



Tēnā koe

On 20 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *All hardship assistance applied for and declined this week (16-20 August) by day and by benefit type and by service centre in the Central Region. This included JSS, SPS, SLP and Emergency Benefit and Student Allowance and weekly living loan payment.*

The Ministry provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to help people meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs, power and other costs.

These payments are available to any person as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost for an essential need from any other source. Work and Income ensures that people receive their correct entitlement to any other financial assistance as part of the application and assessment process.

The Ministry assists people to manage their costs in the longer term, not just with immediate and urgent assistance. It is important to understand why the client cannot meet these costs, to provide the most appropriate form of assistance. The applicant also has an obligation to manage their own finances with the help of Work and Income. This may include seeking financial advice from budgeting services.

Further information about financial assistance and eligibility can be found on the Work and Income website: www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/index.html.

The Ministry recognises that an increase in COVID Alert Levels can create difficulties for many people and may result in them needing urgent assistance for emergency and essential items. The Ministry has been working closely alongside community partners to ensure we are supporting those people who need help. These partners are well-positioned to assist their communities and include social services, community organisations, iwi and Whānau Ora providers.

During these unprecedented times, the Ministry urges clients who require assistance to contact the Ministry to discuss their individual circumstances and the support we may offer. The Ministry also acknowledges that in some cases, the cost of essential items and household occupants may increase due to alert levels so, Ministry staff remain aware of these factors when granting assistance.

The Ministry does not produce daily or weekly data regarding hardship assistance. As such, I am unable to provide you with the information you have requested 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 thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the 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 Ministry collates and produces hardship data at a monthly level, which is generally prepared the end of the following month. This data is published quarterly at the link below, however if you wish to request official information regarding the monthly data for August 2021, the Ministry recommends your request be made at the beginning of October 2021 to account for any potential delays: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html.

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 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 hardship assistance, 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



Magnus O'Neill
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Ministerial and Executive Services