



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

7 NOV 2018

Dear [REDACTED]

On 15 October 2018, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- 1. As at October 15, 2018, how much money is collectively owed to the Government by individuals due to dental costs?*
- 2. As at October 15, 2018, how many individuals have loans or owe money to the Government due to dental costs?*
- 3. In what situations does the Government loan money or cover the cost of dentistry for adults?*

The Ministry of Social Development through Work and Income provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to people, to meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs (including medical and dental costs), power and other costs.

These payments are available to any person as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source.

The Ministry recognises that individuals who are in receipt of a benefit may not be able to budget for unexpected dental costs, and support is available for those who meet the criteria to help with the cost of dental work.

The maximum amount payable to a person applying for a non-recoverable Special Needs Grant towards the cost of dental treatment is \$300 within any 52 week period. Where exceptional circumstances apply, this amount may be exceeded or more than one payment may be made. In situations where there are no exceptional circumstances, or where individuals do not meet the qualifying criteria for a Special Needs Grant, they may qualify for an Advance Payment of Benefit to meet any or all remaining costs.

All dental treatments funded through Work and Income must be provided by a health agency or registered dental practitioner. Examples of a qualifying dental situation include, but are not limited to, root treatment, tooth extraction, tooth restoration and treatment of acute infection.

Further information about these options is available on the Work and Income website:

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-dental-treatment-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-dental-treatment-01.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/dental-treatment-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/dental-treatment-01.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/maximum-payment-for-emergency-dental-treatment-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/maximum-payment-for-emergency-dental-treatment-01.html)

The Ministry is unable to provide the total amount collectively owed by clients due to dental treatment. This is because the Ministry's reporting does not record the reason for a debt once it has been established. As such, your request for the total amount owed to the Ministry by clients for dental costs and the total number clients with debt for dental costs is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as this information is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

Alternatively, the Ministry is able to provide you with the number of Advances and SNGs granted to clients for dental treatment between 1 October 2017 and 30 September 2018, the most recent 12 month period for which reporting is available.

The following table includes the total number of SNGs and Advances recorded as being for emergency dental treatment between 1 October 2017 and 30 September 2018:

<b>Assistance for emergency dental care</b>		
<b>Assistance type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total value</b>
<b>Recoverable SNG</b>	582	\$273,681.70
<b>Non-Recoverable SNG</b>	40,859	\$11,253,334.53
<b>Advance Payment of Benefit</b>	30,277	\$16,728,327.56
<b>Total</b>	71,718	\$28,255,343.70

**Note:**

- This data represents the number of grants, not the number of clients.
- This data represents payments to all clients, not just working age clients on main benefits.
- If a hardship application is made for a value greater than \$300 and is accepted, the first \$300 is granted as a non-recoverable SNG and the remainder is a recoverable advance.

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 shortly. 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding dental costs and associated debt, 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

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

Cassandra Wise  
**Manager, Issue Resolution, Service Delivery**