



19 April 2023

Tēnā koe

On 21 March 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

I'd like to request the following

- *The number of dental grants granted in the past year in Canterbury and nationally.*
- *The number of dental grants declined in the past year in Canterbury and nationally.*
- *The amount spent on dental grants in the past year in Canterbury and nationally.*

The Ministry provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to people to meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs (including medical and dental costs), power and other costs. These payments are available to any person if they meet an income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source.

The Ministry recognises that individuals who are in receipt of a benefit may not be able to budget for unexpected dental costs, and support is available for those who meet the criteria to help with the cost of dental work.

All dental treatments funded through the Ministry must be provided by a health agency or registered dental practitioner. Examples of a qualifying dental situation include, but are not limited to root treatment, tooth extraction, tooth restoration and treatment of acute infection.

The maximum amount payable to a person applying for a non-recoverable Special Needs Grant (SNG) towards the cost of dental is \$1,000 within any 52-week period, as at 1 December 2022. Where exceptional circumstances apply, this amount may be exceeded, or more than one payment may be made.

Prior to 1 December 2022, the maximum amount payable to a person applying for a non-recoverable Special Needs Grant towards the cost of dental treatment was \$300 within any 52-week period. Where exceptional circumstances applied, this amount may have been exceeded, or more than one payment may have been made.

In situations where there are no exceptional circumstances, or where individuals do not meet the qualifying criteria for a Special Needs Grants, the Ministry may be able to provide other assistance. Beneficiaries may qualify for an Advanced Payment of Benefit (ADV) and non-beneficiaries may qualify for a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP).

Further information on dental treatment assistance can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/dental-treatment.html

Please find attached **Appendix One** which contains data regarding the number of hardship grants and corresponding amounts approved for Emergency Dental Treatment, both nationally and in Canterbury Region Work and Income Service Centres, during the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022.

Please note that **Appendix One** does not include data about Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAPs) granted for Emergency Dental Treatment. RAPs granted for Emergency Dental Treatment are recorded as an 'Other' payment in the Ministry's system. This payment category covers a variety of recoverable assistance that can be granted and cannot be broken down by the type of assistance granted.

As such, information about RAPs granted for Emergency Dental Treatment is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse part of 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.

It is important to note that the Ministry typically assesses Dental Treatment entitlement to both SNG (non-recoverable) and ADV (recoverable) simultaneously while receiving the one application for dental assistance resulting in a decline record for each assistance (SNG and ADV) per application, as reflected in Table Three and Table Four.

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 and attachments 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 dental grants, 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

Bridget Saunders

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**Manager Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**