



13 May 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your email of 12 April 2024, requesting information about emergency housing. I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on your request set out below.

- 1. Annual debt owed from staying in emergency accommodation for period 2014-2024, break down by region and provide national sum.*
- 2. Annual emergency/transitional accommodation debt repaid for period 2014-2024, break down by region and provide national sum.*
- 3. The current national highest amount owed from emergency/transitional housing from one individual.*
- 4. The current Waikato highest amount owed for emergency/transitional housing from one individual*

Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant – emergency housing contribution

Clients who qualify for an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) must pay an emergency housing contribution. This is an amount they pay towards their emergency housing costs. Clients must pay 25% of their net income, or 25% of the appropriate Jobseeker Support rate - whichever is higher.

When a client applies for a EH SNG for a new emergency housing event, they will not have to pay the contribution for the first seven nights, but will have to pay the contribution from the eighth night.

EH SNGs are generally not recoverable, unless the client is not meeting their emergency housing requirements. For example:

- The client has failed to make a reasonable effort in the circumstances to access other sources of housing assistance or
- The client has unreasonably contributed to their immediate emergency housing need or
- The Ministry has been unable to recover the client's contribution for a previous Special Needs Grant for emergency housing or
- The client has not used the Special Needs Grant for emergency housing for the purpose, or for the period for which the grant was made.

Any amount of a EH SNG that is not used by the client for the purpose or period for which it was granted is recoverable.

More information about when a EH SNG is recoverable can be found on our Manuals and Procedures website: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/emergency-housing/when-a-sng-for-emergency-housing-is-recoverable.html

Security deposits

Emergency housing suppliers, transitional or contracted emergency housing suppliers may require a security deposit for loss or damage to their property before they will allow clients to move into their accommodation. For emergency housing suppliers, the security deposit is the equivalent of 7 nights' accommodation.

The Ministry will only pay a security deposit grant approved for emergency housing to a supplier if the supplier has incurred damage or loss. If there is no damage or loss, the security deposit will not be needed, and no payment can be made to the supplier.

When there is damage or loss, the supplier must identify this during the client's stay or by the time the client completes their stay. The decision about whether the client must pay for damage or loss is between the supplier and the client, not the Ministry.

Before payment can be made, the supplier must confirm the client is responsible for the damage or loss arising from their stay, and there was no known dispute of that responsibility by the client when they completed the check-out process. A claim must be supported by evidence.

If there is agreement between the supplier and the client that the client is responsible for the costs due to the damage or loss, the Ministry can pay the supplier up to the security deposit amount originally approved. If a security deposit is paid to a supplier, that amount becomes recoverable from the client.

Any dispute between the client and the supplier as to the client's responsibility for the costs potentially covered by a security deposit is to be resolved between the client and the supplier. This may involve the matter being taken to the Disputes Tribunal.

More information about security deposits and claiming costs for damage or loss can be found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/housing-providers/security-deposit.html>

I am unable to provide you with the total outstanding debt and amount repaid to the Ministry from recoverable EH SNGs broken down by region, the highest national amount owed from emergency housing for from one individual or the current highest amount owed for emergency housing from an individual in the Waikato region.

This information is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands 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.

However, I am able to provide you with the total amount and the number of non-recoverable and recoverable EHSNG's that were granted in the period 1 October 2016 to 31 March 2024, broken down by year. When first introduced, EH SNGs were coded in the Ministry's IT system as 'other emergency grants', which included SNGs for various other emergency reasons. As such, 1 October 2016 is the earliest date the Ministry can disaggregate EH SNG payments from other types of assistance under that code.

Please see **Table One** in the attached **Appendix**. It is important to note that the amount granted may not be the total amount spent, and that this is a count of grants, not a count of clients. Clients may have multiple grants in a period. Please note, security deposit is not included in the below data.

5. The longest length of stay in emergency/transitional accommodation nationally to date. Please provide the age of the individual.

Please see **Table Two** in the attached **Appendix**, detailing the highest number of consecutive weeks in emergency housing during the period 1 October 2016 to 31 March 2024.

Your request for the age of this individual is refused under section 9(2)(a) of the Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of this individual outweighs the public interest in this information.

6. Average length of stay in emergency/transitional housing to date. Break down by region if possible

The Ministry regularly publishes updated data about emergency housing on our website. You can find the latest information in our publicly available data regarding EHSNG's here, and previous data can be found through the previous release link at the bottom of the page: msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/emergency-housing.html

7. Number of individuals who currently lives in social housing, and has an income of the highest threshold (\$779.21 for single or \$1198.77 if they have a partner or children), break down by region.

Please see the attached **Appendix**, containing **Table Three**: the number of current tenancies as at 31 March 2024, broken down by housing region and income threshold.

The Ministry undertakes a public housing assessment using the Social Allocation System (SAS) in order to fully understand a person's housing needs. Generally, to qualify for social housing, a client must be earning at or under the income limit for their household type. Assessable income is used to determine eligibility for social housing.

Generally, a client does not qualify for social housing if they exceed the income or asset limits. However, there are exceptions that allow the progress of a client's application for social housing when:

- the client's income or assets exceeds the limits and
- they have an urgent social housing need and
- that housing need can be met by the provision of social housing.

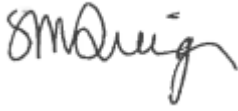
Further information on income limits is available on our website, here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/assessment-of-eligibility/income-limits-01.html>

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details removed, 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 regarding emergency housing, 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 'M O'Neill', written in a cursive style.

pp.

Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services