



8 April 2024

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your email of 7 March 2024, requesting information about the funding of counselling sessions through the Disability Allowance.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on your request set out below. For the sake of clarity, I will respond to your request in parts.

- 1. Please can you share any policies, guidance or other documentation that outlines how WINZ and their employees make decisions about whether or not to fund someone's requests for counselling sessions through the disability allowance?*

When a client applies for assistance towards the ongoing cost of counselling, they will need to complete a Disability Allowance application form (if they are not already receiving Disability Allowance), a Disability Allowance Medical Certificate, and a Disability Allowance Counselling form. The relevant sections of the Counselling form must be completed by the applicant's registered medical practitioner or a nurse practitioner and their counsellor. The medical practitioner or nurse practitioner will need to confirm that the need for counselling is directly related to the client's disability and is of therapeutic value. If a case manager is uncertain about the eligibility or requires further clarification from a medical practitioner or nurse practitioner, these are referred to our regional health and disability team.

Further guidance on the criteria of including counselling fees or transport to counselling costs into a Disability Allowance assessment can be found here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/counselling-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/counselling-01.html).

Information relating to the proof of counselling cost can be found here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/proof-of-counselling-costs-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/proof-of-counselling-costs-01.html).

2. *What would justify an employee to decline an application, or application for extension of further sessions?*
3. *Please can you clarify whether there is any total limit on accessing WINZ funded counselling sessions and if so, what period this applies to e.g. whether there is X sessions that can potentially be approved over a year, a lifetime or some other period of time?*

Disability Allowance for counselling generally will be limited to a maximum of 10 sessions for the first application. It is up to the counsellor and client to determine the frequency of sessions within the allocated amount based on the clients need/ treatment plan which is determined between them.

The extension of counselling sessions can be considered on the recommendation of the client's medical practitioner or nurse practitioner. Information relating to additional counselling sessions can be found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/additional-counselling-sessions.html>.

The costs associated with counselling (counselling session and transport to and from session) are included as an allowable cost for a Disability Allowance. Information relating to the calculation of the rate is found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/calculating-rate-and-expiry-date-counselling.html>.

Disability Allowance is currently paid to a weekly maximum of up to \$78.60. This is a legislated limit given under Schedule 4, Part 9 of the Social Security Act 2018.

4. *If there are limitations around the number of sessions someone may access, please can you advise whether counselling sessions are totalled across both WINZ and Studylink applications, or whether these are counted separately?*

The number of available sessions for clients applies has been discussed above, and applies in the same way for clients applying through Studylink or Work and Income.

Please note that any decision to decline a request for payment can be reviewed by a client through our Review of Decision process. Further information can be found here: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/complaints/review-of-decisions.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/complaints/review-of-decisions.html).

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, 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

pp.

  
Magnus O'Neill

**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**