

Insights Reporting Series

Emergency Housing

Purpose

This report focuses on the households who have accessed Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EH-SNGs), as part of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD)'s Insights Reporting Series. Each report in this series focuses on a different group that are a priority for MSD, to better understand their historical, current, and future needs.

This report uses analysis and data from MSD administrative data, the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), and previous pieces of analysis.

The IDI contains data from government agencies, Stats NZ surveys, and non-government agencies (NGOs) about people, households, and firms. This allows researchers to better understand how people interact with a variety of government agencies over the long-term.

Key findings

MSD has strengthened systems to support people into sustainable housing.

MSD has been involved in a range of initiatives working across government to improve the provision of housing support, including large-scale reviews and cross-organisational strategies. Within MSD there has been a focus on making Housing Support Products (HSPs) more accessible and helping people into sustainable housing through services including Housing Brokers, Ready to Rent, Integrated Services Case Management and Navigators.

Weather events, boarding house closures and ongoing pressures in the housing market have contributed to a slight rise in the number of households accessing EH-SNGs over 2023.

The number of households accessing EH-SNGs remains significantly lower following recovery from COVID-19, however, ongoing pressure in the housing market continues to make it difficult for people to find and retain housing, particularly in areas affected by events such as the North Island Weather Events.

Households accessing EH-SNGs are often facing complex challenges which are interwoven with their need for housing.

Households accessing EH-SNGs are more likely than other benefit clients to have low incomes, unstable or insufficient employment outcomes, and recent experiences with the healthcare and justice systems. These experiences may indicate existing needs that are combined with their need for housing.

MSD continues to provide financial support for most households after they stop accessing EH-SNGs.

After leaving emergency housing, most households access hardship grants, which may include HSPs. Many households access other forms of housing support after leaving, including Accommodation Supplement and Social Housing.

MSD continues to support people into sustainable housing.

Improving housing support remains a key priority for MSD and the government.

As demand for Social Housing (through the Housing Register) and EH-SNGs remains high, provision of housing support remains a key priority. MSD has been involved in a range of initiatives working across government to address this, including the Emergency Housing System Review, The Aotearoa Homelessness Action Plan, the Rotorua Housing Accord, the Accommodation Supplement Review, reviewing the management of the social housing register and a refreshed model for HSPs.

The supply of transitional housing has increased.

People may be referred to transitional housing providers if they need short-term housing while being supported to move into stable longer-term accommodation. This can represent both a preventative measure and a possible pathway out of emergency housing. As at August 2023, there were 6,069 places available in Transitional Housing, 3,014 more than at January 2020.¹

¹ Based on administrative data as at end of month.

MSD has strengthened supports that help people retain a private rental or transition into sustainable housing.

MSD has made HSPs more accessible and easier to implement to encourage their use. HSPs include payments such as Bond Grants, Moving Costs Grant, Rent Arrears Assistance and Rent in Advance payments, which help people gain or retain private housing. In June 2023, around 3,020 unique households accessed HSPs.

Housing Brokers placed over 1,182 households in sustainable accommodation over the 2022/23 financial year. Housing Brokers work to increase connections between MSD clients seeking a tenancy, private landlords, property managers and the wider rental market to support people into suitable and sustainable private rental options. Currently, the Housing Brokerage service is focused on supporting those at greatest risk of housing insecurity, including preventing vulnerable people from needing to access EH-SNGs.

MSD offered 109 Ready to Rent courses over the 2022/23 financial year, which have received positive feedback. These courses are run by community providers and aim to prepare people for the private rental market, including building readiness for interviews and awareness of their rights and responsibilities.

Integrated Services Case Management and contracted system navigator services are available to those supported by EH-SNGs. The Flexible Funding Programme provides financial support to families with children who are staying in emergency housing and who have immediate needs arising from living in that accommodation. These initiatives identify and support whānau living in emergency housing who may benefit from additional support. Integrated Services Case Managers and Navigators work holistically with whānau to address their immediate needs, including health and wellbeing. They help whānau to build their capability to search for houses and remove housing barriers.

Around 1,700 fewer households accessed EH-SNGs after the end of the COVID-19 lockdowns.

COVID-19 level four lockdowns in March 2020 and August 2021 saw more households accessing EH-SNGs, however the number of households declined significantly after the end of the COVID-19 Alert Level System. As at January 2023, there were around 1,700 fewer households accessing EH-SNGs than in November 2021 (see Figure 1).²

Identifying precise causes for shifts in the number of households supported by an EH-SNG within different regions is difficult as numbers are influenced by a wide range of factors. However, the decline accelerated following the end of the COVID-19 Alert Level System. MSD continued to support people in their pathways into sustainable housing over this time, and there was a reducing supply of emergency housing providers as tourism returned.

