



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

28 JUN 2021

Dear

On 27 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *How much was paid in Temporary Additional Support (TAS) in each quarter since March 2017?*
2. *How many recipients of TAS were there in each quarter since March 2017?*
3. *What percentage of TAS is for accommodation?*
4. *How much was paid in Special Benefit in each quarter since March 2017?*
5. *How many recipients of Special Benefit were there in each quarter since March 2017?*
6. *What percentage of Special Benefit is for accommodation?*
7. *How much was paid in Accommodation Supplement in each quarter since March 2017?*
8. *How many recipients of the Accommodation Supplement were there in each quarter since March 2017?*
9. *What limitation(s) is there on how much TAS/Special Benefit/Accommodation Supplement can be paid to any given client?*

I will respond to your questions in turn.

1. *How much was paid in Temporary Additional Support (TAS) in each quarter since March 2017?*

Temporary Additional Support (TAS) is a non-taxable supplementary payment which can be paid for a maximum of 13 weeks. It is paid as a last resort to help clients with their regular essential living costs that cannot be met from their chargeable income and other resources. This includes accommodation costs and can be provided in addition with the Accommodation Supplement if clients' circumstances fit the prerequisites.

Note that when the Accommodation Supplement was increased in April 2018, there was a corresponding decrease to the average amount of TAS payable. This was because payments that were made for the purposes of supporting accommodation costs dropped in proportion to the increased rate of Accommodation Supplement. This is reflected in the data provided.

Further information about TAS is available on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/temporary-additional-support.html.

Please find **Table One** enclosed in **Appendix One**, showing the total amount of TAS payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021.

2. How many recipients of TAS were there in each quarter since March 2017?

The number of clients receiving TAS as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021, is included in **Table Two** in **Appendix One**.

3. What percentage of TAS is for accommodation?

Allowable TAS costs are grouped into the following four categories:

- Essential household items
- Employment related costs
- Accommodation costs
- Health and disability costs.

More detail on the four categories can be found on the Work and Income website at this link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/allowable-costs-01.html.

Please note that TAS is paid based on the assessment of a client's full situation, including income and outgoings, and the total weekly amount paid is unable to be broken down by allowable costs or percentage as this information is held in notes on individual case files. To provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse this aspect of your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

However, in the spirit of being helpful, please find **Table Three** enclosed in **Appendix One**, showing the number of people receiving TAS in the week at end of March 2021, broken down by whether an accommodation cost component is included in the TAS payment or not. This table indicates that accommodation cost is part of most TAS payments.

4. How much was paid in Special Benefit in each quarter since March 2017?

The Ministry provides financial assistance to assist those people whose regular essential living costs cannot be met from their income and other resources. Prior to 1 April 2006, this assistance was in the form of a Special Benefit (SPB). From 1 April 2006, SPB was replaced with TAS.

SPB payments could be made either with a person's benefit payment, weekly for those who were eligible and not in receipt of a main benefit, or as a lump sum payment. SPB continues to be payable to clients who were receiving it, or had applied for it, immediately before 1 April 2006. These clients will continue to receive SPB until they no longer qualify.

Please find **Table Four** enclosed in **Appendix One**, showing the total amount of SPB payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021.

5. *How many recipients of Special Benefit were there in each quarter since March 2017?*

The number of clients receiving SPB payments, as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021, is included in **Table Five** in **Appendix One**.

6. *What percentage of Special Benefit is for accommodation?*

The Ministry does not hold this information for each SPB recipient. This aspect of your request is, therefore, refused under section 18(g)(i) with regard to all recipients for whom the Ministry does not hold information of this type. I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

In cases where this information is held regarding an SPB recipient, it is held in notes on individual case files. To provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review hundreds of files. As such, I refuse this aspect of your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

7. *How much was paid in Accommodation Supplement in each quarter since March 2017?*

The Accommodation Supplement (AS) is a non-taxable supplementary payment which provides financial assistance towards accommodation costs. It is available for people who rent, board or own their own home. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to be assessed to qualify for AS. It is calculated using a formula that considers geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income, and accommodation type.

