



18 December 2024

Tēnā koe

### **Official Information Act request**

Thank you for your letter received 13 December 2024, requesting information about the Steps to Freedom payment.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

1. *Could you please send me information about the 'steps to Freedom' payment of \$350.00, & when the last time this payment amount was reviewed? & by who?*

Steps to Freedom is a non-recoverable re-establishment grant that is part of the Special Needs Grant welfare programme. Like other re-establishment grants, entitlement is based on an applicants identified needs to re-establish themselves in the community.

The attached **Appendix** provides a page from the Ministry's publicly available Manuals and Procedures (Map) website that provides further information about how the Steps to Freedom entitlement of people leaving prison is determined.

The Steps to Freedom grant has existed since 1983. When the grant was originally introduced it was available at a maximum of twice the single youth rate of the unemployment benefit at that time.

Unlike main benefits, re-establishment grants are not indexed to inflation to average wage growth and the Steps to Freedom grant has remained at \$350 since 1991. New Zealand law is made, applied, and enforced by the Government of the day.

2. *Also information about who the public could request to get this payment reviewed?*

Any changes to the Steps to Freedom payment would be made by the Government of the day. You can write to your local Member of Parliament, outlining your concerns.

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

Ngā mihi nui

pp.



Magnus O'Neill  
**General Manager**  
**Ministerial and Executive Services**

# APPENDIX 1



[Map](#) » [Income support](#) » [Extra help](#) » [Special Needs Grant](#) » [Qualifications](#) » [Payments to people in specific circumstances](#) » [Re-establishment grants](#) » [Steps to Freedom](#) » [Payment of Steps to Freedom grants](#)

<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/payment-of-steps-to-freedom-grants-01.html>

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## Payment of Steps to Freedom grants

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A Steps to Freedom grant can be paid to help with the actual costs the client will have to re-establish themselves in the community.

The maximum amount of a Steps to Freedom grant is \$350 (less any cash on release).

The Steps to Freedom grant can be paid:

- directly to the supplier
- to a Westpac Steps to Freedom card **or**
- by direct credit to the clients (or their agents) bank account

**Note** Steps to Freedom grants are non-recoverable.

### More than one payment

You can make more than one payment of a Steps to Freedom grant for the same or similar purpose to a client provided the total amount paid does not exceed \$350 (less any cash on release).

Steps to Freedom grants are not restricted to one grant for the same or similar purpose in any 52 week period.

### Cash on release

The amount of the Steps to Freedom grant payable must be reduced by the total of the prisoner's available cash on release as recorded on the Steps to Freedom form. This includes any amount held in the prisoner's trust account, canteen account and earnings account.

**For example** if a prisoner is (or is about to be) released with \$26.50 cash, this needs to be deducted from the amount of the grant that would otherwise be payable.

### Examples of calculating payment

The maximum payment of a Steps to Freedom grant is \$350, and reduced by any cash on release.

#### Example 1

A client has \$26.50 on release and needs assistance for re-establishment costs of \$250.

The total amount payable for the grant is \$223.50 with the client contributing \$26.50 toward the remaining costs.

This will leave \$100 of the Steps to Freedom grant available for further re-establishment costs if required.

#### Example 2

A client has \$30.50 on release and needs help to pay re-establishment costs of \$150 to assist with clothing.

The amount payable for the grant is \$119.50 with the client contributing \$30.50 toward the remaining costs.

This will leave \$200 of the Steps to Freedom grant available for further re-establishment costs if required.

## **The Prisoner Reintegration team**

The Prisoner Reintegration team can pay a Steps to Freedom grant up to 5 days before a prisoner is released.

### **For more information see:**

- [The Prisoner Reintegration team](#)

Steps to Freedom procedures [[no link find out why](#)]

## **Legislation**

- Steps to Freedom Re-establishment Payments for Released, Sentenced and Remand Prisoners [clause 15.4](#)  
Special Needs Grants Programme
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