



03 NOV 2020

On 5 October 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information in relation to Emergency Housing:

- *How many people have requested Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants in Southland between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020?*
- *How many applications were approved and how many were denied in Southland between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020?*
- *What was the dollar amount that was given out in Southland between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2020?*
- *Could I please have the same information for between January 1 and December 31 for the years 2018 and 2019*

There has been a growing demand nationally for emergency housing as the shortage of affordable housing and rising rents continues to impact low-income whānau, particularly those who are beneficiaries.

The year 2020 has seen a significant increase in demand for emergency housing, as the Ministry supported people through the COVID-19 pandemic period with accommodation in which they could safely self-isolate.

The need to provide Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants (EH SNGs) is, in addition to the shortage of affordable housing, a reflection of the Government's commitment to ensuring that those in need have somewhere to stay, so they are not sleeping in their cars or outside. They provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed.

You can access more general information about the Ministry's housing and support services, including EH SNGs on the Ministry's website available at: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/social-housing/index.html.

In regard to your request, please find the following table enclosed as **Appendix A:**

- **Table One:** Number of EH SNGs for Southland, Gore and Invercargill City Territorial Local Authorities (TLAs), from January 2018 to 30 September 2020, broken down by quarter ending, number of grants, number of distinct clients and amount granted.

The Ministry has provided information for the Southland district, Gore district and Invercargill City TLAs, which make up the broader Southland region.

Please note, a number of very low figures have been suppressed in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. This information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

Furthermore, the Ministry is unable to provide the number of EH SNGs applications which were declined as this information is held on individual client files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of client files. As such, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act as it would require substantial manual collation. 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 this part of 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.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting Alert Level 4 nation-wide lockdown, the Ministry extended EH SNG timeframes from 7 days to a maximum of 21 days, as clients were unable to move into other accommodation which was adequate for them and their families' needs.

The high increase in the amount granted for EH SNGs in the June 2020 quarter, compared with previous quarters, is directly associated with the COVID-19 lockdown period. In accordance with the Ministry of Health guidelines, the Ministry paused non-essential placement activity, meaning that people could not move out of emergency housing into sustainable accommodation, either to transitional or public housing or private accommodation, during COVID-19 Alert Level 4.

Changes in the number of grants granted by particular sites in the June 2020 quarter reflect operational changes introduced by the Ministry to manage increased demand over the COVID-19 lockdown period. In addition to extending the timeframe for EH SNGs, this saw the Ministry make greater use of phone-based and online services and means that clients in a region may have received a grant from another regional office regardless of their physical location.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 lockdown period saw the Ministry support additional client cohorts, including people who were unable to remain in their usual place of residence after receiving a Police Safety Order.

Combined, these factors contributed to longer durations of stay, and higher costs.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

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 this response to your request for emergency housing statistics for Southland, 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 blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Hocking', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Hocking
General Manager
Housing

Appendix A

Table One: The number of EH SNGs for Southland, Gore and Invercargill City Territorial Authorities (TLAs), from January 2018 to September 2020, broken down by quarter ending, number of grants, number of distinct clients, and amount granted

Quarter end	Gore District			Invercargill City			Southland District		
	Number of grants	Distinct clients	Amount granted	Number of grants	Distinct clients	Amount granted	Number of grants	Distinct clients	Amount granted
March 2018	S	S	\$4,175	33	19	\$18,425	15	7	\$9,479
June 2018	S	S	\$420	131	44	\$79,484	14	S	\$13,036
September 2018	7	S	\$5,530	152	57	\$84,784	S	S	\$2,740
December 2018	17	8	\$14,151	163	51	\$102,855	11	7	\$7,283
March 2019	26	11	\$19,085	114	39	\$79,065	S	S	\$2,716
June 2019	21	13	\$12,376	242	78	\$180,021	15	7	\$10,970
September 2019	68	20	\$46,858	265	80	\$157,747	8	S	\$5,440
December 2019	110	20	\$90,260	283	83	\$185,494	16	11	\$8,330
March 2020	29	9	\$18,824	328	100	\$290,032	16	14	\$11,285
June 2020	43	11	\$46,040	348	111	\$472,427	13	9	\$14,870
September 2020	35	14	\$33,383	302	110	\$292,650	12	S	\$15,024

Notes:

- This contains counts of distinct clients and grants.
- Emergency housing assistance payments are granted as Special Needs Grants.
- Client demographics are based on the last grant in the quarter issued in a specific TLA.
- Distinct clients can be counted in more than one quarter if they have had grants in multiple quarters.
- Distinct clients should not be summed up across TLAs as they may be represented in multiple TLAs if regularly changing their address.
- TLA is estimated based on the clients address at the time of the grant. It may not be the same as the address of the emergency housing provider.
- Ungeocoded address records that are unable to be matched to a TLA through suburb and city details have an unknown TLA and are not included in this data.
- The amount granted may not be the amount spent.
- In certain circumstances low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified. Due to these privacy concerns, numbers for some categories of clients have been suppressed or aggregated
- Secondary suppression rules have also been applied when required. Suppressed numbers have been replaced by an 'S'.