



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

21 OCT 2020

Tēnā koe

On 23 September 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), information regarding temporary accommodation for clients between the ages of 15-25 years old.

The Ministry contacted you to clarify what you meant by temporary accommodation, as this could mean either emergency housing or transitional housing. The Ministry also asked you whether you were looking for Auckland data or national data. You responded that by temporary accommodation, you meant 'in either motel accommodation paid for by the Ministry or transitional housing'. You also clarified that you would like to receive both national data and Auckland data.

The transitional housing aspects of your request is more closely connected to the functions of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Therefore, in accordance with section 14 of the Act, the Ministry transferred your request to HUD on 25 September 2020. You can expect to hear from HUD concerning the transitional housing aspect of your request, if you haven't already.

For further clarity, the Ministry also asked you if you would prefer to receive data for 16-24 year olds, as this would be consistent with the Ministry's standard reporting of youth data and would thereby make any comparisons you may wish to make with existing data easier. You agreed to receive data regarding 16-24 year olds instead of the age range of 15-25 year olds you initially requested.

The Ministry understands that demand for housing across New Zealand is growing and more people are experiencing a severe and immediate housing need. This demand is generated by a shortage of affordable housing, which is driving house price and rent growth. People on low incomes are most affected by rising housing costs, and as a result, many seek additional housing and financial help from the Ministry.

People with an immediate and urgent need of accommodation can contact the Ministry for assistance and request an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG). The EH SNG is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place or residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation that is adequate for them or their family's needs. Assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended, dependent on individual circumstances.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term housing solution for most people, and especially not for vulnerable clients. Rather, EH SNGs are designed provide a short-term solution while more sustainable housing options are explored.

Where young people are engaged with the Youth Service, their emergency housing need is assessed by their youth coach and issued by the Youth Service support unit. This helps to ensure that their emergency housing is appropriate to their need, and they continue to receive the support of their youth coach.

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However, the Ministry acknowledges that some people have on-going difficulties accessing suitable housing due to either a lack of available housing supply, or being unable to meet the high cost of housing. Clients facing circumstances such as these may receive EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

It is also worth noting that the year 2020 has seen a significant increase in demand for emergency housing. This was partly due to the Ministry's efforts to support people through the COVID-19 pandemic, which involved providing accommodation for self-isolation. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, people also could not easily move out of emergency housing into long-term accommodation, which meant longer durations of stay in emergency housing.

For the sake of clarity, your questions are addressed in turn below.

- *How many 16-24 year olds (all youth) have been in Emergency Housing across New Zealand provided by the Ministry over the past 12 or 24 months? How many have been in Auckland?*
- *How many of this age group were male?*
- *How many were female?*
- *How many were gender diverse?*

Please find **Table One** in the attached Excel spreadsheet, showing the number of distinct clients aged between 16 and 24 years old receiving EH SNGs from July 2018 to June 2020, broken down by quarter and gender. The data has been provided for both the Auckland region and for the whole country.

Please note that the reporting of gender diverse individuals is a voluntary choice by the main applicant and that the Ministry did not start collecting this information until the quarter ending December 2019.

- *How many identified as Māori?*

Please find **Table Two** in the attached Excel spreadsheet, showing the number of distinct clients aged between 16 and 24 years old, receiving EH SNGs from July 2018 to June 2020, broken down by quarter and ethnicity. As with the previous request, the data has been provided for both Auckland and the country.

- *How many had dependents?*

The Ministry records information about the household composition of clients in emergency housing (i.e. whether the client is living with a partner and children.); not whether clients in emergency housing have dependents. Therefore, I am refusing your request for information about whether clients have dependents under section 18(g) of the Act, as this information is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

In order to meet the intent of your request, please find **Table Three** in the attached Excel spreadsheet, showing the number of distinct clients aged between 16 and 24 years old, receiving EH SNGs at the end of the June 2020 quarter, broken down by household composition. The data has been provided for both Auckland and for the country. Please note that household composition is based on the adults and children

staying in the emergency housing and may not be reflective of their ordinary family/household situation.

- *How many lost their accommodation or were evicted through behavioural difficulties?*

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 hundreds of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

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 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 EH SNGs granted in Auckland and nationally, 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



Karen Hocking
**General Manager
Housing**