



12 FEB 2019

On 11 January 2019, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The funds allocated and used by the Ministry of Social Development in each of the 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/8 years (1 July-30 June) in regards to "work test obligations" including seminars, and managing work-test sanctions; and the funds allocated and used by the Ministry of Social Development in each of the 2015/16, 2016/7, 2017/18 years (1 July-30 June) in regards to hardship applications (in particular Special Needs Grants, Advances of Benefit and RAP) and TAS (and Special Benefit).*

On 16 January 2019, you were advised that the Ministry has interpreted your request as follows:

- The cost of the administration of work test obligations, including the management of sanctions, staff training etc. by front-line staff during the financial years ending 30 June 2016, 2017, and 2018.
- The cost of the administration of hardship applications and Temporary Additional Support by front-line staff, and the cost of the grants that result during the financial years ending 30 June 2016, 2017, and 2018.

The cost of the administration of particular services, payments, or obligations primarily takes the form of staff time. Ministry staff, including front-line Case Managers, carry out a wide range of work on a daily basis to help clients access their entitlements. The Ministry does not allocate specific funding for staff to carry out functions relating to specific payments or obligations, nor does it require staff to keep a record of the time spent helping clients with specific forms of assistance, or advising them of specific legislative obligations. As such, your request for the cost of administering these payments and obligations is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act. The information you have requested 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.

Please find attached Table 1, showing the total number of hardship assistance grants, including Special Needs Grants, Benefit Advances, and Recoverable Assistance Payments, and the value of these grants from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2018. Please note that much of this is recoverable and therefore this data does not represent the net cost to the Ministry of these payments.

Table 2 shows the Ministry's total expenditure on Temporary Additional Support (TAS), and the Special Benefit. As you are aware, TAS was introduced in 2006 in order to assist people to meet immediate and essential living costs. TAS replaced the Special Benefit for new applicants from 1 April 2006. Some clients who were receiving the Special Benefit prior to this date continue to receive the Special Benefit, although these clients are encouraged to speak to Work and Income staff if they believe that they would be better off receiving TAS.

You may also be interested in information regarding the Ministry's departmental appropriation available in the estimates of Vote Social Development for the 2018/2019 financial year. This is available on The Treasury's website here: <https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/estimates/vote-social-development-social-services-and-community-sector-estimates-2018-2019.html>.

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.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding the costs of administering work test obligations and hardship payments, 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,
Acting Manager, Issue Resolution, Service Delivery

Table 1: The total number and value of Recoverable Assistance Payments, Special Needs Grants, and Benefit Advances for the financial years ending 30 June 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Financial year ending 30 June	Number of Hardship Grants				Total value of hardship grants			
	Benefit Advances	Recoverable Assistance Payments	Special Needs Grants	Total Grants	Benefit Advances	Recoverable Assistance Payments	Special Needs Grants	Total Value
2016	321,446	36,486	497,667	855,599	\$133,976,306	\$16,494,056	\$67,139,937	\$217,610,299
2017	380,677	46,346	628,963	1,055,986	\$157,711,792	\$21,289,155	\$116,676,948	\$295,677,895
2018	437,136	55,715	728,903	1,221,754	\$176,196,287	\$25,414,516	\$122,757,323	\$324,368,125

Note:

- This is a count of grants, not a count of clients. A client may receive more than one grant during the period.
- This is not a count of applications. A client may apply more than once in respect of a grant, and an application may be granted or declined.
- This is the amount granted. The amount granted might not be the amount paid.

Table 2: Total expenditure on Temporary Additional Support and Special Benefit for the financial years ending 30 June 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Financial year ending 30 June	2016	2017	2018
Total expenditure	\$218,408,000	\$245,462,000	\$241,930,000

Note:

- Expenditure is rounded to the nearest thousand.
- This data includes both Temporary Additional Support and Special Benefit payments.