On 1 April 2018, the maximum rates for AS increased. This is reflected in the data provided. Further information is available about this increase on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/benefit-rates/benefit-rates-april-2018.html.

Please find **Table Six** enclosed in **Appendix One**, showing the total amount of AS payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021.

8. *How many recipients of the Accommodation Supplement were there in each quarter since March 2017?*

The number of clients receiving AS payments, as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021, is included in **Table Seven** in **Appendix One**. This information is also publicly available in the spreadsheet *National level data tables - March 2021* at www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html, in the tab 'Supplementary - last 5 years'.

9. *What limitation(s) is there on how much TAS/Special Benefit/Accommodation Supplement can be paid to any given client?*

Temporary Additional Support

TAS can be paid for a maximum of 13 weeks. A client who is in need of further TAS payments is required to reapply.

The maximum TAS payment amount is defined by the 'upper limit'.

- For a client receiving a main benefit, the upper limit is 30 percent of the net rate of their main benefit (before any income reduction or other deduction) payable to the client and their partner (if any).
- For a client not receiving a main benefit, the upper limit is 30 percent of the net rate of Jobseeker Support (before any income reduction or other deduction) that would be payable to the client and their partner (if any) if they were eligible for Jobseeker Support.

The upper limit is the maximum amount unless the client is eligible for a disability exception amount or is a certain refugee, protected person, or residence applicant. If the client is eligible for a disability exception amount, the upper limit is added to this amount to calculate the disability exception rate of payment for Temporary Additional Support.

Special Benefit

There is no maximum amount payable for SPB if the client's circumstances warrant it. SPB is payable until the client no longer qualifies for it or chooses to cancel the SPB. There is no time limit if the payment continues to be justified.

Accommodation Supplement

AS payments are assessed considering the client's accommodation costs, income, assets, family status and residential region. There are maximum amounts of AS that can be paid depending on the benefit that the client receives, the client's family size and the area in which the client lives. Tables providing the entry thresholds and maximum rates of AS, depending on the client's circumstances, can be found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/deskfile/extra-help-information/accommodation-supplement-tables/entry-thresholds-and-maximum-rates.html>.

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

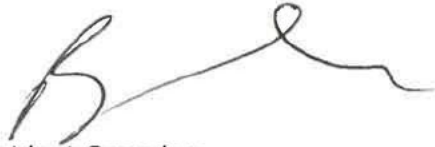
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

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 and attachments 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 statistics on TAS, SPB and AS, 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Saunders', with a large initial 'B' and a long horizontal stroke.

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

Appendix One

Table One: The total amount of Temporary Additional Support payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

Quarter ending	Total amount of Temporary Additional Support payments
March 2017	\$56,582,553
June 2017	\$64,373,458
September 2017	\$60,484,873
December 2017	\$62,142,135
March 2018	\$63,491,107
June 2018	\$42,524,829
September 2018	\$43,664,849
December 2018	\$45,088,128
March 2019	\$46,575,840
June 2019	\$47,678,773
September 2019	\$51,980,973
December 2019	\$56,060,561
March 2020	\$58,931,678
June 2020	\$66,425,240
September 2020	\$74,001,561
December 2020	\$80,085,658
March 2021	\$78,910,370

Notes:

- The amount of payments in the quarters ending September 2020, December 2020 and March 2021 has not been audited to date.

