



20 APR 2021

Tēnā koe

On 19 March 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *How many people/whānau have been declined food grants/full amount of food grants in the last two years*
- *How many people/whānau have been declined advances for any other assistance in the last two years*
- *Can this information please be broken down by ethnicity and region.*

The Ministry provides hardship assistance to help people pay for essential items or services they need urgently. Hardship assistance includes Special Needs Grants (SNGs), Advance Payments of Benefit (Advances) and Recoverable Assistance Payments (RAPs). These payments are available to any person as long as they meet an income and asset test and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source.

You can find more information about hardship payments, including information about SNGs for food on the Work and Income website at the following links:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/food.html
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/advance-payment-of-benefit.html
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/recoverable-assistance-payment-grant.html

A request for hardship assistance can be approved if a client meets the eligibility criteria and will depend on the client's individual circumstances. As such, decisions to approve SNGs can be discretionary (and are considered on a case by case basis). The Ministry is also acutely aware of the increased numbers of New Zealanders without jobs and needing extra support because of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to your request, please find the following two tables attached to this response as an excel spreadsheet:

- **Table One:** The number of food related Special Needs Grant applications processed between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020, broken down by Territorial Local Authority and ethnicity.

- **Table Two:** The number of non-food related Special Needs Grant, Advance Payment of Benefit and Recoverable Assistance Payment applications processed between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2020, broken down by Territorial Local Authority and ethnicity.

Please note, **Table Two** has not been broken down by payment type and therefore, the figures provided represent a combined total of non-food related SNGs, Advances and RAPs.

In addition, both **Table One** and **Table Two** provide the number of applications broken down by whether they were granted or declined, and do not represent a count of unique clients. A client may have been declined and subsequently granted a payment, or may have been granted more than one payment in the relevant period.

Furthermore, the Ministry has interpreted your request for data for the last two years as the two most recent calendar years. As such, the information has been provided for the 2019 and 2020 calendar years.

Please note, the ethnicity data is self-identified based on an individual's preference or self-construct. Clients are not required to provide the Ministry with an ethnicity, which is why an 'unspecified' option is included. If a client chooses not to record an ethnicity, they are entitled to non-disclosure.

In order to protect client confidentiality, the Ministry uses processes to make it difficult to identify an individual person or entity from published data. As such, the datasets provided to you have had random round to base three applied to the figures in the table. This means a value of one or two may be rounded to zero or three.

The impact of random rounding is that the columns and rows may not add exactly to the given column or row total however, the published figures will never differ by more than two counts and still allow you to see trends.

If you are interested in more information regarding benefit statistics, the Ministry publishes a monthly Benefit Factsheet, available here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.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 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 for information regarding Food-related Special Needs Grants and other benefit type declines, 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

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Manager

Issue Resolution, Service Delivery