



18 March 2022

Tēnā koe

On 14 January 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- 1. What types of dwellings qualify for government funding as "emergency accommodation"?*
- 2. How many children are living in each of the accommodation types? Eg, How many in motels, how many in private rentals etc.*
- 3. Please provide any data on the ages and ethnicity of the children living in emergency accommodation.*
- 4. Please provide any data on the sizes of the families / whānau living in emergency accommodation? E.g Number of 1 child families, 2 child families etc.*
- 5. With regard to the parents/guardians of the children living in emergency accommodation please list the number of one parent families and the number of two parent families.*
- 6. Please provide any data on the employment status of the parents/guardians listed in above E.g. beneficiaries, casual, part-time, full-time work. Again it would be helpful if this data reflected the situations of the children living in emergency accommodation. Ie. How many of the 4,599 children are supported by a parent/guardian on a benefit and how many are supported by a parent/guardian in casual and full-time work?*
- 7. Is there a cap on the amount of money that can be allocated to each family for emergency accommodation?*

8. *Is data kept on the ethnicities of each family/whānau in emergency accommodation? If so, please provide it.*
9. *In the last financial year much public money was paid to how many emergency accommodation providers? Please breakdown costs according to the type of accommodation e.g. how much on how many motels?*
10. *Are all dwellings funded as emergency accommodation inspected as suitable places for children to live in? If so, please outline the inspection process and provide any checklist of facilities and health standards which must be met for funding to be approved. Put another way, is there a minimum standard? If so, what is it?*
11. *How many families with children were housed in emergency accommodation last financial year, what was the total cost of that accommodation and how much was spent on each type of accommodation?*
12. *What specific efforts and/or provisions are made to ensure the health and safety of children living in emergency accommodation? Is there a checklist of standards which must be met before a child is housed in that accommodation?*
13. *Thinking of child health and infections - what is the measure of "overcrowding" with regard to emergency accommodation. How many children are allowed to sleep in the same room? How many adults and children can sleep in the same room? How many "overcrowding " complaints have been lodged by families housed in emergency accommodation in the last financial year?*
14. *What is the average time a child under 16 spends living in emergency accommodation? What is the longest time any child under 16 has had to live in emergency accommodation?*
15. *What is the average time a family spends in emergency accommodation? What is the longest time any family has spent in emergency accommodation?*
16. *How many complaints have been received from families living in emergency accommodation over the last year? Please tabulate categories of complaint.*

17. *What factors are taken into consideration when placing family groups into emergency accommodation? E.g. type of emergency accommodation, who is in neighbouring properties or rooms?*
18. *When placing a family in emergency accommodation is consideration given to their transport needs, like the distance to essential services such as supermarkets, doctors, pharmacies, schooling and workplaces?*
19. *When placing a family in emergency accommodation is it a matter of policy that the children in emergency accommodation should be able to attend the same school they were at prior to moving into emergency accommodation?*
20. *This question relates to 13) above. What was the total number of children who were moved into emergency accommodation in the last financial year and how many of those children had to change schools as a result of the move?*
21. *What consideration is taken to the provision of play areas for children in emergency accommodation? Is the provision of play equipment and play spaces for children a requirement for funding?*
22. *What is the reporting process for a parent who may have any safety concerns for their child/children living in emergency accommodation?*
23. *On page 1 of the MSD monthly update there is a reference to an "emergency housing pilot programme" in Rotorua. Please supply any documentation you have on this pilot project and any review of it. Please provide any information about the numbers, ages and ethnicities of children involved in this housing pilot.*

On 20 January 2022, question 23 of your request was transferred to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for response because the information is more closely related to their functions and responsibilities. You can expect to receive a response from HUD to question 23 of your request in due course.

On 3 February 2022, the period required to respond to your request was extended due to consultations necessary to make a decision on your request.

Demand for housing across New Zealand is growing and more people are experiencing a severe and immediate need. This demand is generated by a shortage of affordable housing driving up house prices and rents. People on

low incomes are most affected by rising housing costs and many seek financial help through the Ministry.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place of residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for them or their family's needs. The Ministry pays EH SNGs directly to the accommodation supplier and assistance is generally granted, in the first instance, for up to seven nights but can be extended dependent on individual circumstances.

