



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Dear

On 23 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *How many people who receive assistance from MSD are over their limit and need discretion to approve food assistance?*
2. *How many people on a main benefit are over their limit and need discretion to approve food assistance?*
3. *How many people are case managed and can only get assistance from their case manager e.g. can't be dealt with by the contact centre or MyMSD?*
4. *What happens if these people (case managed) need urgent assistance (which wasn't assisted by a Friday) on a weekend day when the contact centre is open, but the offices aren't?*

I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. *How many people who receive assistance from MSD are over their limit and need discretion to approve food assistance?*
2. *How many people on a main benefit are over their limit and need discretion to approve food assistance?*

These two questions have been grouped together as they relate to one another.

Special Needs Grants (SNG) for food are generally subject to discretion, as the amount of the grant depends on the situation of the client. Further information regarding SNGs for food can be found here:

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/food.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/food.html)

The amount a client may be approved for SNGs for food per year is based on the family's circumstances. The following limits currently apply:

- The limit for single with no children is \$200;
- the limit for married couples without children is \$300;
- the limit for single clients or married couples with one or two children is \$450; and
- the limit for single clients or married couples with more than 3 children is \$550.

This information can also be found here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/maximum-payment-for-food-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/maximum-payment-for-food-01.html). Based on these limits, please find **Table One** enclosed in **Appendix One**, showing the number of clients, as at 31 July 2021, who received an SNG for food in the period 1 January 2021 to

31 July 2021, broken down by benefit type and food balance. A negative balance means that the client has been approved for SNGs for food over their limit. 'Full limit' means that the yearly amount of SNGs for food is still fully available to the client.

Data about clients who receive 'assistance' from the Ministry (your first question) would, in addition to main benefits, include other types of assistance, such as supplementary or hardship assistance. Although the Ministry holds raw data regarding these clients' access to SNGs for food, this data is not held in a reportable way. New coding and verification processes would need to be developed to report this data. Information on clients that are in receipt of supplements or hardship assistance is, therefore, refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the Ministry is not obligated to create new information under the Act.

It is important to note when viewing these figures that demand in food support has significantly increased as we respond to the impacts of COVID-19. This is reflected in the number of people who have a negative food balance to consider and have been approved a SNG for food over their limit.

In the week ending 17 September 2021, 23,913 SNGs for food were granted. A weekly overview of income support, which includes the number of SNGs granted for food, is available on the Ministry's website at the following link: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/weekly-reporting/index.html>.

To further help with the increased demand, the Government has provided further funding to the New Zealand Food Network to support regional food hubs across the country. MSD has provided \$900,000 to the food sector, including \$500,000 to the New Zealand Food Network (NZFN). This funding helps to boost existing stocks held by NZFN and foodbanks across the country.

3. *How many people are case managed and can only get assistance from their case manager e.g. can't be dealt with by the contact centre or MyMSD?*
4. *What happens if these people (case managed) need urgent assistance (which wasn't assisted by a Friday) on a weekend day when the contact centre is open, but the offices aren't?*

These two questions have been grouped together as they relate to one another.

All clients, including those with an assigned Case Manager, can contact the Ministry online through MyMSD and apply for assistance.

When a person with an assigned Case Manager calls the Contact Centre and needs to apply for assistance, they will generally be referred to their Case Manager. This ensures they receive a single, consistent point of contact and one-on-one support from their Case Manager. However, there are certain situations when these people may receive assistance through the Contact Centre, such as when they are calling after hours and have an immediate, urgent need.

With regard to your third question, I can advise that as at 31 August 2021, 62,951 clients had an assigned Case Manager.

The principles and purposes of the Act 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding limits for SNGs for food and how clients can contact the Ministry, 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.

Yours sincerely

*Bridget Saunders*

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

## Appendix One

**Table One: The number of clients as at 31 July 2021 who received an SNG for food in the period 1 January 2021 to 31 July 2021, broken down by benefit type and food balance**

Benefit type	Estimated SNG Food balance as at 31 July 2021						Total
	Zero or negative	\$1 - \$49	\$50 - \$79	\$80 - \$100	\$100 to just under limit	Full limit	
Emergency Benefit	84	57	33	9	192	4,530	<b>4,908</b>
Emergency Maintenance Allowance	57	90	18	9	165	342	<b>678</b>
Jobseeker Support related	20,100	20,238	7,869	3,387	25,587	111,711	<b>188,892</b>
Jobseeker Support Student Hardship	15	3	0	0	15	90	<b>123</b>
Non-beneficiary Assistance	1,542	816	585	270	5,133	66,294	<b>74,643</b>
New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension	1,419	1,698	1,395	594	5,973	835,203	<b>846,279</b>
Supported Living Payment related	5,670	5,247	2,622	1,251	9,987	72,723	<b>97,503</b>
Sole Parent Support	7,305	9,558	2,019	1,158	18,927	26,976	<b>65,940</b>
Widow's Benefit Overseas	0	0	0	0	0	3	<b>3</b>
Youth Payment and Young Parent Payment	57	51	42	18	450	2,421	<b>3,039</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,252</b>	<b>37,755</b>	<b>14,586</b>	<b>6,696</b>	<b>66,429</b>	<b>1,120,287</b>	<b>1,282,008</b>

### Notes:

- 'Zero or negative' means that a client has exceeded their yearly limit for SNGs for food.
- 'Full limit' means that a client still has their full yearly limit for SNGs for food available.
- This table excludes clients receiving the Orphan's Benefit or the Unsupported Child Benefit.
- The table provides an estimated food grant balance for current clients as at end of July 2021. The food grant balance is estimated using the processed amounts of food grants in the last 12 months if the client received at least one food SNG in the last 6 months
- A client may have changed their circumstances during the period, and the information in this table is based on last grant.
- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry 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.