



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Dear

On 28 July 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *Why are adverts played instead of, and intermixed with hold music?*
2. *What policy or law allows you to monetise citizens and residents interactions with your services by phone?*
3. *What were the legal opinions supporting this change?*
4. *What groups were consulted before making this change?*

Your questions are responded to in the following way:

1. *Why are adverts played instead of, and intermixed with hold music?*

The Ministry recognises the need to support people with their wellbeing and provide connection to services that can do that. People calling the Ministry's Contact Centres are currently played an introduction message about Puāwaitanga through the interactive voice response messaging system. Puāwaitanga is a free, voluntary, phone and online counselling service available to anybody on a main benefit or at risk of coming on to benefit. It is provided by qualified and registered counsellors. People can self-refer to the service by calling the self-referral number 0800 782 999.

Playing this message to callers on hold is the main way the Ministry lets people know about the self-referral pathway. The Ministry made this change after clients advised that they would prefer to make contact with the service directly. Clients who self-refer are also more likely to successfully engage with the service, compared to being referred via a Case Manager.

Puāwaitanga is a clinical service, therefore it is important that the Ministry ensures clients understand it is separate from the Ministry and the service is completely private and confidential.

For a couple of specific call flows, the Ministry also plays promotional messages for other Ministry services (specifically MyMSD and the Apprenticeship Boost) to make callers aware of these services.

2. *What policy or law allows you to monetise citizens and residents interactions with your services by phone?*

There are no specific laws or policies that cover this messaging. The Ministry has general communications guidelines that apply across the Ministry, but these guidelines do not contain specific rules for playing promotional messages while callers are on hold.

The Ministry has not received any money to promote Puāwaitanga.

*3. What were the legal opinions supporting this change?*

The Ministry did not seek a legal opinion on playing the message about Puāwaitanga to callers on hold.

*4. What groups were consulted before making this change?*

The messaging on Puāwaitanga was approved by the Ministry's Communications team.

The principles and purposes of the Act 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 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding the Ministry's communications to callers on hold, 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

P.P. 

Geoff Cook  
**General Manager**  
**Contact Centre and Digital Service**