



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

26 MAY 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 30 April 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *How many people have had Jobseeker applications turned down in the past month because of their partner's income?*

Eligibility for a benefit is based on the combined income of a couple, whether they are married or living in the nature of marriage, and also considers family circumstances and residential status to target those most in need. This is a longstanding principle that underpins New Zealand's social security legislation. It is based on the notion that for a person who is married, or living in the nature of marriage, spouses and de facto partners owe primary obligations of support to each other, and that the State's support obligations are secondary.

Accordingly, legislation requires that Work and Income take all income received by either spouse or de facto partner into account when assessing the rate of benefit. Unfortunately, there is no discretion to waive income tests for benefits.

The Ministry does not report on the number of Jobseeker Support applications declined specifically due to their partner's income, these instances are instead recorded as declines based on "household income". Household income may also include a client's own income. Therefore, we are unable to provide you with the number of Jobseeker Support applications declined solely due to a client's partner's income as this information is held on individual files, and Ministry staff would need to manually review every file. As such, your request is refused under 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.

To meet the intent of your request, please find below a table which outlines the number of declines for Jobseeker Support due to excess household income in April 2020. The table includes additional information about the partner status of the applicants.

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Table One: Number of Jobseeker Support applications declined due to excess household income in April 2020, broken down by single or primary client

Month	Primary client declines	Single client declines	Total
April 2020	414	605	1,019

Notes:

- 'Primary client' refers to an applicant who has indicated they have a partner.
- 'Single client' refers to those who indicate they are single.
- The table provides a count of applications, not a count of people. A person may have more than one application in the period.

If you are interested in more information regarding how Jobseeker Support applications are assessed, some useful links are included below:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/qualifications.html
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/income-criteria-01.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. 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 to your request, 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
Manager, Issue Resolution, Service Delivery