



29 September 2023

Tēnā koe

On 1 August 2023, the office of Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development and Employment, transferred your request made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry). You requested the following information:

- *Under the OIA 1982 please provide me with a list of all emergency payments authorised by the minister under s64 and 63 SSA 2018 BETWEEN 2020-2023.*
- *And the total amount, in addition to what benefit [if any] the recipients were on and the MSD staff member who sought these payments.*

On 29 August 2023, the Ministry emailed you to advise that more time was required to respond to your request. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in responding to your request.

I will first provide you with information about the Emergency Benefit and sections 63 and 64 of the Social Security Act 2018 (SSA), before responding to your questions.

The Emergency Benefit is an income and asset tested benefit payable to people who are in hardship and who (in simple terms):

- Are unable to earn enough income for themselves (and any dependent family); and
- Cannot receive another benefit.

You can read more about the Emergency Benefit, including the criteria for grant and continued payment, on the Ministry's Work and Income website, here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/emergency-benefit/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/emergency-benefit/index.html).

Section 63 of the SSA enables the Ministry to grant an emergency benefit on the ground of hardship to a person who meets the criteria outlined in the link above.

Section 64 of the SSA applies while a domestic epidemic management notice is in force. It enables the Ministry, with the written approval of the Minister, to grant emergency benefits to people who would not otherwise be entitled to be granted emergency benefits. In context, there must be a link with the domestic epidemic and the emergency assistance sought.

Section 64 was used during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide emergency benefits to certain foreign nationals and temporary visa holders who were stuck in New Zealand from 1 December 2020 to 31 August 2021. If you would like to read the Cabinet papers that approved this policy, criteria and funding, please see the following links:

- [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-foreign-nationals-in-hardship-from-1-december-2020.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-foreign-nationals-in-hardship-from-1-december-2020.pdf)
- [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-temporary-visa-holders-from-1-september-2021/cabinet-paper-support-for-temporary-visa-holders-in-hardship-on-1-september-2021.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-temporary-visa-holders-from-1-september-2021/cabinet-paper-support-for-temporary-visa-holders-in-hardship-on-1-september-2021.pdf)
- [www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-temporary-visa-holders-from-1-september-2021/cabinet-paper-support-for-temporary-visa-holders-in-hardship-on-1-september-2021.pdf](http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2021/support-for-temporary-visa-holders-from-1-september-2021/cabinet-paper-support-for-temporary-visa-holders-in-hardship-on-1-september-2021.pdf)

I will now respond to your questions.

Please see the **Appendix** for the following information:

- **Table One:** The number of current working age Emergency Benefit clients as at the end of each quarter in the period 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2023, by quarter end.
- **Table Two:** The number of grants for working age Emergency Benefits in the period 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2023, by quarter end.

I am unable to provide you with a breakdown of whether the emergency benefit was granted under section 63 or 64 of SSA during the period 1 December 2020 to 31 August 2021. I am also unable to provide you with the amount paid for each emergency benefit granted and the Ministry staff member who recommended the grant as it 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 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 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding Emergency Benefits, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

*Bridget Saunders*

Bridget Saunders  
**Manager Issue Resolution  
Service Delivery**

## Appendix

**Table One: The number of current working age Emergency Benefit clients as at the end of each quarter in the period 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2023, by quarter end.**

<b>Quarter End</b>	<b>Number of Clients</b>
<b>March 2020</b>	1,080
<b>June 2020</b>	2,238
<b>September 2020</b>	2,382
<b>December 2020</b>	2,574
<b>March 2021</b>	1,410
<b>June 2021</b>	1,383
<b>September 2021</b>	2,193
<b>December 2021</b>	2,343
<b>March 2022</b>	1,386
<b>June 2022</b>	1,362
<b>September 2022</b>	1,458
<b>December 2022</b>	2,019
<b>March 2023</b>	1,398
<b>June 2023</b>	1,458

**Table Two: The number of grants for working age Emergency Benefits in the period 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2023, by quarter end.**

<b>Quarter End</b>	<b>Number of Grants</b>
<b>March 2020</b>	936
<b>June 2020</b>	1,968
<b>September 2020</b>	1,074
<b>December 2020</b>	1,899
<b>March 2021</b>	1,182
<b>June 2021</b>	939
<b>September 2021</b>	2,334
<b>December 2021</b>	2,610
<b>March 2022</b>	1,323
<b>June 2022</b>	1,188
<b>September 2022</b>	1,254
<b>December 2022</b>	1,977
<b>March 2023</b>	1,326
<b>June 2023</b>	1,185

**Notes for Tables:**

- Working age clients are clients between 18 and 64 years.
- 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.
- Random rounding does not round down to zero, a value of one or two will be rounded to 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.