



04 SEP 2020

Dear

On 23 June 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- 1. The number of WINZ beneficiaries accessing tenancy in New Zealand between the period of 1 July 2019 to currently.*
- 2. The number of WINZ beneficiaries accessing tenancy in New Zealand between the period of 1 July 2019 to currently with data disaggregated according to ethnicity.*
- 3. Whether there has been a rise in WINZ beneficiaries and WINZ beneficiaries seeking tenancy between the period of 21 March 2020 to currently, possibly due to Covid-19.*

On 26 June 2020, your request was clarified to:

- 1. The number of Work and Income clients who applied for rent and bond assistance between the period of 1 July 2019 to 30 March 2020 broken down by ethnicity and benefit types.*
- 2. The number of Work and Income clients in receipt of a main benefit and the percentage of those who applied for rent and bond assistance between the period of 1 July 2019 to 30 March 2020.*
- 3. Whether there has been a rise in Work and Income clients applying for rent and bond assistance between the period of 21 March 2020 to currently, possibly due to Covid-19.*

As discussed on 24 July 2020, regarding the time period of questions 1 and 2 of your request, the Ministry will provide you information for the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

Hardship assistance may be available to help people pay their rent or tenancy bond, provided they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source. This hardship assistance includes Advance Payment of Benefit (Advance) or Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAP).

You have indicated that you are interested in beneficiaries only which has been interpreted to mean Work and Income clients who receive a main benefit.

An Advance Payment of Benefit is a recoverable payment available to people receiving a main benefit that require assistance to meet a particular immediate need for an essential item.

Housing Support Products (HSP) are also available to beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, as a set of individual products that aim to address barriers to accessing or retaining housing by meeting needs not covered by other forms of assistance. This can include a Bond Grant and Moving Assistance. It is important to note that generally, HSP should only be considered after all options available to the client have been exhausted. HSPs have a higher income limit than do Advances and RAPs. These mean that beneficiary clients are less likely to receive an HSP and, correspondingly, non-beneficiary (working) clients are more likely to receive them.

Additional information about Housing Support Products is available on the Work and Income website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/housing-support-products/index.html.

The Ministry has interpreted your request to mean the number of Work and Income clients on a main benefit, who applied and were granted assistance in the form of HSP Bond Grant, HSP Rent Arrears and Advance for Rent Arrears, Rent in Advance and Tenancy Bond.

In response to questions one and three, please find enclosed the following tables, attached as an Excel spreadsheet:

- **Table One:** The number and amount of Hardship Grants for Accommodation for the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020, broken down by quarter, ethnicity and assistance type.
- **Table Two:** The number and amount of Hardship Grants for Accommodation for the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020, broken down by quarter, benefit and assistance type.
- **Table Three:** The number and amount of Hardship Grants for Accommodation for the period 1 March to 30 June for the years 2019 and 2020.

Please note in regard to **Table Three**, I have provided you with figures for the months of March to June 2019 and March to June 2020, to enable you to compare whether there has been a rise in the number of Work and Income clients who applied and were granted hardship grants for accommodation.

You will see that there is a significant decrease in April 2020 of the number of grants for HSP Bond Grant, Rent in Advance and Tenancy Bond compared to the same period in 2019. This is because people were not moving properties at this time due to the Covid-19 Alert Level 4 restrictions. During this time, moves only occurred in very extreme circumstances.

It is important to note that the HSP Rent Arrears payment started in November 2019, which is why there is no data prior to this.

In certain circumstances low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified. Due to these privacy concerns, the numbers for some categories of clients have been suppressed under section 9(2)(a) of the Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

In regard to question two, your request for this information is refused under section 18(d) of the Official Information Act on the basis that the information requested is publicly available. The Ministry publishes Benefit Fact Sheets which contain quarterly

statistics, including the number of Work and Income clients who received main benefit assistance and hardship assistance, as at the end of each quarter in the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. This information can be accessed at: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/.

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 hardship grants for accommodation, 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. 

Karen Hocking
General Manager, Housing