



30 October 2024

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your emails of 28 August 2024, requesting information relating to benefit sanctions and their impact on Māori. For administrative purposes, your request has been split into two responses, which cover your requests for data and for policy related documents separately. This letter is responding to the aspects of your request relating to data.

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. *The number of benefit sanctions applied to Māori beneficiaries annually since October 2023, broken down by:*
  - a. *Type of benefit*
  - b. *Type of sanction (e.g., suspension, reduction, or cancellation)*
  - c. *Region*
  - d. *Age group*

Please find the information requested in Tables 1 to 4 of **Appendix A** attached:

- **Table 1:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit Māori clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by benefit.
- **Table 2:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit Māori clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by sanction type.
- **Table 3:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit Māori clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by region.
- **Table 4:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit Māori clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by age group.

Please note that the Ministry is unable to distinguish cancelled sanctions from suspended sanctions. However, the Ministry has provided the data we centrally report on, broken down by sanction types in Table 2.

2. *The percentage of total benefit sanctions applied to Māori beneficiaries, compared to non-Māori, since October 2023.*

Please find the information requested in Table 5 of **Appendix A** attached:

- **Table 5:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by ethnicity.
3. *Data on how many Māori have been placed in each stage of the traffic light system (green, amber, red) since October 2023.*
  4. *Data on the number of Māori beneficiaries escalated from green to amber or red since October 2023, and the reasons for those escalations.*

Please find the information requested in Tables 6, 7, and 9 of **Appendix A** attached:

- **Table 6:** Number of sanctions imposed for working age main benefit clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by first sanction reason and ethnicity.
- **Table 7:** Number of work obligation failures for working age main benefit clients from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by reason and ethnicity.
- **Table 9:** Number of working age clients in the traffic light system as at end of August 2024, by colour and ethnicity.

Please note that as the traffic light system was implemented in August 2024, there is no data in scope of your request prior to this date.

5. *Data on the average duration of benefit sanctions applied to Māori beneficiaries compared to non-Māori since October 2023.*

I am unable to provide you with this information 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.

6. *Statistics on the rate of successful appeals against benefit sanctions by Māori beneficiaries, compared to non-Māori, including the number of appeals submitted and resolved annually since October 2023.*
7. *The total financial cost or impact on Māori beneficiaries as a result of benefit sanctions since October 2023, including estimations of total benefit payments lost by sanctioned individuals.*
8. *Any data on whether Māori beneficiaries are more likely to escalate through the traffic light system compared to non-Māori, including the criteria used for escalation.*

These aspects of your request are refused under section 18(g) of the Act, on the basis that the information 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.

9. *A breakdown of appeals or disputes lodged by Māori beneficiaries in relation to benefit sanctions, including the outcomes.*

Please find the information requested in Table 8 of **Appendix A** attached:

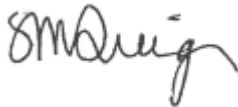
- **Table 8:** Number of outcomes for review/dispute of obligation failure from 1 October 2023 to 31 August 2024, by review outcome and ethnicity.

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](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp. 

Magnus O'Neill  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**