



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

03 MAY 2021

Tēnā koe

On 1 April 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from January 1st 2020 to December 31st 2020 based on Work and Income region, broken down by quarter ending and gender.*
- *The month by month cost to MSD for 16-24 year olds in emergency accommodation from January 1st 2020 to December 31st 2020.*
- *The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from January 1st, 2020 to December 31st 2020 based on Work and Income region, broken down by quarter ending and ethnicity.*
- *The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from January 1st 2020 to December 31st, 2020 quarter by quarter based on Work and Income region broken down by household composition.*

Demand for housing across New Zealand is growing, and more people are experiencing a severe and immediate need. This demand is generated by a shortage of affordable housing driving up house prices and rents. People on low incomes are most affected by rising housing costs and many seek financial help through the Ministry.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place of residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for them or their family's needs. The Ministry pays EH SNGs directly to the accommodation supplier, and assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended depending on the individual's circumstances.

After these seven nights, Work and Income arrange another appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation, and whether another grant is required. The Ministry works hard to support people in emergency housing to secure a long-term housing solution, either through public housing or private rental accommodation. Other options, including transitional housing, can also be explored as an option, depending on availability and the individual's circumstances.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term solution, or the solution that we want to deliver for people who are potentially in a vulnerable situation. More information about EH SNGs is available at the following link:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-housing.html

Some people may struggle to access suitable housing due to a lack of available supply, or they simply may not be able to meet the high cost of housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

There has been a growing demand nationally for emergency housing, as the shortage of affordable housing and rising rents continues to impact low-income whānau, particularly those who are beneficiaries. The year 2020 saw a significant increase in demand for emergency housing, as the Ministry supported people through the COVID-19 pandemic period with accommodation where they could safely self-isolate. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, people also could not easily move out of emergency housing into long-term accommodation, which contributed to longer durations of stay and higher costs.

Across government, there is a major programme of work underway aimed at increasing the supply of public housing and improving housing affordability and supply.

Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga (The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development/HUD) and Kāinga Ora are responsible for increasing the supply of affordable and public housing. This includes planning, and with Kāinga Ora, delivering more public housing, transitional housing, and services to tackle homelessness. HUD is also working to improve housing affordability and supply for aspiring homeowners.

In regard to your request, please find the following five tables attached an Excel spreadsheet:

- **Table One:** The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, broken down by region, quarter ending and gender
- **Table Two:** The cost of Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants for clients aged 16 - 24 years old for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, broken down by quarter ending
- **Table Three:** The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, broken down by region, quarter ending and ethnicity
- **Table Four:** The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from 1 January 2020 to December 31 2020, broken down by region, quarter ending and household size
- **Table Five:** The number of distinct clients aged 16-24 years old receiving Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2020, broken down by region

In regard to **Table Two**, the Ministry is unable to provide you with the information you have requested as monthly data. Monthly data reporting is not standard reporting practise for the Ministry; however, the Ministry can provide you with the data you have requested regarding for EH SNG broken down by quarters ending, from quarter ending 31 March 2020 to 31 December 2020.

In regard to **Table Four**, the Ministry is unable to provide household composition for the quarter ending 31 March 2021 as the Ministry did not start reporting on household composition prior to 1 April 2020.

To determine household composition prior to 1 April 2021 would require substantial manual collation, as this information, where held, would be on the notes of individual files. Ministry staff would therefore need to manually review thousands of files to provide this information. As such I refuse this aspect of 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.

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 their ethnicity, which is why an 'unspecified' option is included. If a client chooses not to record an ethnicity, they are entitled to non-disclosure.

Furthermore, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting Alert Level 4 nation-wide lockdown, the Ministry extended EH SNG timeframes from 7 days to a maximum of 21 days, as clients were unable to move into other accommodation which was adequate for them and their families' needs.

The high increase in the amount granted for EH SNGs in the June 2020 quarter, compared with previous quarters, is directly associated with the COVID-19 lockdown period. In accordance with the Ministry of Health guidelines, people could not move out of emergency housing into sustainable accommodation, either to transitional or public housing or private accommodation, during COVID-19 Alert Level 4.

Changes in the number of grants granted by particular sites in the June 2020 quarter reflect operational changes introduced by the Ministry to manage increased demand over the COVID-19 lockdown period. In addition to extending the timeframe for EH SNGs, this saw the Ministry make greater use of phone-based and online services and means that clients in a region may have received a grant from another regional office regardless of their physical location. These changes to the way emergency housing was granted during COVID-19 mean that the number of grants for a particular region is no longer a true indicator of demand in the region.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 lockdown period saw the Ministry support additional client cohorts, including people who were unable to remain in their usual place of residence after receiving a Police Safety Order.

Combined, these factors contributed to longer durations of stay, and higher costs.

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.

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 Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant data, 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



 Karen Hocking
**General Manager
Housing**