



12 September 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 15 August 2024, requesting beneficiary 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.

Please note, I have interpreted your request to be for data relating to cuts for sanctions found on the Ministry's benefit factsheets.

- 1. Please break down the 1,500 benefits cuts in the last quarter, broken down demographically, ethnicity, and age?*
- 2. Please break down the 1,500 benefits cuts in the last quarter, broken down by Māori electoral boundaries.*
- 3. How many of the 1500 benefit cuts are sole parents, broken down demographically?*
- 4. How many Māori have received the job seekers benefit in the last financial year, broken down demographically?*
- 5. How many Māori have received the job seekers benefit in the last financial year, broken down by Māori electoral boundaries?*
- 6. How many beneficiaries on the job seekers benefit are under 25 years old in the last financial year, broken down demographically and ethnicity?*
- 7. How many beneficiaries on the job seekers benefit are under 25 years old in the last financial year, broken down Māori electorate boundaries?*

Please find the information requested attached in **Appendix A** which contains the following tables:

- **Table 1:** Number of sanctions for failing work obligations that result in benefit suspension or cancellation for working age main benefit clients from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024, by ethnicity and benefit type
- **Table 2:** Number of sanctions for failing work obligations that result in benefit suspension or cancellation for working age main benefit clients from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024, by gender and benefit type

- **Table 3:** Number of sanctions for failing work obligations that result in benefit suspension or cancellation for working age main benefit clients from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024, by age and benefit type
- **Table 4:** Number of Jobseeker Support recipients with Māori ethnicity as at month ending June 2024, by gender
- **Table 5:** Number of Jobseeker Support recipients with Māori ethnicity as at month ending June 2024, by age
- **Table 6:** Number of Jobseeker Support recipients with Māori ethnicity as at month ending June 2024, by Territorial Local Authority
- **Table 7:** Number of Jobseeker Support recipients aged between 18 to 24 as at month ending June 2024, by ethnicity and gender

Please note that the Ministry is unable to report on Māori electorate boundaries. Your request for this information is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information is held in individual client files, and substantial manual collation would be required to provide this information. 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.

8. What processes and pathways are in place specifically for Māori to ensure equitable outcomes for Māori on the job seekers benefit?

Te Pae Tata, the Ministry's Māori Strategy and Action Plan, sets out how it will work to achieve better outcomes for Māori. *Te Pae Tata* helps Ministry staff to think differently about the way it works and to embed a Māori world view throughout the organisation. This helps Ministry staff to have the capability to do their best for whānau, hapū and iwi.

Te Pae Tata is the collective effort of many. It draws on the wisdom and experiences of whānau, hapū and iwi who have engaged with the Ministry.

You can read *Te Pae Tata* in the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/strategies/te-pae-tata/te-pae-tata-maori-strategy-and-action-plan-single.pdf.

9. How will you ensure there is not an abuse of power associated with the traffic light system, and treatment of all beneficiaries is fair and equitable?

The Traffic Light System does not add any new work, work preparation or social obligations and does not add or change the nature of financial benefit sanctions or who they apply to. The Traffic Light System changes will instead help beneficiaries clearly understand and stay on track with meeting their existing obligations, so that they can avoid sanctions and the associated impacts.

10. What assistance and advocacy will be available for beneficiaries?

Should a client require further support from Work and Income, they can call the general inquiries line on 0800 559 009.

Alternatively, a client can choose to have someone else act on their behalf in their dealings with Work and Income. Such support people or agent can be friends, family or advocates from community groups or organisations.

A client may verbally agree to have an agent for one meeting, or they can fill out a form to have an agent for longer. There is more information about the appointment of an agent and advocates at the following links:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/on-a-benefit/your-rights-and-responsibilities/having-someone-act-on-your-behalf.html and <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/advocates/index.html>

11. How will the Ministry ensure that tamariki are not impacted by the benefit sanction changes?

To further strengthen the impact of the Traffic Light System, the Minister for Social Development and Employment intends to introduce legislation to enable non-financial sanctions to be imposed instead of a financial sanction. You can read more here: www.beehive.govt.nz/release/green-light-welfare-works#:~:text=Social%20Development%20and%20Employment%20Minister,are%20not%20meeting%20those%20expectations.

Non-financial sanctions will provide an alternative to financial sanctions for parents with children who fail to meet their obligations, and reduce the consequent impacts of sanctions on children.

The Ministry plans to undertake a review of both non-financial sanctions (Money Management and Community Work Experience) a year after implementation to better assess and determine their impacts and consider opportunities for improvements.

Additionally, for financial sanctions, the current settings will remain, wherein clients with dependent children do not have their whole benefit sanctioned. Instead, only a maximum sanction of 50% of the total benefit may be imposed.

12. How many whānau rely on benefits to survive day by day (pay for food, essentials, rent, power etc), broken down by demographics?

This aspect of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry, and I have no reason to believe it is held by any other department.

13. What modelling has the Ministry done on the impacts of the benefit sanctions?

The Ministry has interpreted this aspect of your request to be for the modelling relating to the Traffic Light System. As such, your request has been refused s18(e) of the Act, as the information requested does not exist.

Please let us know if this was not the intention of your request.

14. Does the Ministry expect to see an increase in poverty and homelessness as a result of the benefit sanctions?

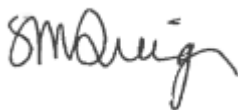
Please refer to the responses to questions 9 and 13 above.

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 regarding benefits and sanctions, 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