

Dear

On 1 August 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *Other than the last five years how many applications do you receive for the disability allowance per year?*
2. *How is your data collected? Are the applications divided into categories, e.g. mental health?*
3. *How many of these applications are mental health-related?*
4. *In the last 5 years, how many of all disability applications are accepted?*
5. *In each of the last 5 years. How many applications made under mental health grounds are successful, and how many are rejected? For those who are rejected, can you summarise the grounds on which they're rejected?*

On 10 August 2021, you refined your request to the following:

1. *In the last five years, how many applications did the Ministry receive for the disability allowance per year?*
2. *How is the Ministry's data collected? Are the applications divided into categories, e.g. mental health?*
3. *How many of these applications were made with the health condition "Psychological or psychiatric conditions"?*
4. *In the last 5 years, how many of all disability applications were granted?*
5. *In each of the last 5 years, how many applications made under mental health grounds were granted, and how many are declined? For those who are rejected, can you summarise the grounds on which they're rejected?*
6. *How many Disability Allowance grants were granted for counselling costs?*

On 7 September 2021 the Ministry wrote to you to advise that your request required more time to respond in accordance with section 15(1) and 15A of the Act, and that the Ministry would have a decision to you no later than 21 September 2021.

On 21 September 2021 the Ministry wrote to you to advise that further time was required to prepare this response, this was done in accordance with section 15(1)(a) of the Act. Thank you for your patience.

Disability Allowance (DA) provides non-taxable assistance to people who have on-going, additional costs because of a disability. The Ministry pays up to a maximum of \$66.11 per week for a DA. The amount paid is calculated in relation to the actual costs that have been or will be incurred on a regular basis.

To receive DA people must meet an income test. People are obliged to advise the Ministry of any changes in their circumstances that might affect their entitlement to a DA and to ensure they are receiving the correct rate of payment. More information about DA can be found on the Ministry's website here:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/disability-allowance.html.

Counselling fees or assistance for transport to counselling may be included in a client's DA if they have a health condition or disability that is likely to last at least six months from when they were diagnosed, require counselling because of their health condition or disability, and their regular ongoing counselling costs are not covered by another agency. Furthermore, they must be seeing an approved counsellor or psychologist.

Generally, a client can apply to include counselling fees or associated travel in their DA for up to 10 counselling sessions, but the Ministry may consider assistance for further sessions with a health practitioner's recommendation, or in exceptional circumstances. More information can be found at the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/health-and-disability/counselling.html#null

It may also be of interest to note that the Ministry contracts specialised service providers, who offer counselling services, and these are available to people who may not meet the criteria to have counselling costs included in their DA. For example, the Ministry works with Homecare Medical, who run the national telehealth services, to offer virtual health and wellbeing services to New Zealanders, including Puāwaitanga.

Puāwaitanga is a free, voluntary, phone and online counselling service available to anybody on a main benefit or at risk of coming on to benefit. It is provided by qualified and registered counsellors.

For the sake of clarity, I will number and respond to your questions in turn.

1. *In the last five years, how many applications did the Ministry receive for the disability allowance per year?*
4. *In the last 5 years, how many of all disability applications were granted?*

See below **Table One** which outlines the number of DA applications (grants and declines) in the calendar years 2016 to 2020 by year.

Table One: The number of DA applications (grants and declines) in the calendar years 2016 to 2020, broken down by year

Calendar year	Type		Applications (grants and declines)
	Grant	Decline	
2016	62,523	9,549	72,075
2017	62,793	15,345	78,141
2018	62,454	14,883	77,337
2019	62,439	15,612	78,051
2020	50,076	10,020	60,093

Notes:

- Tables One is number of grants and declines not number of clients.
- A client may have multiple grants or declines during the reported periods.
- 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.

In 2020 Covid-19 caused disturbances in clients visiting Health Practitioners as well as their local Work and Income offices, with the alert level changes. While you will note there was a decrease in DA application numbers in the year 2020, the number of people receiving DA did not decrease. The number of recipients of the DA are publicly available in the Benefit Fact Sheets published on the Ministry's website here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html#LatestBenefitFactSheetsrelease1>.

