



18 August 2023

Tēnā koe

On 10 July 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Total amount paid by MSD clients for Emergency Housing Contributions - broken down by month since the contribution was established*
- *Total amount charged but unpaid by MSD clients for Emergency Housing Contributions - broken down by month since the contribution was established*
- *Total number of clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*
- *Total amount paid by clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*
- *Total amount still owed by clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*

On 8 August 2023, the Ministry contacted you to advise that more time was required to respond to your request as consultations were necessary to make a decision on it. The Ministry advised that a decision will be with you no later than 5 September 2023.

In the interests of clarity, I will respond to each of your questions in turn. Some questions have been grouped together.

Demand for housing across New Zealand is growing and many 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.

From 19 October 2020, the Ministry introduced the Emergency Housing Contribution (EHC). Following this change, the EH SNG paid for the first seven nights is still non-recoverable. For any further consecutive EH SNGs required, clients are required to pay 25 percent of their weekly income towards accommodation costs. The EHC is similar to what clients pay in transitional housing or public housing, this is to better transition clients when they leave Emergency Housing into longer-term housing. More information about EHC is available here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/news/2020/emergency-housing-changes.html.

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.

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.

- *Total amount paid by MSD clients for Emergency Housing Contributions - broken down by month since the contribution was established*

- *Total amount charged but unpaid by MSD clients for Emergency Housing Contributions - broken down by month since the contribution was established*

Please refer to **Table One** in the attached **Appendix** which shows the outstanding and paid Emergency Housing Contributions as at month ending October 2020 to June 2023 by year and month ending.

- *Total number of clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*

Please note, EH SNGs are intended as a one-off grant. They are not able to be paid in advance of the need, or beyond what an individual is entitled to at the time of application. Given the high level of need many clients experience, subsequent grants are applied for in succession, and these are paid for up to 21 days at a time. As such, the data for EHC Unpaid is inclusive of contribution for the future weeks.

Please also note, as you have not specified a timeframe for the data you are requesting for this part of your request, the Ministry has interpreted it to be for the month of June. Please contact the Ministry if this was not the intention of your request and you would like a different period of time.

Please refer to **Table Two** in the attached **Appendix** which shows the number of clients with recoverable Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants between 1 June 2023 to 30 June 2023 by year and month ending.

- *Total amount paid by clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*
- *Total amount still owed by clients who have been instructed to pay the full cost of emergency housing back to MSD*

The Ministry is unable to provide you with this information as information regarding debts resulting from recoverable emergency housing costs is not centrally recorded and is instead held in notes on individual case files. A client can have more than one debt at a time with the Ministry and the recovery process includes debt being deducted chronologically that is, from the oldest to newest listed debt. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, 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.

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 emergency housing contributions, 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, appearing to read 'K. Hocking', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Karen Hocking
**Group General Manager
Housing**