



13 June 2022

Tēnā koe

On 29 April 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *I'm requesting information to do with superannuation payments that have been cancelled, and debt owing due to people being out of the country for too long.*

Please provide the info in an excel sheet, or a fully searchable PDF. If I could please have the data broken down per year from April 1 2020 – March 31 2021 and again April 1 2021 – March 31 2022.

1. *The number of people receiving NZ superannuation payments who were out of the country for 26 weeks or more unexpectedly.*
2. *The number of people who continued to receive their super payments beyond 26 weeks.*
3. *The number of people who had their super payments stopped after they had been away for 26 weeks.*
4. *The number of people who were sent correspondence advising them their payments would stop if they did not return within 26 weeks.*
5. *The number of people who MSD has determined must pay back their 26 weeks of payments.*
6. *The dollar amount of these repayments.*
7. *The dollar amount of any repayments made in each year.*

Please provide any contextual information around government policies at certain points in these periods which may help understand the figures provided.

New Zealand Superannuation (NZS) provides a retirement income for clients who have reached 65 years of age. Under the New Zealand Superannuation and Retirement Income Act 2001, NZS recipients can travel overseas for 26 weeks or less and continue to receive their payments. Clients are not entitled to receive NZS after 26 weeks, and if they do not return to NZ within 30 weeks, they may need to repay any NZS payments they received after they left New Zealand (NZ).

NZS and VP clients who are going overseas for longer than 26 weeks can apply for General Portability while they are still in NZ, which allows these clients to continue receiving their payments while they are out of the country.

If a client is already overseas and is unable to return to NZ within 30 weeks for reasons outside of their control, that could not have reasonably been foreseen before leaving NZ, they can apply for General Portability under Section 27 of the New Zealand Superannuation and Retirement Income Act 2001. You can find more information about overseas applications for General Portability at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/to-or-from-overseas/portability/general-portability/applying-for-payment-from-overseas-01.html.

In regard to questions one and two of your request, the Ministry are unable to accurately advise you of the number of superannuants that were unexpectedly out of NZ for more than 26 weeks, and those that continued to receive their NZS payment beyond 26 weeks. There is no historic reporting available on this data. To provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review daily data held which would constitute as substantial collation and research.

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.

However, in the spirit of good faith please see below **Table One** which outlines the number of portability grants to clients in receipt of NZS and Veteran's Pension (VP) between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

Table One: The number of portability grants to clients in receipt of New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

| 1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021 | 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022 |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 5,301 | 5,529 |

Notes:

- Portability is where a client receives NZS, VP overseas.
- This may include people who have moved from New Zealand, or in some cases people already based overseas who have lived in New Zealand.
- The numbers are counted for NZS and VP benefits.
- This is number of grants not number of clients. A client may have more than one grant during the period
- 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.
- 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.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry developed the COVID-19 New Zealanders Stranded Overseas Support Programme. The purpose of this programme was to provide special financial support to New Zealand beneficiaries and superannuants who were stranded overseas because of the effects of COVID-19, until it could be reasonably expected that they can return to NZ. You can find more information about this programme at the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/legislation/notice-of-change/2020/covid-19-new-zealanders-stranded-overseas-support-programme.html.

In regard to question four of your request, the Ministry is not able to centrally report information about the number of clients who received correspondence advising them their payments would stop if they did not return within 26 weeks. To determine this, the Ministry would need to review individual case files to determine what correspondence had been sent. As above, I am refusing 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.

However, I can advise that when a client makes an application for NZS, the Ministry helps them understand their obligations to receive and maintain

payments. Part of this process includes communicating information on the impacts of travelling overseas, including that payments will be stopped if they are overseas longer than 26 weeks without first applying for General Portability. Clients are encouraged to contact the Ministry before they travel overseas to help ensure they receive their correct payments while they are abroad.

Furthermore, I am unable to provide you with a response to questions five, six and seven of your request as this information, as above, would also be held in notes on individual case files. Therefore, I refuse 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.

In regard to question three of your request, please see below **Table Two** which outlines the number of NZS and VP payments that were suspended for the reason coded 'Left New Zealand' in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

Table Two: The number of New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension Suspensions for the reason 'Left New Zealand' in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

| Suspended Benefit | April-March 2020 to 2021 | April-March 2021 to 2022 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| NZS | 1,584 | 4,800 |
| VP | 6 | 27 |

Please see below **Table Three** which outlines the number of NZS and VP cancellations for the reason code 'Left New Zealand' in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

Table Three: The number of New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension cancellations for the reason code 'Left New Zealand' in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022.

| Cancelled Benefit | April-March 2020 to 2021 | April-March 2021 to 2022 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| NZS | 402 | 516 |
| VP | 0 | 0 |

Notes for Table Two and Table Three:

- These two tables are counts of suspensions and cancellations of NZS and VP in the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2022 for reason 'Left New Zealand'.
- Clients with suspensions can be resumed or cancelled. Similarly, cancelled clients can be re-granted NZS or VP.
- A client could have multiple suspensions and/or cancellations in the period.
- Clients may be in receipt of NZS with 'portability' payment.
- Reason group 'Left New Zealand' includes:
 - Client in agreement country, left New Zealand for 26–30 weeks, left New Zealand for 30 weeks, left New Zealand for Australia greater than 30 weeks,
 - Left New Zealand for UK greater than 30 weeks, left New Zealand for UK for 26–30 weeks, left New Zealand, non qualifying partner (NQP) left New Zealand 26–30 weeks,
 - NQP left New Zealand less than 30 weeks, only qualifying partner left New Zealand, overseas less than 4 weeks,
 - Overseas more than 4 weeks, qualifying partner left New Zealand for Australia greater than 30 weeks, qualifying partner left New Zealand for UK 26–30 weeks, qualifying partner left New Zealand for UK greater than 30 weeks,
 - Qualifying partner left New Zealand greater than 30 weeks and qualifying partner left New Zealand 26–30 weeks.
- 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.
- 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.

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'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 New Zealand Superannuation payments in relation to client overseas, 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

George Van Ooyen
Group General Manager
Client Service Support