



29 January 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 1 December 2023, requesting information about Ministry clients staying at Spa Lodge in Rotorua, including assistance type, mental health or offending history, and amount paid to Spa Lodge.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out below.

Four addresses were registered to this supplier number

It is important to note that in order for a business to receive any form of payment from the Ministry, they must register with us as a supplier.

In regard to private rental suppliers, Ministry staff provide people with advice about their options and assess eligibility for financial assistance, but do not place clients with suppliers.

Further, one registered supplier may provide their services across multiple premises. These premises may be in different locations or operating under different trading names but may be receiving payment through the single supplier record.

As at 22 November 2023, the time the second dangerous building notice was issued, the following three addresses also used the same supplier number as Spa Lodge:

- EJ's Dormitel, 20 Victoria St, Rotorua
- Amber Lodge, 1296 Hinemaru St, Rotorua
- Funky Green Voyager, 4 Union St, Rotorua

It is not possible for the Ministry to accurately disaggregate data for Spa Lodge only.

You may be interested to know that EJ's Dormitel, Amber Lodge, and Funky Green Voyager subsequently passed the FENZ inspection conducted by Rotorua Lakes District Council.

How long had each of the residents lived at Spa Lodge by the time the second dangerous building notice was issued?

What was the age range of the clients?

The Ministry are aware of nine clients who were staying at Spa Lodge as at 22 November 2023. Your request for information about the length of stay and age of each client is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs the public interest in this information.

However, in the spirit of being helpful, I have provided you with **Table one** below, showing the median length of stay and age range of the nine Ministry clients staying at Spa Lodge on 22 November 2023.

Table one: Median length of stay and age range of the nine Ministry clients staying at Spa Lodge on 22 November 2023.

Median length of stay	Age range
167 days	19 to 50

Notes:

- Information about length of stay is self-reported by clients to the Ministry and may not be accurate.

If any of the clients had mental illness or criminal records, how many?

What kinds of mental illness and what crimes did they commit?

Had any committed category 3 or 4 offences? How many?

Your request for information on the mental health status and criminal record of Ministry clients is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons. The information you have requested is highly personal in nature and the need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

What kind/s of support were each of the clients given?

How were the clients supported in their tenancy at the lodge? How much was this and who was this paid to?

As part of the Ministry's services provided to clients, it is determined which of the Ministry's products and services will best support the client given their particular circumstances.

Clients were primarily supported with Accommodation Supplement (AS) and Temporary Additional Support if they qualified.

Accommodation Supplement is available to help pay rent, board, or costs of home ownership. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to be assessed to qualify for AS. It is calculated using a formula that considers geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income, and tenure type (renting, boarding, or home ownership).

When a client is in a private rental, any contractual relationship and payment of accommodation costs (such as rent or board) is between a client and their accommodation supplier, however clients can request for a redirection of their benefit payment (including AS) to be paid directly to their accommodation supplier.

You can find more information about AS at the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/accommodation-supplement.html

Your request for how much each client received in assistance is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, in order to protect the privacy of natural persons.

In a previous OIA I was told: "We do not place people in boarding houses or hostels. Our staff provide people with advice about their options and assess eligibility for financial assistance."

What kind of advice was provided to tenants of Spa Lodge about what options they had?

The Ministry is committed to supporting clients in their search for long-term homes.

The Ministry works with our Housing Accord partners to ensure support is available to anyone who needs assistance finding accommodation. A range of supports is explored with clients, including:

- private rental options they can afford
- help with rent if they're behind
- help paying bond for a new property
- help negotiating with landlords to retain a tenancy
- paying bond and rent in advance for a new place
- financial assistance with moving costs
- offering a landlord tenancy costs cover.

What alternative accommodation were the residents moved to?

In acknowledgement of the public interest of this information we can advise that the Ministry worked with people who were staying at Spa Lodge to support their search for alternative accommodation. Clients have found accommodation in a mix of hostel-type accommodation, emergency housing, and private accommodation.

Your request for more specific information is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, in order to protect the privacy of natural persons.

How many of the residents were previously living at Four Canoes Motel?

I am refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

How many lived there during its time as emergency housing? How many continued to live there after the last grant was made?

How much was being paid during its time as emergency housing? (i.e., through the grant, how much was the lodge getting in an average week from how many people living there?)

For how long was the lodge used as emergency housing and what was the total paid to it in grants in that time? Each year?

I refer you to **Appendix One** which provides **Table Two**: Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EHSNG), distinct clients and amount granted to Spa Lodge from 1 October 2016 to 31 October 2023.