After these seven nights Work and Income arrange a follow up appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation and if another grant is required. The Ministry works hard to support people in emergency housing to secure a long-term, sustainable housing solution, either through public housing or private rental accommodation. Other options including transitional housing can also be explored as an option depending on availability and the individual's circumstances.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not always ideal for families with children, but it is extremely important to us that whānau are not left to sleep rough or in cars. They provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed. More information about EH SNGs is available at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/nowhere-to-stay/emergency-housing.html.

Some people may struggle to access suitable housing due to a lack of available supply or they simply may not be able to meet the high cost of private rental housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

There are also a distinct group of people that face a range of complex issues that are a barrier to finding private rentals, such as mental health and addictions, criminal history, or family violence. To help support those with high and complex needs the Ministry may refer clients to a dedicated housing navigator service and assign them a specialised Case Manager to support them. There are others that need to live in a specific area, due to the need to access specialist care or educational needs for them or their family.

For people with high and complex needs, it can sometimes be challenging to identify suitable long-term housing, which can lead to longer stays in emergency housing. Work and Income work closely with them so that once they have a home of their own, they have the skills to sustain it, and the support they need to keep it.

Information regarding children in emergency housing was released in the Ministry's 2019/20 Annual Review to the Social Services and Community

Committee. The data used for the 2019/20 Annual Review was operational data. In the past, the Ministry has chosen to publish emergency housing data in line with other official reporting on hardship assistance. However, due to the increased public interest, the Ministry decided to publish operational data, which is at a point in time, or a snapshot, of children in emergency housing for the purposes of the Annual Review.

Operational data is taken from a narrow window and can fluctuate significantly from day to day. Any clients that are entering emergency housing on the day the reporting takes place will not be counted within the reported snapshot of data, resulting in a significant portion of EH SNG clients that will be missed in this method of reporting. Standard reporting is based on quarterly data and thus, provides a clearer indication of the trends and patterns of the emergency housing population. This reporting aligns with the methods used across all government agencies, and is quality assured which ensures the data provided is as accurate as possible.

When a client applies for an EH SNG, the client will provide the appointed Case Manager or Housing Broker the total number of adults and children who will likely be staying at the emergency accommodation with them. No other information that identifies the relationships of these adults and children to the applicant is recorded for an EH SNG application, nor is confirmation of whether the children and/or adults will be staying in emergency accommodation for the duration of the EH SNG. EH SNG clients may have complex family or caregiver relationships, and it is not uncommon for children of one parent to stay with another family member or there could be scenarios where the same child is recorded in multiple EH SNG applications, (that is, both parents are in separate emergency accommodation at the same time).

Children may also be counted more than once, as the Ministry is unable to verify if the child/children are included in more than one household's EH SNG application.

I will now respond to each of your questions in turn.

1. What types of dwellings qualify for government funding as "emergency accommodation"?

The Ministry pays EH SNG on behalf of clients directly to suppliers of commercial accommodation, such as hotels, motels, hostels, shelters and campgrounds.

The Ministry works with clients to identify emergency housing options best suited to their individual circumstances at the time of their application. Some clients, such as families and whānau, will prefer self-contained accommodation such as motels. However, in some locations the Ministry is constrained by the accommodation that is available and clients may choose to stay in emergency accommodation with shared facilities because it is more appropriate for them for other reasons.

Like all suppliers who may receive direct payments from the Ministry on behalf their clients, suppliers of commercial accommodation need to be registered with the Ministry in order to receive hardship payments. The Ministry undertakes general checks when working with suppliers to ensure the legitimacy of the business. This could include checking the New Zealand Companies Register, completing an insolvency check or running an internet search to confirm they are an established accommodation provider.

Suppliers are required to provide general information such as trading name, address, phone number, bank account details, IRD number, GST number, and anything further they can provide to show the legitimacy of their business.

In considering what accommodation option is appropriate, the Ministry considers what is adequate to meet the needs of the client and their family. The adequacy of the accommodation for the client and their immediate family's needs must be balanced with market rates, which is set by the supplier. This is often influenced by a range of factors including demand, the size of the household requiring accommodation and the region it is located in.

Clients are also free to reject an accommodation option provided by the Ministry should they wish to.

- 2. How many children are living in each of the accommodation types? Eg, How many in motels, how many in private rentals etc.*

The Ministry centrally records the total number of children, and separately, the total number of adults who are likely to be staying in emergency accommodation. This is recorded in the main applicant's EH SNG application. In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, the Ministry has provided you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children, in **Table One**.

Please see **Table One**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of children in emergency housing as at 31 December 2021, by accommodation type.

