



18 NOV 2020

On 20 October 2020, you emailed the Minister for Social Development, Hon Carmel Sepuloni, requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *For how long has a \$300 per year payment for dental care been available to beneficiaries? What year was it brought in?*
- *Also, has this payment always been available to everyone who has a community services card?*

On 20 October 2020, this request was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry), as it is of an operational nature.

The Ministry 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 (SNG) towards the cost of emergency 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 SNG, they may qualify for an Advance Payment of Benefit to meet any or all remaining costs.

All dental treatments funded through the Ministry 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.

The maximum amount payable under the SNG Programme for emergency dental treatment was \$200 until 1 July 1996, when it increased to the current maximum of \$300. As noted above, the maximum amount is not necessarily a limit, and can be exceeded where exceptional circumstances apply.

More information about SNGs and dental care assistance can be found in the Social Assistance Chronology, which outlines social assistance policy and programmes in New

Zealand, from 1844 to 2020. This can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/about-msd/history/social-assistance-chronology-programme-history.html>.

Community Services Cards (CSC) can be issued to people in a variety of circumstances and for a variety of reasons. For instance, where a client is in receipt of an income tested benefit a CSC will automatically be issued. More information regarding CSCs can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/card-services/community-services-card/introduction.html.

Eligibility criteria for an SNG for dental work does not include an applicant meeting eligibility criteria for or holding a CSC. Likewise, the eligibility criteria for a CSC does not include eligibility to an SNG. Although clients are often eligible for both a CSC and SNGs, the two products are not dependent on each other.

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
- 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 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 when the emergency dental care assistance became available, 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

PP 

Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**