



Tēnā koe

On 27 July 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *How many people are currently staying in emergency accommodation?*
 - *How many of them are Māori?*
- *How many people overall have been in emergency accommodation for more than 3 months?*
 - *Further to that, how many Māori have been in emergency accommodation for more than 3 months?*
- *How many people have been placed in more than 1 emergency accommodation location over the last 12 months?*
- *How many incidents at emergency accommodation have been referred to the police or required police intervention over the past 12-months?*
 - *How has MSD responded to those concerns?*
- *How many children are currently living in emergency accommodation?*
 - *How many of those children are Māori?*
- *How many people living in emergency accommodation are in full time employment?*
 - *How many are Māori?*
- *How many people in emergency accommodation have been receiving a benefit from MSD for more than 12 months?*
 - *How many of these people are Māori?*

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 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.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place of 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 dependant on individual 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/housing/nowhere-to-stay/emergency-housing.html

Some people may struggle to access suitable housing due to a lack of available supply or they simply may not be able to meet the high cost of housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time. Please note that the Ministry does not hold any contracts or official agreements or arrangements with any emergency housing provider outside of Rotorua.

There are also a distinct group of people that face a range of complex issues that are a barrier, such as mental health and addictions, criminal history, or family violence. There are still others that need to live in a specific area, due to the need to access specialist care or educational needs for them or their family.

For people with high and complex needs, it can sometimes be challenging to identify suitable long-term housing, which can lead to longer stays in emergency housing. Work and Income work closely with these people to see what can be done to ensure that once they have a home of their own, they have the skills to sustain it, and the support they need to keep it.

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

- *How many people are currently staying in emergency accommodation?*
 - *How many of them are Māori?*
- *How many people overall have been in emergency accommodation for more than 3 months?*
 - *Further to that, how many Māori have been in emergency accommodation for more than 3 months?*
- *How many people in emergency accommodation have been receiving a benefit from MSD for more than 12 months?*
 - *How many of these people are Māori?*
- *How many children are currently living in emergency accommodation?*
 - *How many of those children are Māori?*

Information to determine whether a person was continuously receiving a main benefit for over 12 months would be held in the notes of individuals' files.

As such, your request regarding how many people in emergency accommodation have been receiving a benefit from the Ministry for more than 12 months and how many of these people are Māori is refused under section 18(f) of the Act. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. 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, the Ministry can provide you with the number of distinct clients in emergency housing for more than 12 months receiving a main benefit as at 30 June 2021.

Please note that an EH SNG application does not store the ethnicity of any children included within the application. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information 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.

- *How many people have been placed in more than 1 emergency accommodation location over the last 12 months?*

17,226 clients who received EH SNG had more than one distinct supplier during the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Please note that the timeframe provided is in line with the Ministry's standard reporting procedures to provide information up to the latest quarter.

- *How many incidents at emergency accommodation have been referred to the police or required police intervention over the past 12-months?*
 - *How has MSD responded to those concerns?*
- *How many people living in emergency accommodation are in full time employment?*
 - *How many are Māori?*

Information on police involvement or intervention with clients in emergency housing, and any response by Ministry staff is held in notes on individual case files.

While the Ministry holds information on the work obligations of clients, the number of hours a client works per week is not centrally stored; this information is held in notes on individual case files.

As such, I am unable to provide you with the information needed to satisfy these parts of your request. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse 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.

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 regarding 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.

Ngā mihi nui

P.P. 

Karen Hocking
General Manager
Housing

Appendix A

Table One: The number of distinct clients currently in emergency housing as at 30 June 2021, broken down by ethnic group, distinct clients in emergency housing for more than three months, distinct clients in emergency housing for more than twelve months who are receiving a main benefit, and number of children.

Ethnic group	Distinct clients	Distinct clients in emergency housing for more than 3 months	Distinct clients in emergency housing for more than 12 months receiving a main benefit	Number of children
NZ Māori	2,412	1,233	153	N/A
ALL	4,026	2,043	237	4,233

Notes for Table One and attached response:

- Emergency housing assistance payments are granted as Special Needs Grants (EH SNG).
- This consecutive weeks calculation is based on the clients most recent grant within a quarter. They may have had multiple grants in a quarter.
- Clients can be counted in more than one quarter if they have had grants in each quarter.
- A client's total stay may cross more than one quarter. The length of stay at the time of their last grant in each quarter is what is used to calculate the average time here.
- Post 29 March 2020, consecutive weeks is calculated based on the check in and check out dates for which emergency housing grants have been granted.
- The consecutive weeks calculation is operational and as such can change slightly over time.
- Ethnicity data is self-identified and multiple ethnicities may be chosen by an individual as fits their preference or self-concept.
- Ethnic groups do not currently align with Statistics New Zealand ethnicity groupings.
- The number of children is declared at the time of each individual EH SNG.
- When a client applies for an EH SNG, MSD records the household make up including the number of children.
- In some cases, children may have alternative or alternating living arrangements and may not necessarily be living in emergency housing for the entire duration in Emergency Housing.
- Children may also be counted more than once, as the Ministry is unable to verify if the child/children are included in more than one household living in emergency housing.
- Details of the children attached to each EH SNG are not recorded and as such we are unable to count the number of unique children in EH across a period if their caregivers have had more than one grant in the period.
- Main benefits exclude NZ Superannuation, Veteran's Pension, Non-Beneficiary assistance, Orphan's Benefit and Unsupported Child's Benefit.
- 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.
- The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.