



15 OCT 2020

Dear

On 21 September 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Is there data showing how many sickness beneficiaries are on the West Coast, who are on the benefit due to drug and alcohol abuse?*
- *Does the Ministry record P-related sickness too?*

The Ministry helps clients with health conditions or disabilities in a number of ways. Clients may be entitled to either a Jobseeker Support benefit or Supported Living Payment depending on the length of their diagnosed condition. To be eligible for a Supported Living Payment, a doctor must declare in a medical certificate that a person is unable to work for a period of more than two years.

Jobseeker Support Health Care and Disability (JS HC&D) is available to clients who are temporarily unable to work or unable to work full-time due to a health condition, injury or disability. Clients receiving this type of Jobseeker Support may not be obligated to seek employment, depending on their individual circumstances and medical advice.

Supported Living Payment Health Care & Disability (SLP HC&D) is available for people who are not able to work because they are permanently and severely restricted in their capacity for work because of a health condition, injury, or disability or they are totally blind.

Clients with work obligations who have been diagnosed with substance dependence can have these obligations deferred until such time as their health practitioner deems them ready for work. Often these clients suffer from multiple medical issues that include the effects of substance dependence and their circumstances influence the length of time they are in receipt of financial assistance.

People with drug and alcohol addiction problems are encouraged to access appropriate services, often as part of a broader package of assistance to help them move into employment. Interventions may be contracted through Work and Income providers such as Workbridge or services funded by the Ministry of Health. These include detoxification programmes, short and long-term drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes, and community-based counselling services. The client's practitioner may also suggest interventions that could improve the client's ability to work.

As per your request, **Table One in Appendix A** attached outlines the number of clients from the West Coast region receiving health care and disability related benefits which have substance abuse listed as their primary reason. These benefits are JS HC&D and SLP HC&D.

In response to the second part of your query, the Ministry does record P or methamphetamine related reasons for receiving JS HC&D and SLP HC&D. In the case of the West Coast region, numbers of these instances are very low and would therefore be suppressed.

In order to protect the privacy of the individuals, the Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number of individuals receiving a benefit for a P-related sickness, as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As such, 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 the information.

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
- 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 and any attached documents available to the wider public. 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 regarding sickness beneficiaries on the West Coast, 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.

Yours sincerely

PP 

Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**

Appendix A

Table one: Number of clients from the West Coast region receiving Jobseeker Support and Supported Living Payment with Health Care and Disability Related services for substance abuse as at end of June 2020 by benefit type

Region	Substance abuse		Total
	JS HC&D	SLP HC&D	
West Coast Region	9	16	25

Notes:

- The Regional Council is determined by using the client's address as at the end of June 2020. Non-geocoded addresses that cannot be mapped to a Regional Council will use the region of the service centre responsible for the client's case management.
- JS HC&D related services include Jobseeker Support Health Condition, Injury or Disability and Jobseeker Support Health Condition, Injury or Disability Hardship.
- SLP HC&D is Supported Living Payment Health Care & Disability.