



27 August 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 30 July 2024 to the Ministry of Social Development's (the Ministry's) Media team requesting the number of Emergency Housing Special Need Grants (EHSNGs) declined by month, between 1 April 2023 and 30 July 2024, both nationwide and by Territorial Local Authority (TLA), including the decline reason.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) and my decision is set out below.

Please refer to Appendix One, which is a spreadsheet containing two tables setting out the data you have requested, for the period between 1 April 2023 and 31 July 2024.

I have also included some general information about Emergency Housing (EH) support services and Housing Support Products for your further information.

In response to your request for the decline reason for EHSNG applications, the Ministry is unable to provide a breakdown of the actual reasons for decline for those allocated the reason "other" in the tables in Appendix One. Ministry staff would be required to review a substantial volume of files as the information is held on individual client records. As such, I refuse this part of 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 this part of 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 disrupted.

To protect client privacy, some values in the data tables are suppressed and are represented by 'S'. The Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As such, this information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to

protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in the information.

Reporting on EHSNG declines

The Ministry has tightened the gateway into emergency housing. In April 2024, the Priority One fast track was implemented to support whānau with children to move out of emergency housing and into social housing.

Further legislative changes that came into effect on 26 August 2024 create a more rules-based system and ensure emergency housing is provided to those in genuine urgent need and for those who are meeting their responsibilities.

Under the operational changes introduced in April 2024, an updated emergency housing resolution framework gave Ministry staff updated guidance on EH end-to-end processes, including using mandatory Structured Client Event Notes to record processes when screening and assessing if a client qualifies for EH.

It is anticipated that those changes will lead to more consistent frontline practice with regard to emergency housing declines, and consequently more accurate reporting.

Reporting on housing outcomes

The Ministry's ability to track the housing outcomes of those exiting emergency housing has improved, with the Ministry now able to discern high-level outcomes for approximately 78 percent of those exiting EH.

The Ministry is continuing to develop official reporting on EH exits, but that will take time as it requires linking information from multiple systems, agencies and other organisations.

Risk mitigations

The Government has sought to mitigate risks associated with tightening the gateway for emergency housing in a number of ways, including continued investment in emergency housing (EH) support services and additional financial products to support people into sustainable homes, policy settings to enable housing growth and funding community housing providers to build 1,500 new homes. In addition, there is ongoing work underway to assist people transitioning from state care.

EH Support Services

Through Budget 2024, the Ministry received funding to extend EH support services for a further two years. These services include integrated services case managers, housing brokers, contracted navigator services, flexible funding and the ready to rent programme to help people at risk of homelessness, and those in EH to access suitable and sustainable accommodation.

The Ministry is putting the needs of vulnerable whanau in EH first by establishing the Priority One fast-track on the Social Housing Register, where families with children in EH for longer than 12-weeks are prioritised into available social housing tenancies. Since this was established in April this year, we have seen about 540 whanau exit EH into secure social housing tenancies.

Housing Support Products (HSPs)

The Ministry has expanded its suite of HSPs to assist people into suitable homes. These products can now also be used where people are flatting or boarding privately. In particular, the Accommodation Security Cover Grant provides assistance to obtain or retain accommodation by providing assurance to accommodation suppliers that any outstanding accommodation costs will be covered, if owed at the end of the accommodation agreement.

Ministry staff can use these supports to work with at-risk whanau to prevent homelessness where possible and to help them remain safely housed.

Where a client is declined EH assistance, it is important to note that there may still be other services, packages and supports the client can access through the Ministry. The Ministry will continue to provide the client with options and advice on alternative housing options and financial and other support.

We recognise that many of the people accessing EH experience multiple complexities and require tailored support to help them address the issues underlying their homelessness and to find a home.

As people in EH can be at risk of having complex needs, we have also introduced a "limited circumstance" pathway for those most vulnerable. People who have multiple risk factors, are experiencing a crisis beyond their control and are at risk of current or near-term harm, will be able to temporarily continue to access EH until risk to near term harm is resolved.

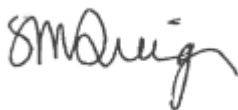
I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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

pp.



Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services