Please note, the Ministry does not rent houses from private owners and no supports the used of private rental properties for emergency housing. The Office of the Auditor General's inquiry into the Ministry of Social Development's historic funding of private rental properties for emergency housing can be found at the following link: <https://oag.parliament.nz/2021/inquiry-emergency-housing>.

- 3. Please provide any data on the ages and ethnicity of the children living in emergency accommodation.*

The Ministry has provided you with **Table Two**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of households with children in receipt

of EH SNGs at 31 December 2021, by number of children and household composition.

Please also see **Table Four**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of households with children in receipt of EH SNGs as at 31 December 2021, by ethnicity.

While the number of children included in EH SNG is recorded, the Ministry is unable to provide you with further information about children in Emergency Housing by age group or ethnicity as this information is not collected.

The Ministry only records the age and ethnicity of the person receiving the EH SNG, and the number of people included in that grant. The requested breakdown for the children's ages and ethnicities is, therefore, refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as this information is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- 4. Please provide any data on the sizes of the families / whānau living in emergency accommodation? E.g Number of 1 child families, 2 child families etc.*
- 5. With regard to the parents/guardians of the children living in emergency accommodation please list the number of one parent families and the number of two parent families.*

The Ministry centrally records the total number of children, and separately, the total number of adults who are likely to be staying in emergency accommodation. This is recorded in the main applicant's EH SNG application.

In line with data released in the 2019/20 Annual Review, the Ministry has provided you with a point in time snapshot of emergency housing composition, which includes children, in **Table Two**.

Please see **Table Two**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of households with children in receipt of Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants at 31 December 2021, by number of children and household composition.

- 6. Please provide any data on the employment status of the parents/guardians listed in 5) above E.g. beneficiaries, casual, part-time, full-time work. Again it would be helpful if this data reflected the situations of the children living in emergency accommodation. Ie. How many of the 4,599 children are supported by a parent/guardian on a benefit and how many are supported by a parent/guardian in casual and full-time work?*

The Ministry has provided you with **Table Three**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the benefit status of the households with children in receipt of EH SNGs as at 31 December 2021.

7. Is there a cap on the amount of money that can be allocated to each family for emergency accommodation?

EH SNGs are used to pay for commercial accommodation suppliers for up to 21 days at a time, however the Ministry does not cap these grants. The cost of the accommodation is set by the supplier based on market rates influenced by a range of factors including demand, the size of the household requiring accommodation and the region it is located in.

8. Is data kept on the ethnicities of each family/whānau in emergency accommodation? If so, please provide it.

Please see **Table Five**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number of households in receipt of EH SNG as at 31 December 2021, broken down by ethnicity.

9. In the last financial year much public money was paid to how many emergency accommodation providers? Please breakdown costs according to the type of accommodation e.g. how much on how many motels?

Please see **Table Six**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the amount granted for EH SNGs during the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, broken down by accommodation type.

10. Are all dwellings funded as emergency accommodation inspected as suitable places for children to live in? If so, please outline the inspection process and provide any checklist of facilities and health standards which must be met for funding to be approved. Put another way, is there a minimum standard? If so, what is it?

The Ministry is committed to ensuring clients staying in emergency housing feel safe and have the support they need. The Ministry's ability to do this needs to be balanced against what is often an urgent need for immediate assistance.

Local Councils are responsible for ensuring that commercial accommodation suppliers meet the relevant legislative and regulatory standards. The regulatory standards affecting commercial accommodation facilities is the responsibility of local councils, and other agencies, including MBIE and Fire and Emergency New Zealand.

Clients provide feedback about emergency housing accommodation suppliers in various ways including face to face, phone, or email discussions with Ministry staff at Work and Income Service Centres.

The Ministry expects our clients to get the same quality of service as any other guest, and that our clients observe the rules and conditions of the accommodation supplier.

To ensure providers for emergency housing are delivering accommodation to a suitable standard the Ministry:

- checks in regularly with clients on issues or concerns with their accommodation when approving subsequent EH SNGs
- escalates concerns or complaints to the housing team who follow up directly at that time with the motelier
- monitors all ongoing issues or complaints received in relation to EH SNG accommodation with moteliers.

As the emergency accommodation used is typically commercial properties, the Healthy Homes standards are not applicable to these properties as they are not private rentals. The application and enforcement of the Healthy Homes Standards is not the responsibility of the Ministry and falls within the portfolio of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).

In Rotorua, MSD endeavors to ensure that whānau with children stay in contracted emergency accommodation. Each contracted emergency housing facility is managed by an accredited social service provider in Rotorua who is responsible for ensuring a safe and adequate environment and have support and safety services available to clients.

