



7 March 2023

Tēnā koe

On 10 February 2023, your request made under the Official Information Act (the Act) to the Ministry of Housing, Hon Dr Megan Woods, was transferred in part to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) for response. The Ministry will be responding to the following questions:

Please let me have the following information on the period 1988 - 2022 for each year where the data is available:

- *Total government expenditure on the accommodation supplement*
- *The number of NZers who live in emergency housing such as motels*

I will now respond to your questions in turn.

- *Total government expenditure on the accommodation supplement*

The Accommodation Supplement (AS), which replaced the Accommodation Benefit from 1 July 1993, is a non-taxable payment to assist people with limited income and limited cash assets to meet their accommodation costs. Assistance is available to help pay rent, board or costs of home ownership. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to be assessed to qualify for Accommodation Supplement. It is calculated using a formula that considers geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income and tenure type (renting, boarding or home ownership). You can find more information about the AS at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/accommodation-supplement.html

You have requested for total government expenditure on the accommodation supplement from 1988-2022. Please refer to **Table One** in the **Appendix**, which shows the number of clients and the weekly amount paid as at month ending December 1996 to 2022.

You will note that the data provided in the Ministry's response to you does not contain information from 1988. The Ministry's benefit payment computer system does not hold full information on benefit records that predate July 1996. As such, I am refusing your request under section 18(g) of the Act as

the information you had requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- *The number of NZers who live in emergency housing such as motels*

Demand for housing across New Zealand is growing and many 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 for up to seven nights but can be extended dependant on individual circumstances.

After these seven nights Work and Income arrange another 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 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.

It is important to note that the Ministry does not contract directly to Emergency Housing suppliers. In order to receive an Emergency Housing Special Needs payment, an accommodation supplier must register with the Ministry as a supplier. The Ministry can only pay into the bank accounts of businesses who are registered as suppliers, and this registration does not create a contractual relationship between the Ministry and the accommodation supplier.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term solution or the solution that we want to deliver for people who are potentially in a vulnerable situation. 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 housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

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 these people to see

what can be done to ensure that once they have a home of their own, they have the skills to sustain it, and the support they need to keep it.

Please refer to **Table Two** in the **Appendix**, which shows the list of the distinct count of clients who have been granted an Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant from 1 October 2016 to 31 December 2022.

You will note that the data provided in the Ministry's response to you does not contain information from 1988. EH SNGs were introduced on 1 July 2016 in order to fund temporary accommodation at commercial accommodation suppliers to meet people's immediate housing needs.

Prior to the 2016 December quarter, emergency housing grants were coded in the Ministry's IT system as 'other emergency grants', which includes hardship grants for various other emergency reasons. The Ministry cannot disaggregate emergency housing hardship payments from other types of assistance granted under the 'other emergency grants' category and any information regarding emergency housing grant payments prior to the December 2016 quarter is recorded in notes on individual case files.

In order to provide you with the information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number 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 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Hocking', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Hocking
Group General Manager
Housing