Over 2023, weather events, boarding house closures and ongoing pressures in the housing market have contributed to a slight rise in the number of households accessing EH-SNGs.

The number of households accessing EH-SNGs broadly declined after COVID-19, and MSD has mostly sustained this decline over 2023 (see Figure 1). Several events over the year have placed upward pressure on EH-SNGs:

- › Ensuring people were housed following Cyclone Gabrielle and the North Island weather events was primarily managed by MBIE’s Temporary Accommodation Service, however we still saw a small rise in households accessing EH-SNGs within these regions
- › The closure of a number of boarding houses after May, particularly in the Auckland region, saw higher demand for EH-SNGs in these areas
- › Pressure in the housing market has persisted, with rental prices⁴ rising by 3.9 percent to May 2023. Higher levels of immigration also mean fewer available rentals, with particularly strong pressure in Auckland making it difficult for households to find and retain sustainable housing

⁴ The Stats NZ RPI "stock measure" is a modelled view of nationwide rental inflation for existing tenancies.

Figure 1: Following the post-COVID decline, there has been a slight rise in households accessing EH-SNGs over 2023 (month end data).



Following COVID-19, fewer households have accessed EH-SNGs, however those remaining have longer stays. While most households accessing EH-SNGs still stay for less than six months,³ the proportion of households with stays longer than six months has been growing over time. Households with longer stays in emergency housing generally face greater barriers to sustainable housing and are likely to need more support.

² Based on administrative data as at end of month.

³ 64 percent of households had accessed EH-SNGs for six months or less as at August 2023



Most households accessing EH-SNGs are single adults or sole parent families.

As at 31 August 2023 there were around 3,396 households accessing EH-SNGs, and around 3,537 children in these households.⁵ Households accessing EH-SNGs are primarily single adults and sole parent families, and 50 percent of total primary clients identify as Māori.⁶

- › Single adult households represent 46 percent of all households accessing EH-SNGs. They are slightly more often male (55%) and are most likely to be Māori or NZ European. Single adults are accessing emergency housing at a broad range of ages, however 41 percent are between the ages of 30-49.⁷
- › Sole parent households represent 42 percent of all households accessing EH-SNGs. They are generally women (83%), Māori (66%) and between the ages of 30-49 (55%),⁸ with 93 percent below the age of 50.
- › For those under the age of 30 accessing EH-SNGs, most households have children (59%), however there is still a large group of single adults (39%).
- › For those over the age of 50 accessing EH-SNGs, most are single adults (77%).⁹

⁵ Clients are asked how many children they have with them when they apply for an EH-SNG. MSD does not check details of individual children including whether they are staying in emergency housing with their parents. Therefore, any reporting on children in emergency housing is approximate, based on what clients have said on their latest application.

⁶ Total clients with recorded ethnicity as at August 2023. www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/monthly-housing-update/2023/monthly-housing-update-august-2023.pdf

⁷ As at August 2023, end of month.

⁸ As at August 2023, end of month.

⁹ As at August 2023, end of month.

Households accessing EH-SNGs often face complex challenges which are interwoven with their housing needs.¹⁰

People seeking emergency housing tend to experience a range of complex challenges. While households accessing EH-SNGs have a need for housing, they are also more likely than other benefit clients to need support around healthcare, mental health and addiction, low incomes, or having spent time in prison. Those who access EH-SNGs for longer periods may have extreme difficulty obtaining sustainable housing, particularly single adult households, as temporary housing options often prioritise families with children. Understanding the complexity of needs faced by these households provides insight into where cross-organisational responses may be useful.

Most people accessing EH-SNGs have low incomes and do not have stable or sufficient employment.

Most EH-SNG clients (59 percent) had received no income (excluding benefit and NZ superannuation) in the previous year,¹¹ and 95 percent had received a main benefit.

People accessing EH-SNGs have a higher rate of acute hospitalisations and use of mental health or addiction services.

Of all primary clients accessing an EH-SNG:

- › 26 percent had an acute hospitalisation within the previous year
- › 31 percent had accessed a mental health or addiction service¹²
- › 31 percent were supported by a health-related benefit.¹³

¹⁰ The analysis in this section is taken from the IDI and based on data for clients who have accessed an EH-SNG up to December 2022.

