



2 December 2022

Tēnā koe

On 7 November 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Between March 2020 to July 2022 the Ministry of Social Development Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants spent a total of \$820 Million to temporary house just over 37 thousand people. Accommodation was contracted and non-contracted Motels. Currently we also have over 26 thousand on the waiting EH waiting list.*
 - *We're the 37 thousand made up of 26 thousand on the waiting list?*
 - *Where has the extra 10 thousand come from?*
 - *Are any of the 26 thousand on the EH waiting lists temporary working visa holders?*
 - *Were any of the 37 thousand temporary working visa holders?*
 - *What is the total number of people in motels?*
 - *Are any temporary working visa holders?*
 - *How many motels has the New Zealand Government brought?*
 - *What are the names of motels the New Zealand Government have brought?*

On 16 November 2022, the Ministry transferred the last two sections of your request relating to the motels bought by the New Zealand Government to the

Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). You can expect to hear from HUD in due course.

For clarity, I will address each point of your request in turn. Some sections of your request are grouped together.

- *We're the 37 thousand made up of 26 thousand on the waiting list?*
- *Where has the extra 10 thousand come from?*
- *What is the total number of people in motels?*

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.

When New Zealanders require Public Housing, their needs are recorded on either the Housing Register or the Transfer Register. The Housing Register shows people who are not currently in Public Housing but who have been assessed as eligible for Public Housing. The Transfer Register shows people already in Public Housing who have applied to be rehoused. The combined register is referred to as the Public Housing Register (the Register). While the Ministry completes housing assessments which inform the Register, responsibility for funding and the supply of housing sits with HUD and Kainga Ora, respectively. More information about the Register is available here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/housing-register.html.

The Register is dynamic rather than static, and it changes as people's circumstances and situations change. Placing people and families into houses is about matching them with the right house in the area they want to live. This includes ensuring the family has the right number of bedrooms, is close to essential services such as schools, and that the accommodation meets any disability needs if appropriate. Those assessed as having greater need for housing will be prioritised higher. As people's needs change, their priority on the Register may change also. As such, the length of time spent on the Register awaiting housing can vary significantly.

Further information regarding the assessment of a client's housing need, housing need priority ratings and the calculation of overall priority ratings can be found on the Work and Income website, here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/social-housing/assessment-of-eligibility/assessment-of-housing-need-01.html.

The Register is different to the number of people in emergency housing. There is not a waitlist for clients who require emergency housing. The Ministry assists clients on a case-by-case basis if they do not have a place to stay for that night or for the following seven days – this is through the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG).

The 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 dependant on individual circumstances.

After these seven nights Work and Income arrange another appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation and if another grant is required. Clients who qualify for a Special Needs Grant for emergency housing must contribute 25% of their net income (or 25% of the appropriate jobseeker support rate, whichever is higher) towards their emergency housing costs. The contribution applies after they have been getting Special Needs Grant for emergency housing for 7 nights. 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. They provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed. More information about EH SNGs is available at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/housing/nowhere-to-stay/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.

For people with high and complex needs, it can sometimes be challenging to identify suitable long-term housing, which can lead to longer stays in emergency housing. Work and Income work closely with these people to see what can be done to ensure that once they have a home of their own, they have the skills to sustain it, and the support they need to keep it.

The Ministry publishes the number of people on the Register and the number of people in emergency housing every month on our website, here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/housing/monthly-housing-reporting.html.

- *Are any of the 26 thousand on the EH waiting lists temporary working visa holders?*
- *[Of people in motels] Are any temporary working visa holders?*

When applying for an EH SNG, clients must be able to meet the residency requirements to be granted this assistance. This means applicants must be a

New Zealand citizen or permanent resident. The full eligibility criterion are outlined on the Work and Income Manuals and Procedures (MAP) website, here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/qualifications.html.

There is a possibility that clients may have partners or members of their household staying with them in emergency housing who are on a temporary working visa. If this information does exist, it would likely be held on individual files of clients as it is not centrally recorded.

In order to provide you with this information, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to assess each individual file of clients in emergency housing to determine the visa status of their household. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, requires substantial collation. 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 requests 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 on the Ministry'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, 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 'KH' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

Karen Hocking
Group General Manager
Housing