



22 May 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 22 April 2024, requesting information about the financial assistance provided by the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) in regard to electricity costs.

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 separately below.

1. *The total sum of grants/loans/advances WINZ gave for electricity bills in the calendar year 2023, by region.*
 - a. *What was the total paid out in Special Needs Grants for electricity bills in 2023?*
 - b. *What was the total paid out in Advance Payments of Benefits for electricity bills in 2023?*
 - d. *What sum of each of the above was recoverable, versus non-recoverable?*
 - e. *In 2023, besides the Winter Energy Payment, did WINZ give out any non-recoverable grant for electricity costs?*

2. *How many individual clients did WINZ give grants, loans, or advances for electricity bills in each year 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023? Please break this down by region.*

Please refer to the attached **Appendix** in response to questions 1 and 2 of your request.

As you will note, there are no Special Needs Grants (SNG) in the period requested as they are not available to clients to assist with electricity costs.

3. *What is the eligibility criteria for a client to receive from WINZ:*
 - a. *a Special Needs Grant for electricity costs*
 - b. *an Advance Payment of Benefit for electricity costs*
 - c. *any other grant, loan or advance that WINZ offers to help people pay electricity costs (excluding the Winter Energy Payment).*

4. *Regarding Special Needs Grants for electricity costs:*

- a. *-What's the maximum sum a client can receive per Special Needs Grant for electricity costs?*
- b. *What's the maximum number of Special Needs Grants for electricity costs that a client can receive per year?*
- c. *How many individual clients did receive this maximum sum, and/or maximum number of grants, in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023?*

SNGs are not available to clients to assist with electricity costs. As such, I am refusing your request for information on SNGs for assistance with electricity costs under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you had 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.

People who need assistance with electricity, gas, or water costs can apply for an Advance Payment of Benefit (ADV) or a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP).

ADVs and RAPs are recoverable assistance for specific immediate and essential needs, such as electricity, where the person cannot meet the need from their own or other resources. ADVs are available to eligible clients receiving a main benefit, Orphans Benefit, Unsupported Childs Benefit, New Zealand Superannuation and Veterans Pension. RAPs are available to eligible non-beneficiaries.

To find more information on the eligibility criteria for ADVs and RAPs, please visit the following links:

- ADV- [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/adv-qualifications)
- RAP- [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/rap-qualifications)

1. c. *Were there any other types of grants/loans/advances given out by WINZ to help clients pay electricity bills in 2023? (Excluding the Winter Energy Payment.)*

Outside of ADV and RAP, there are no other "grants/loans/advances" for electricity bills. However, if a client has additional power, gas or heating costs because of their disability, over and above the normal power consumption of similar-sized households in the area at the same time of the year, the Ministry may be able to assist under Disability Allowance (DA).

If you would like to find out more information on DA and what power, gas and heating costs can be included in the DA, please visit the following links:

- [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/da-qualifications)
- [Power, gas, and heating - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/da-power-gas-heating)

5. *Regarding Advance Payment of Benefits for electricity costs:*
 - a. *What's the maximum sum a client can receive on each Advance Payment for electricity costs?*
 - b. *What's the maximum number of Advance Payments for electricity costs that a client can receive per year?*
 - c. *How many individual clients did receive this maximum sum, and/or maximum number of Advance Payments of Benefits, in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023?*

As a guideline for ADV and RAP, payments for electricity should not be more than \$200, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If you would like information on the number of clients that have received an ADV or RAP for more than \$200, please contact the Ministry and we will consider if we are able to collate that data.

There is no restriction on the number of times a client can be granted ADV or RAP for electricity costs.

Eligibility for ADVs and RAPs is assessed on a case-to-case basis, taking into account a range of factors including a person's continued reliance on hardship assistance, whether they are receiving their full and correct entitlement, and whether their needs can be met in another way.

If you would like more information on determining whether exceptional circumstances exist, please visit the below links:

- ADV- [Exceptional circumstances - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/exceptional-circumstances-map)
- RAP- [Exceptional circumstances - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/exceptional-circumstances-map)

6. What was the total debt to WINZ (or MSD) for electricity bills in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023?

7. How many individuals owed debt to WINZ (or MSD) for electricity bills in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023?

I am unable to provide you with this information as it is not centrally recorded in the format you have requested. 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.

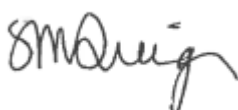
I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

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 nui

pp. 

Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services