¹¹ Income is considered here to be taxable income including; wages and salaries, paid parental leave, ACC weekly compensation, student allowance or sole trader/partnership/company income. It excludes benefits and NZ superannuation.

¹² Higher than the rates of Register and main benefit clients (22% and 17% respectively).

¹³ Based on MSD administrative data as at August 2023, end of month.

A high proportion of those accessing EH-SNGs have had experience with the criminal justice system.

Notably, 28 percent of primary clients accessing an EH-SNG had a police proceeding¹⁴ against them in the previous year. This is higher than the rate for Register clients (14 percent) and main benefit clients (10 percent). In addition, 22 percent of primary clients accessing an EH-SNG had a corrections sentence (excluding driving),¹⁵ and 8 percent had been in prison in the previous year.¹⁶

Most clients under 30 accessing EH-SNGs have experienced childhood challenges.

Young people accessing EH-SNGs are likely to have had interactions with Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) or youth justice.¹⁷ For clients accessing EH-SNGs who are aged 30 or under:

- › 73 percent had a Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) care and protection event in their childhood.
- › 25 percent had recorded involvement with youth justice.

¹⁴ Whether the Police had proceeded (ie taken legal action) against that individual for an offence in the past 3 years.

¹⁵ Higher than the rate on the Register (12%) and the main benefit (8%).

¹⁶ Higher than that for main benefit clients (3%) and people on the Register (4%).

¹⁷ Whether a person (aged 30 or under) has had any involvement with the Care and Protection or Youth Justice systems. This comprises: Reports of concern, Care and Protection investigations, Family Group Conferences or Whānau agreements, and placements.



MSD continues to provide financial support services for most households after they leave emergency housing.

Most households access hardship grants after leaving emergency housing.

Around 80 percent of households who left emergency housing between December 2021 and December 2022 accessed hardship assistance grants from MSD. Most of these grants (43 percent) were for food, while a further 18 percent were for other housing related needs, including HSPs.¹⁸ Eight percent of grants were for an EH-SNG, as some households in the cohort returned to emergency housing after leaving.

Almost twenty percent of households who had accessed an EH-SNG enter a Social Housing tenancy at some point after leaving emergency housing.¹⁹

Seven percent of households shifted from emergency housing to a Social Housing tenancy within thirty days,²⁰ likely meaning they were placed directly into a Social Housing tenancy. Others may have moved through other accommodation types first, as the wait for Social Housing averages at around 224 days for people on the Housing Register.²¹

Around half of households who had accessed an EH-SNG go on to enter private accommodation after leaving emergency housing, and are supported through the Accommodation Supplement (AS).

Of households who left emergency housing following COVID-19, 53 percent accessed Accommodation Supplement at some point after leaving.²² Households who accessed EH-SNGs for longer periods less frequently access AS, suggesting that private accommodation may be less accessible for this group.

¹⁸ Other housing related needs include various Housing Support Payments, as well as grants related to furniture, appliances, repairs and utility payments. EH-SNGs and security deposits were excluded.

¹⁹ Based on analysis of 15,518 unique households who left emergency housing between December 2021 and December 2022, and what support they had accessed after leaving, up to June 2023. Leaving emergency housing refers to the end of their first spell. If a household had subsequent spells in emergency housing the analysis includes all activity after the end of their first spell.

²⁰ Clients who left emergency housing between November 2017 and January 2023, based on where clients within 30 days after leaving.

²¹ Median days to house as at June 2023: www.hud.govt.nz/stats-and-insights/the-government-housing-dashboard/housing-register/#tabset

²² Based on analysis of 15,518 unique households who left emergency housing between December 2021 and December 2022, and what support they had accessed after leaving, up to June 2023. Leaving emergency housing refers to the end of their first spell. If a household had subsequent spells in emergency housing the analysis includes all activity after the end of their first spell.

Improving the provision of housing support will require an ongoing, cross-organisational approach.

Understanding that households accessing EH-SNGs are often experiencing complex challenges interwoven with their need for housing is key to our approach. MSD intends to further explore these challenges from a household perspective, using MSD administrative data alongside information held in the IDI to get a better view of families.

Work is underway across government to address some of these complex needs. These programmes include the Homelessness Action Plan led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and work underway in Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) to look at outcomes for children leaving care. We need to build our understanding of how different factors, including the presence of health conditions, interactions with the criminal justice system and interactions with Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), combine to lead different cohorts on a path to Emergency Housing. Exploring these will help determine where support is best placed to prevent people entering vulnerable housing situations.

IDI Disclaimer

These results are not official statistics. They have been created for research purposes from the IDI which is carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the IDI please visit www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data.

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.