the TLA level. Any breakdown smaller than TLA 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 all of the above questions in 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.

Therefore, I refer you to my response to question one which outlines the number of EH SNGS paid, as at the end of the quarters 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2021, broken down by TLA and quarter

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
- 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 children in 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

P.P. 

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Housing