The date of the first EHSNG payment to the Spa Lodge supplier was 6 September 2018. The date of the last EHSNG payment to Spa Lodge was October 2022. The 2023 payment of \$720 that appears in **Table Two** was made by mistake, likely due to a payment error.

To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. Some values in **Table Two** are suppressed and are represented by 'S'. The Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As such, this information is withheld under Section 9(2)(a) of the Act.

Furthermore, in order to protect client privacy, the data in **Table Two** has been randomly rounded to the nearest multiple of 3. An 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.

Your request for how many continued to live at Spa Lodge after the last grant was made is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act as releasing this information risks identifying the individuals concerned. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

Your request for information on how much the lodge was receiving in an 'average week' is refused under section 18(g) of the Act. The Act only applies to information that is already held by the Ministry and there is no obligation on the Ministry to create information in order to respond to a request.

What was the total MSD was paying for tenancies at the lodge as at November 15?

As at 17 November 2023 the Ministry paid a total of \$20,570.00 in redirections to the address the supplier registered to 1221 Amohau Street, Rotorua. As noted, three additional addresses used the same supplier number as Spa Lodge which was registered to 1221 Amohau Street. It is not possible to isolate redirections made to Spa Lodge.

Why did Spa Lodge cease being an emergency housing provider? Can I please have a copy of any relevant email or summary of verbal conversation, for example any email from MSD or the owner of the lodge advising of the stopping of EH.

It is important to note that the Ministry does not contract directly with emergency housing suppliers. The Ministry can only pay an EHSNG into the bank accounts of businesses who are registered as suppliers, but this registration does not create a contractual relationship between the Ministry and the accommodation supplier.

Since late 2021, there has been a decline in observed need for Emergency Housing. There were peaks during the COVID 19 pandemic, and over the last 12 months numbers have, on the whole, reduced.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Homelessness Action Plan 2020 (NZHAP) introduced several initiatives to better support clients in Emergency Housing. These sit alongside existing support products to assist people into sustainable housing to prevent and reduce homelessness. Transitional Housing options were increased to reduce the need for Emergency Housing.

As part of the Rotorua Accord, the Ministry has been working with partners to reduce reliance on motels as a form of Emergency Housing. We have reduced the number of suppliers from 35 to 7 suppliers. Therefore, the Ministry no longer needed to use Spa Lodge.

The owner of Spa Lodge was advised verbally in 2022 that Spa Lodge was no longer needed for Emergency Housing.

Did any MSD staff visit the lodge, or residents at the lodge, since January? (When it ceased being emergency housing)

Ministry staff have not visited Spa Lodge since January 2023.

Please note that the Ministry has no power to tell people where they should live, inspect their living arrangements, inspect buildings, or monitor compliance with building regulations.

Ministry staff provide people with advice about their options and assess eligibility for financial assistance.

Did anyone, including staff and residents, raise concerns about the lodge? Either in the time it was providing EH or as longer-term tenancies? Details please.

The Ministry received one complaint, the details of which are withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. However, in acknowledgement of the public interest of this information we can advise that this complaint was lodged in November 2023 and was in regard to safety and the facilities at Spa Lodge. The Ministry raised these concerns with Rotorua Lakes Council as part of ongoing discussions regarding Spa Lodge.

The Ministry welcomes council action on unsafe buildings and expects accommodation suppliers to meet the standards set by all the relevant regulatory authorities and for those authorities to take action where necessary.

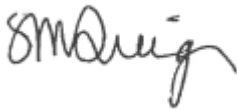
I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 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 or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

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Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

Appendix One

Table Two: Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants, distinct clients and amount granted to the Spa Lodge supplier from 1 October 2016 to 31 October 2023, by calendar year

Calendar year	Number of grants	Distinct clients	Amount granted
2018	237	45	\$231,074
2019	1,242	192	\$1,773,341
2020	783	123	\$1,203,665
2021	330	57	\$658,658
2022	252	39	\$560,849
2023 (to 31 October)	S	S	\$720

Notes:

- The 2023 payment of \$720 was made by mistake, likely due to a payment error.
- The number of grants is not the number of individuals. A client can have more than one grant in each time period.
- Amount granted is not necessarily the amount spent.
- One registered supplier may provide accommodation across multiple premises. These premises may be in different locations or operating trading names but are receiving payment through the single supplier record.
- 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 published counts will never differ by more than two counts.
- In certain circumstances, low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified. Due to these privacy concerns, numbers for some categories of clients have been suppressed or aggregated. Suppressed numbers have been replaced by an 'S'.