



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

02 OCT 2020

Tēnā koe

On 6 September 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the amount spent on appliances and grants from Work and Income for products bought from The Warehouse and other retail outlets within the past seven years, broken down by year. Specifically, you requested that the data include the amount spent on TVs, toasters, blankets and all products over \$300.

In order to help cover the cost of an unexpected need, the Ministry administers hardship payments to eligible clients. Hardship payments consist of Special Needs Grants (SNGs), Advanced Payment of Benefits (Advances) and Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAPs).

SNGs provide non-taxable, one-off recoverable or non-recoverable financial assistance to clients to meet an immediate and essential need. A client does not have to be receiving a main benefit to qualify for such assistance. Advances and RAPs provide interest free loans to help clients meet an immediate need for essential items or services. Advances can be paid to beneficiaries and RAPs to non-beneficiaries.

The Ministry grants these types of hardship assistance to eligible people who meet an income and asset test, and who are not able to meet this cost from their own resources or other sources. More information regarding SNGs, Advances and RAPs can be found on the Ministry's website at the following links:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html#null
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/advance-payment-of-benefit.html#null
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/recoverable-assistance-payment-grant.html#null

The Ministry assists people to manage their costs in the longer term, not just with immediate and urgent assistance. It is important to understand why the client cannot meet these costs to provide the most appropriate form of assistance including helping them find other avenues of assistance such as from their District Health Board. The applicant also has an obligation to manage their own finances with the help of the Ministry. This may include seeking financial advice from budgeting services.

In regard to your request, when the Ministry enters hardship assistance grants into the Ministry's benefit tracking system, there are several categories that the staff member can classify the item in need as. These overarching categories enable the

Ministry to process these requests quickly and ensure clients receive the grant in a timely manner. Therefore, in order to best capture your request, the Ministry can provide you with the number of hardship assistance grants granted for the categories 'Bedding' and 'Other Appliances'. Please note, blankets are just one aspect of 'Bedding' and TVs, toasters and other products over \$300 are several aspects of 'Other Appliances'.

The following two data tables for the hardship assistance grants for 'Bedding' and 'Other Appliances' mentioned above are attached to this letter in an Excel spreadsheet:

- **Table One:** The number of Hardship Assistance Payments granted, and amount granted for reason 'Bedding' from 2013 to 2020, broken down by financial year and top 10 retail providers
- **Table Two:** The number of Hardship Payments granted, and amount granted for reason 'Other Appliances' from 2013 to 2020, broken down by financial year and top 10 retail providers

In order to specifically isolate the number of blankets, TVs, toasters and all products over \$300 that have been approved for a hardship payment, Ministry staff would need to inspect each individual client's file to determine what the grant is specifically for.

Additionally, listing out each potential product included in the 'Bedding' and 'Other Appliances', as well as all items over \$300, categories would require Ministry staff to review each client file that was granted a hardship assistance grant in that category to see what the product was listed in the notes.

Therefore, I am unable to provide you with this information as it is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request 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.

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 and attachments 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 hardship assistance payments paid within the last seven years, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bridget Saunders', written in a cursive style.

Bridget Saunders
Manager
Issue Resolution, Service Delivery