



Tēnā koe

On 25 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Annual data from 2008 to 2021 (for the most recent quarter available) for the total number of current working age main benefit recipients with debt owed to MSD*
- *Annual data from 2008 to 2021 (for the most recent quarter available) for the mean and median outstanding debt owed to MSD among current working age main benefit recipients*
- *Annual data from 2008 to 2021 (for the most recent quarter available) for the total outstanding debt to MSD owed by current main benefit recipients*

There is a range of reasons people might owe the Ministry money. A debt may be established as a result of recoverable hardship assistance, an overpayment or fraud.

Recoverable hardship assistance provides people with interest free loans to help them meet an immediate need for essential items or services, like paying late utility bills or rent, buying essential household appliances, or meeting other urgent needs. The Ministry grants this assistance to eligible people who are not able to meet the cost from their own resources, or other sources. Repayment arrangements are agreed with the client at the time assistance is granted, taking their individual circumstances and financial situation into account.

An overpayment is established when a person has received benefit payments from the Ministry to which they were not entitled. Additionally, in some cases, overpayments are established as a result of receiving new client information from other Crown agencies or following a fraud investigation. If a client has been overpaid, Ministry staff will discuss this with them on a case-by-case basis. There is no interest charged on an overpayment.

Please see enclosed **Appendix A** containing **Table One** which outlines the number of working age main benefit clients with debt and the total, mean and median amounts of debt owed to the Ministry for the years 2008 to 2021 as at the end of June.

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 annual data of debt owed to the Ministry, 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

Bridget Saunders

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**Manager, Issue Resolution
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