The Ministry links families with children to intensive case managers and contracted navigators to help them stay connected to their community, health services and other necessary agencies.

11. How many families with children were housed in emergency accommodation last financial year, what was the total cost of that accommodation and how much was spent on each type of accommodation?

Please see **Table Seven**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the number and amount granted for EH SNGs to clients with children during the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, by accommodation type.

12. What specific efforts and/or provisions are made to ensure the health and safety of children living in emergency accommodation? Is there a

checklist of standards which must be met before a child is housed in that accommodation?

The Ministry works to ensure accommodation is adequate for each family. As well as assigning each household a dedicated Case Manager to support them while in emergency housing, clients are also able to be referred to Navigator services with accredited social service providers. In Rotorua, emergency accommodation has been contracted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (see question 10).

You may wish to refer back to HUD's Official Information response to you dated 3 March 2022, this included further information on the Rotorua Pilot.

13. Thinking of child health and infections - what is the measure of "overcrowding" with regard to emergency accommodation. How many children are allowed to sleep in the same room? How many adults and children can sleep in the same room? How many "overcrowding" complaints have been lodged by families housed in emergency accommodation in the last financial year?

Again, the Ministry works with clients to identify emergency housing options best suited to their individual circumstances. The client can indicate what their needs are, and we work to meet them within available supply of accommodation available.

There is no across the board formula for how many rooms are provided for each family configuration in emergency housing, as it depends on what the family is looking for and what is available.

Overcrowding in Public Housing tenancies is measured by the number of bedrooms a client's household has compared to how many bedrooms the household needs.

The guidelines for identifying overcrowding are:

- there should be no more than 2 persons per bedroom
- children 10 years of age or older of the opposite sex should not share a bedroom
- children under 18 years of age and the same sex can reasonably share a bedroom
- single adults, couples and parents should have a separate bedroom

Note adults are considered to be someone aged 18 years or over, or if aged 16 or 17 years are (or have been) married or in a civil union.

More information on overcrowding of current accommodation can be found online at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/assessment-of-eligibility/overcrowding-of-current-accommodation-01.html.

For the number of complaints, please refer to my response under **question 16** of your request.

14. What is the average time a child under 16 spends living in emergency accommodation? What is the longest time any child under 16 has had to live in emergency accommodation?

15. What is the average time a family spends in emergency accommodation? What is the longest time any family has spent in emergency accommodation?

The Ministry does not hold information regarding the length of time spent in emergency housing by children, therefore, I am refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act. When a client applies for an EH SNG, the Ministry records the household make-up as it has been advised by the client, including the number of children. However, in some cases, children may have alternative living arrangements, and may not necessarily be living in emergency housing for the entire duration of the EH SNG.

However, in order to meet the intent of your request, the Ministry has provided you with following two tables:

Table Eight, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the average and maximum number of consecutive weeks stay in Emergency Housing for clients with children for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Table Nine, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines the average and maximum number of consecutive weeks stay in Emergency Housing for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

16. How many complaints have been received from families living in emergency accommodation over the last year? Please tabulate categories of complaint.

The Ministry has provided you with **Table Ten**, within the attached Excel spreadsheet, which outlines emergency housing complaints for the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

Please note from 28 April 2021, the Complaints Management System was updated centrally to record complaints made by clients about Emergency Housing suppliers. The reporting on these complaints is still under development. When concerns are raised about Emergency Housing suppliers,

Regional Housing managers follow-up directly with the supplier to resolve any issues around quality or service. Where issues cannot be resolved in a timely way, suitable alternative accommodation will be sought for the client.

If an Emergency Housing supplier notices any damage or loss, either during or at the end of the client's stay, they are advised that they may invoice the Ministry up to the amount of the approved security deposit. More information regarding the process Emergency Housing suppliers are advised to follow to claim costs for damages is publicly available on the Work and Income website at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/housing-providers/emergency-housing/emergency-accommodation-suppliers.html#null.

17. What factors are taken into consideration when placing family groups into emergency accommodation? E.g. type of emergency accommodation, who is in neighbouring properties or rooms?

18. When placing a family in emergency accommodation is consideration given to their transport needs, like the distance to essential services such as supermarkets, doctors, pharmacies, schooling and workplaces?

19. When placing a family in emergency accommodation is it a matter of policy that the children in emergency accommodation should be able to attend the same school they were at prior to moving into emergency accommodation?

