



11 July 2022

Tēnā koe

On 6 May 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Does MSD's funding for community partners include funding to organisations that provide free advice and advocacy to beneficiaries to help them access their entitlements?*
- *Is that funding intended to cover representation at BRC or SSAA hearings where required, or only advice and advocacy prior to any such hearing?*
- *What is the process for organisations seeking such funding?*
- *How much funding for this purpose was provided to which organisations in the past three financial years?*
- *Does MSD's funding to Whānau Ora include funding for advice and advocacy on benefit entitlements?*

On 3 June 2022, the Ministry emailed you to advise that more time was required to make a decision on your request as the consultations necessary to provide a decision were such that a response could not be provided within the original timeframe.

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

- *Does MSD's funding for community partners include funding to organisations that provide free advice and advocacy to beneficiaries to help them access their entitlements?*
- *Is that funding intended to cover representation at BRC or SSAA hearings where required, or only advice and advocacy prior to any such hearing?*

The Citizen Support initiative was established to assist individuals in their interactions with Ministry service lines; Work and Income, and Students and Senior Services. The funding was initially time-limited (2003 to 2007) until on-going funding was approved as part of the Budget 2008 package [CAB Min (08) 14/1 (46)]. The 2008 Budget package is available on the Treasury's website, at the following link: www.treasury.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-02/b08-cabmin08-14-1-46.pdf.

The Citizens Support Fund (CSF) provides funding to support advocacy groups to help New Zealanders access social assistance entitlements by:

- providing access to quality confidential advisory and information services; and,
- assisting community-based organisations to deliver these services.

This initiative is designed to support those beneficiary advocacy groups that are able to support clients through the benefit review process and the appeal process to the Social Security Appeal Authority. This requires advocacy groups to have expertise in the social security legislation.

The number of groups that have this expertise is limited in New Zealand. Many other organisations can provide advocacy support but do not have the expertise to take matters through the benefit review and appeal processes. Clients seeking assistance from other support groups and community law centres are frequently referred to the beneficiary advocacy groups - again, because of a lack of specialised knowledge on welfare law. Few lawyers are willing to represent beneficiaries because it is generally uneconomical for them to do so.

The CSF has traditionally been the only source of funding within the Ministry for organisations providing benefit advocacy services. Between 2008 and 2017, the amount of funding available was capped at \$260,000 (excluding GST). In June 2018, this was increased to \$300,000 (excluding GST) per year.

The Ministry also provides a list of organisations that clients can refer themselves to for free and legal benefit advice. This list is broken down by region and is available to the public here: [Complaints about an income support or pension decision - Ministry of Social Development \(msd.govt.nz\)](http://www.msd.govt.nz/Complaints/about-an-income-support-or-pension-decision)

- *What is the process for organisations seeking such funding?*

Organisations make their applications to the Ministry to seek access to the CSF. As the Ministry has allocated the entirety of the CSF, new applications from different organisations are unable to be considered.

- *How much funding for this purpose was provided to which organisations in the past three financial years?*

Please see attached 'Allocation of funding through Citizens Support Fund' for the last three financial years as **Appendix A**.

- *Does MSD's funding to Whānau Ora include funding for advice and advocacy on benefit entitlements?*

Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) is leading the work of embedding whānau-centred approaches and building understanding and connectedness of Whānau Ora among government agencies and the wider public. Commissioning agencies are contracted by TPK to invest in initiatives and services in communities across the country. The Ministry does not directly fund Whānau Ora for advice and advocacy on benefit entitlements.

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'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, 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



Diane Anderson
Manager
Client Advocacy and Review