



30 JAN 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 20 December 2019, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *How many applications for Child Disability Allowance did the Government receive in each year since 2010?*
- *Of those applications how many were approved and how many were declined in each year since 2010?*
- *Of those applications how many were referred to medical practitioners contracted to the government in each year since 2010?*
- *Of the applications that were referred to government-contracted medical practitioners, how many were subsequently approved or declined in each year since 2010?*
- *Of the applications that were declined, how many were appealed to Medical Appeal Boards in each year since 2010?*
- *Of the applications referred to Medical Appeal Boards, how many decisions to decline Child Disability Allowance were upheld and how many were overturned in each year since 2010?*
- *Of the matters heard by Medical Appeal Boards resulting in decisions to uphold departmental decisions to decline applications for Child Disability Allowance, how many were subsequently appealed to higher judicial authorities in each year since 2010?*

The Ministry works with clients to understand their circumstances, and the circumstances of their families to ensure that every individual is receiving their full and correct entitlements. The online eligibility guide launched in July 2018 helps families and individuals identify the types of financial assistance they may qualify for.

The Ministry depends on assessments from doctors, nurse practitioners, midwives and dentists to help us determine whether people are eligible for health-related financial assistance. A qualified medical practitioner provides information in the form of a medical certificate which allows the Ministry to determine whether the conditions are met for health and disability-related benefits, including the Child Disability Allowance. Any statement a doctor certifies must be honest and made in good faith.

The guide concerning Child Disability Allowance is available on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/child-disability-allowance.html

Each of your questions are answered in turn.

1. *How many applications for Child Disability Allowance did the Government receive in each year since 2010?*
2. *Of those applications how many were approved and how many were declined in each year since 2010?*

Table 1 provides annual figures for the number of Child Disability Allowance applications broken down by granted and declined applications. The 2019 figure provides numbers from 1 January 2019 to 30 September 2019.

Table 1: Number of Child Disability Allowance applications (by calendar year), broken down by granted and declined applications

| Year | Total Applications | Grants | Declines |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 2010 | 10,699 | 7,854 | 2,845 |
| 2011 | 8,931 | 6,775 | 2,156 |
| 2012 | 7,974 | 6,417 | 1,557 |
| 2013 | 7,980 | 6,538 | 1,442 |
| 2014 | 8,515 | 7,218 | 1,297 |
| 2015 | 7,925 | 6,919 | 1,006 |
| 2016 | 8,123 | 7,218 | 905 |
| 2017 | 8,542 | 7,508 | 1,034 |
| 2018 | 8,667 | 7,657 | 1,010 |
| 2019 (partial year) | 6,879 | 6,121 | 758 |

3. *Of those applications how many were referred to medical practitioners contracted to the government in each year since 2010?*
4. *Of the applications that were referred to government-contracted medical practitioners, how many were subsequently approved or declined in each year since 2010?*

The Ministry is unable to report on referrals to government contracted medical practitioners, or on the number of referred applications that were subsequently approved or declined. Details regarding such referrals is held in note form on individual client files. As such, to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

5. *Of the applications that were declined, how many were appealed to Medical Appeal Boards in each year since 2010?*

6. *Of the applications referred to Medical Appeal Boards, how many decisions to decline Child Disability Allowance were upheld and how many were overturned in each year since 2010?*

Table 2 provides figures showing the number of declined applications for Child Disability Allowance that were appealed to the Medical Appeal Boards for the financial years from 2015-2019 and the subsequent outcome of the appeal.

Table 2: Child Disability Allowance applications (by financial year) that were declined and subsequently appealed, broken down by upheld and overturned applications

| Financial Year End | Appealed | Upheld | Overtured |
|--------------------|----------|--------|-----------|
| 2015 | 27 | 22 | 5 |
| 2016 | 20 | 15 | 5 |
| 2017 | 14 | 9 | 5 |
| 2018 | 15 | 10 | 5 |
| 2019 | 15 | 11 | 4 |

Note: This information has been retrieved from the Ministry's operational reporting system which is a live reporting system that can be retrospectively updated. This data was a reflection of the information in the system as at 11 December 2019. Future reporting for the same period may vary slightly from these numbers.

Please note that data relating to Child Disability Allowance applications submitted to the Medical Appeal Boards was only centrally collated in 2015. The Ministry is therefore unable to retrieve the number of appeals that occurred for the 2010 to 2014 financial years. To provide this information, staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, your request for this data prior to the 2015 financial year is refused under 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

7. *Of the matters heard by Medical Appeal Boards resulting in decisions to uphold departmental decisions to decline applications for Child Disability Allowance, how many were subsequently appealed to higher judicial authorities in each year since 2010?*

The Medical Appeals Board is an independent body which reviews appeals relating to decisions to decline or cancel a benefit on medical grounds, including the Child Disability Allowance. There are no further rights of review for medical decisions. However, if there are concerns regarding the Ministry's or the Medical Appeal Board's process, then the client may raise their concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. If there are concerns regarding the legal grounds for the decision, the client may go through the Judicial Review process. It must be noted that neither process includes a reassessment of the medical decision.

As such, the Ministry refuses your request for this information under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act as this information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

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 in due course. 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 Child Disability Allowance applications, 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Saunders', with a small comma at the end.

Bridget Saunders
Team Manager, Issue Resolution, Service Delivery