



21 April 2023

Tēnā koe

On 24 March 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Excluding the Winter Energy Payment, what was the total sum of grants given by WINZ for electricity bills in 2020, 2021 and 2022?*
- *What proportion of these grants are recoverable, versus non-recoverable?*
- *Do you have a breakdown of the above data by region?*
- *What sum of grants was given specifically for disconnection fees due to unpaid bills? (if known)*

The Ministry of Social Development, through Work and Income, provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to help people meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs, power and other costs. These payments are available to any person as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost for an essential need from any other source. Work and Income ensures that people receive their correct entitlement to any other financial assistance as part of the application and assessment process.

Work and Income assists people to manage their costs in the longer term, not just with immediate and urgent assistance. It is important to understand why the client cannot meet these costs, to provide the most appropriate form of assistance. The applicant also has an obligation to manage their own finances with the help of Work and Income. This may include seeking financial advice from budgeting services.

Please find attached **Appendix One** which contains data regarding the number of Advance Payment of Benefit (ADV) and Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP) grants and amounts approved for 'Electricity' and 'Gas' Assistance in the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, broken down by type of assistance and recommending region.

You will note that there is no breakdown of these grants by recoverable or non-recoverable. ADV and RAP grants are both required to be recovered from the client, therefore all the provided data refers to recoverable ADV and RAP grants.

Further information about financial assistance and eligibility can be found on the Work and Income website: [www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/a-z-benefits/index.html).

I am unable to provide you with a sum of grants given specifically for disconnection fees due to unpaid bills, as it is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review a substantial number of files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the 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.

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 and attachments 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](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding electricity and gas grants, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

*Bridget Saunders*

Bridget Saunders  
**Manager Issue Resolution  
Service Delivery**