When supporting clients to access emergency housing, the Ministry works with clients to identify emergency housing options best suited to their individual circumstances at the time of their application, and balances that against what is available. Clients often have their own preferences for where they wish to stay, which the Ministry consider, including closeness to their children's schools, closeness to family or other support, closeness to amenities, or to health services if they have particular health issues. Schools are an extremely important consideration. We are mindful however that availability of emergency housing accommodation can be challenging, depending on the location being sought.

The Ministry also contracts 'navigators' (members of local community organisations) and support services across the country to provide direct support to clients and to emergency housing suppliers. This often involves working with clients where they are staying and can highlight any issues around the conditions or suitability of the accommodation.

When supporting clients to access emergency housing, Ministry staff will work with suppliers that are known to be suitable for the circumstances of the client. Regional staff are aware that there may be reasons why certain motels or

options may be not suitable for some whānau. This may include who is in neighbouring properties or rooms.

Our priority is to ensure individuals and whānau who have nowhere to stay have safe and secure accommodation as soon as it is required. We work hard to ensure emergency accommodation is appropriate for these people in their unique circumstances. We expect suppliers of emergency accommodation to meet all the relevant housing and service standards set by local or regional regulatory authorities.

The Ministry launched a funding package, Flexible Funding Assistance (FFA) for whānau with children in emergency housing to support children who have immediate needs arising from living in that accommodation. The aim of this funding is to support whānau to improve their outcomes by keeping them connected to their community and helping them to access a range of appropriate social and education activities to mitigate the impact of longer-term stays in emergency housing.

For example, the Ministry has partnered with community organisations to deliver after-school programmes and school holiday programmes for children in emergency housing. FFA has also been used for additional early childhood education, employment preparedness, travel (where whānau are financially disadvantaged, and need to attend house viewings in an area of their choice for a long-term home), and a small number of cases, FFA has been used to assist with gymnastics class attendance.

It is worth noting that the FFA package is not a cash fund for clients to apply for directly. It is funding for Ministry regions to use for goods or services that help meet education/early childhood/wellbeing needs of children when additional occur because they are staying in emergency housing. More information around the FFA can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/flexible-funding-assistance/index.html.

20. This question relates to 13) above. What was the total number of children who were moved into emergency accommodation in the last financial year and how many of those children had to change schools as a result of the move?

It is important to note the Ministry tries where possible to place families close to the schools that their children are attending. The Ministry can also assist families with travel costs to ensure children remain connected to their school. However, the Ministry is unable to provide you with the number of children in emergency housing who have had to change schools as a result, as this information is not collected.

The Ministry does not capture this type of data for EH SNGs and it would not likely be held on client files either. The requested number of children who are

in emergency housing who have had to change schools as a result, therefore, is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as this information is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

21. What consideration is taken to the provision of play areas for children in emergency accommodation? Is the provision of play equipment and play spaces for children a requirement for funding?

Again, our priority is to ensure individuals and whānau who have nowhere to stay have safe and secure accommodation as soon as it is required. We work hard to ensure emergency accommodation is appropriate for these people in their unique circumstances.

Additionally, the Ministry can provide additional support through the Flexible Funding Assistance. This assistance can be provided to families with dependent children staying in emergency housing who meet the criteria for assistance and must relate to meeting the wellbeing needs of any dependent children including education and early childhood.

Flexible Funding assistance can be used for individuals, and where appropriate, groups of children. For example, the Ministry has partnered with community organisations to deliver after-school programmes and school holiday programmes for children in Emergency Housing. Flexible Funding assistance has also been used for additional early childhood education, employment preparedness, travel (where families/whanau are financially disadvantaged, and need to attend house viewings in an area of their choice for a long-term home), and sports equipment for children who would benefit from extra-curricular activities.

Please refer back to the Ministry's response to **question 17 to 19**.

22. What is the reporting process for a parent who may have any safety concerns for their child/children living in emergency accommodation?

The ministry prioritises clients in EH for case management who are in emergency housing have a dedicated case manager. Having a dedicated case manager means that clients will have someone to contact, and someone who will make sure they are getting all the support available to them from the Ministry.

Any parent who has general safety concerns about emergency accommodation should talk to their Ministry case manager and/or their housing navigator. Ministry staff and/or navigators are in regular contact with all recipients of EH SNGs.

For any emergency or urgent situations, the Ministry would encourage those involved, or those witnessing an incident, to contact the Police directly.

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 and attachments 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

Karen Hocking
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