



1 June 2023

Tēnā koe

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

*I am making an OIA Request as a beneficiary of WINZ. I would like to have made available any documents held by MSD in relation to receiving a benefit and owning your own home, with emphasis on:*

*How main benefit payments are structured around allowable home ownership costs?*

*What are considered reasonable costs and how will MSD allow for these expenses in a benefit?*

*What costs are not allowable?*

*What is the formula for calculating accommodation supplement entitlement when owning your own home?*

*How can reasonable house repair costs be incorporated into a benefit if additional expenses are incurred on a mortgage?*

*Who decides what is a reasonable repair?*

*Any information or internal policy around any aspect of calculating a benefit and owning your own home while receiving any type of benefit or supplementary assistance?*

*Any other information that you think may be relevant to the above requested information.*

On 23 May 2023, the Ministry advised you that more time was required to respond to your request and that the Ministry's decision will be with you no later than 7 June 2023.

In the interests of clarity, I will respond to each of your questions in turn. Some sections of the request are grouped together.

*How main benefit payments are structured around allowable home ownership costs?*

*What is the formula for calculating accommodation supplement entitlement when owning your own home?*

Main benefits (as defined under Schedule 2 of the Social Security Act 2018) are intended to replace income and are not specifically structured around homeownership costs. However, the Ministry provides supplementary assistance including Accommodation Supplement (AS) and Temporary Additional Support (TAS) which can be paid specifically to help with additional costs such as those associated with accommodation.

The AS, which replaced the Accommodation Benefit from 1 July 1993, is a non-taxable payment to assist towards a person's accommodation costs. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to receive AS but must meet the eligibility criteria.

You can find more information about AS at the following link:  
[www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/index.html)

The rate of AS is calculated using a formula that takes into account geographical location, family size, accommodation costs, income and tenure type (renting, boarding or home ownership).

You can find more information on calculating the rate for AS at the following link:  
[www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/calculating-rate-general-formula-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/calculating-rate-general-formula-01.html)

TAS is non-taxable extra help paid for a maximum of 13 weeks. It is paid as a last resort to help people with their regular essential living costs that cannot be met from their chargeable income or other resources. A person does not have to be receiving a benefit to receive TAS but must meet the eligibility criteria.

TAS can be paid for allowable accommodation costs. A person does not have to be eligible for AS to receive TAS for accommodation costs, but if they are, AS should be granted before assessing whether a person qualifies for TAS. You can find more information on TAS at the following link:  
[www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/index.html)

*What are considered reasonable costs and how will MSD allow for these expenses in a benefit?*

*What costs are not allowable?*

Please refer to the links below for information on costs that can be considered as accommodation costs when applying for an AS and TAS.

You will note that mortgage, rates and insurances arrears cannot be included as accommodation costs as outlined in the link below.

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/home-ownership-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/home-ownership-01.html)
- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/accommodation-costs-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/temporary-additional-support/accommodation-costs-01.html)

Further information on mortgage repayments and how a homeowner is able to claim mortgage repayments as accommodation costs is outlined in the link below.

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/mortgage-repayments-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/mortgage-repayments-01.html)

*How can reasonable house repair costs be incorporated into a benefit if additional expenses are incurred on a mortgage?*

*Who decides what is a reasonable repair?*

Homeowners can claim the costs of essential repairs and maintenance to their house as accommodation costs, including costs already paid for. While each application for assistance is considered on a case by case basis, Ministry staff can use the following general guidelines to help determine whether a repair and/or maintenance cost is coverable:

- repairs or maintenance must be essential in order to maintain the house and property to a habitable standard
- any repairs and maintenance should be made to meet the client and families current housing needs
- all costs claimed must be verified with receipts which, if necessary, are detailed enough to verify the work undertaken was essential or needed for maintenance.

If a client has already met the costs of repairs and maintenance needed and they have provided receipts from a previous 12 months to verify that they have already paid from their own resources, the cost can be included in the AS.

You can find information on the types of repairs that can be considered as accommodation costs at the link below.

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/repairs-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/repairs-01.html)

You can find information on the types of maintenance that can be considered as accommodation costs on the link below.

- [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/maintenance-01.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/accommodation-supplement/maintenance-01.html)

*Any information or internal policy around any aspect of calculating a benefit and owning your own home while receiving any type of benefit or supplementary assistance?*

*Any other information that you think may be relevant to the above requested information.*

Please note, these aspects of your request for any information are very broad, and substantial manual collation would be required to locate and prepare all documents within scope of your request. 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.

You are welcome to make a new request for official information but would need to clearly specify the information you are seeking.

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](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

*Bridget Saunders*

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**Manager Issue Resolution  
Service Delivery**