2. *How is the Ministry's data collected? Are the applications divided into categories, e.g. mental health?*

As part of the application for a Disability Allowance, people are required to provide a Disability Certificate form which is completed by a health practitioner along with proof of their on-going disability related costs (e.g. pharmacy and medical receipts and invoices, electricity bills).

The Disability Certificate lists the type of health condition or disability a person's costs are related to. You can find the application for a Disability Allowance at this link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/documents/forms/disability-allowance-application-for-existing-clients.pdf

3. *How many of these applications were made with the health condition "Psychological or psychiatric conditions"?*

See below **Table Two** which outlines the number of DA grants with the incapacity 'Psychological or Psychiatric conditions' recorded on the application in the calendar years 2016 to 2020 by year.

Table Two: The number of DA grants with an incapacity 'Psychological or psychiatric conditions' in the calendar years 2016 to 2020, broken down by year

In the calendar year	Number of grants
2016	25,077
2017	26,448
2018	26,118
2019	26,673
2020	20,757

Notes:

- Table Two is the number of grants not the number of distinct clients.
- A client may have multiple grants or declines during the reported periods.
- This data table has 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.

5. In each of the last 5 years, how many applications made under mental health grounds were granted, and how many are declined? For those who are rejected, can you summarise the grounds on which they're rejected?

The Ministry does not capture or record the type of health condition or disability listed on an application for DA if it is declined. The health condition is only recorded when an application is granted.

Therefore, I am unable to provide you with the number of applications for DA with an incapacity of 'Psychological or psychiatric conditions' which were declined or the reasons which these applications were declined for. This information 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 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.

However, you may be interested to see below **Table Three** which outlines the number of DA declines and the reasons for decline in the calendar year 2016 to 2020 for Disability Allowances made in relation to any health condition.

You will note a large number of applications have been declined using the reason code 'Other'. Staff will use 'Other' when there is no appropriate code available for the reason an application has been declined. Specific details regarding the reason for decline would be recorded in individual notes.

Table Three: The number of DA declines in the calendar years 2016 to 2020, broken down by year and reason group for decline

Reason for decline	In the calendar year				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Other	8,271	13,956	13,299	13,872	8,439
Excess Income/Assets	1,116	1,080	1,251	1,461	1,335
Obtained Work	60	153	147	126	114
Died	36	39	39	42	36
Transferred to Another Benefit	24	42	51	39	39
Left NZ	9	15	18	12	9
In Prison	6	12	9	12	9
Change in Marital Status	12	33	39	30	21
Left/Ceased Course	3	3	9	6	3
Non-Payment >8 Weeks	3	3	0	9	9
Non-Renewal of Declaration/Renewal	6	6	6	0	3
Child Left Care/No Longer Dependent	6	3	9	6	6
Total	9,549	15,345	14,883	15,612	10,020

Notes:

- Tables Three is number of declines not number of clients.
- A client may have multiple declines during the reported periods.
- Table Three may have reasons for decline that are not directly relevant to DA. This may be due to operational or administrative errors.
- There is a reason code 'Other' where operationally staff members use it to decline.
- The reason 'Other' may or may not have free text notes explaining the reason for decline.
- To protect confidentiality the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data.
- This data table has 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.

6. How many Disability Allowance grants were granted for counselling costs?

See below **Table Four** which outlines the number of clients with counselling costs included in their DA as at the end of June each year from 2016 to 2020 by year.

Table Four: The number of clients with counselling costs included in their DA as at end of June each year from 2016 to 2020, broken down by year

As at end of June	Total Number of Clients
2016	1,617
2017	1,527
2018	1,482
2019	1,785
2020	1,287

Notes:

- Table Four includes where the DA cost included for 'Counselling'.
- A client may be receiving DA for themselves, their partner or a dependent child, in this case they are only counted once.
- This data table has 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.
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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 the tables 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 information relating to Disability Allowance applications, 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

Bridget Saunders

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**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**