Table Two: The number of clients receiving Temporary Additional Support as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

At the end of quarter	Number of clients receiving Temporary Additional Support
March 2017	63,393
June 2017	64,500
September 2017	66,675
December 2017	69,753
March 2018	60,588
June 2018	58,764
September 2018	58,779
December 2018	62,802
March 2019	62,484
June 2019	63,891
September 2019	67,812
December 2019	73,518
March 2020	75,003
June 2020	86,340
September 2020	95,694
December 2020	94,020
March 2021	86,904

Notes:

- A client may receive both AS and TAS or both AS and SPB.
- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three. The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

Table Three: The number of clients receiving Temporary Additional Support as at end of March 2021, broken down by whether an accommodation cost component is included in the Temporary Additional Support payment or not

Accommodation cost included	Number of clients receiving Temporary Additional Support
Yes	85,707
No	1,197
Total	86,904

Notes:

- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three. The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

Table Four: The total amount of Special Benefit payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

Quarter ending	Total amount of Special Benefit payments
March 2017	\$4,041,812
June 2017	\$3,903,730
September 2017	\$3,941,867
December 2017	\$3,897,589
March 2018	\$3,789,201
June 2018	\$2,790,784
September 2018	\$2,884,794
December 2018	\$2,677,068
March 2019	\$2,544,646
June 2019	\$2,628,712
September 2019	\$2,784,319
December 2019	\$2,636,945
March 2020	\$2,489,263
June 2020	\$3,287,275
September 2020	\$2,916,506
December 2020	\$4,641,156
March 2021	\$2,874,353

Notes:

- The amount of payments in the quarters ending September 2020, December 2020 and March 2021 has not been audited to date.
- You will note that in some quarters, the amount of Special Benefit payments increased while client numbers decreased in the same quarter. The spikes in the 2020 calendar year result from some of the COVID-19 Income Relief Payments (CIRP) made by the Ministry which were entered into the Ministry's IT system under the category 'miscellaneous subsidy'. This attributed these payments to the Special Benefit although they are CIRP by their nature. A similar rationale applies to spikes in the 2017, 2018 and 2019 calendar years, which are caused by payments made under the accounting category 'miscellaneous subsidy', which are not Special Benefit payments but are counted under the Special Benefit category.

Table Five: The number of clients receiving Special Benefit payments, as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

At the end of quarter	Number of clients receiving Special Benefit
March 2017	2,919
June 2017	2,817
September 2017	2,700
December 2017	2,604
March 2018	2,478
June 2018	2,184
September 2018	2,040
December 2018	1,986
March 2019	1,908
June 2019	1,839
September 2019	1,770
December 2019	1,701
March 2020	1,626
June 2020	1,497
September 2020	1,440
December 2020	1,368
March 2021	1,281

Notes:

- A client may receive both AS and TAS or both AS and SPB.
- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three. The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.

Table Six: The total amount of Accommodation Supplement payments, broken down by quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

Quarter ending	Total amount of Accommodation Supplement payments
March 2017	\$281,051,525
June 2017	\$276,607,092
September 2017	\$279,970,619
December 2017	\$281,616,046
March 2018	\$278,053,125
June 2018	\$363,869,692
September 2018	\$378,127,327
December 2018	\$388,960,830
March 2019	\$390,690,246
June 2019	\$394,197,032
September 2019	\$408,160,426
December 2019	\$419,816,330
March 2020	\$426,281,189
June 2020	\$453,387,721
September 2020	\$482,088,398
December 2020	\$501,715,260
March 2021	\$499,893,305

Notes:

- The amount of payments in the quarters ending September 2020, December 2020 and March 2021 has not been audited to date.

Table Seven: The number of clients receiving Accommodation Supplement payments, as at the end of each quarter, in the period 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2021

At the end of quarter	Number of clients receiving Accommodation Supplement
March 2017	285,174
June 2017	284,571
September 2017	285,486
December 2017	291,633
March 2018	279,285
June 2018	284,688
September 2018	292,008
December 2018	302,841
March 2019	295,410
June 2019	300,741
September 2019	308,046
December 2019	319,563
March 2020	317,526
June 2020	348,756
September 2020	366,159
December 2020	378,129
March 2021	360,549

Notes regarding all tables:

- A client may receive both AS and TAS or both AS and SPB.
- To protect confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. These data tables have had random rounding to base three applied to all cell counts in the table. A value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three. The impact of applying random rounding is that columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row totals. The published counts will never differ by more than two counts.