



5 November 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 19 September 2024, requesting information.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

- 1. How many people are disadvantaged from assistance with self-employment and what's the Minister doing to address disadvantages in this area?*

People "disadvantaged from assistance".

For the Act to apply, the request needs to be for information held by an agency. The Ministry is unable to respond to official information requests about being "disadvantaged" in this context or to offer opinions, as this information is not currently held by the Ministry.

As explained above the Ministry is not able to provide information about 'disadvantage'. However, we do routinely report on the number of applications declined for some forms of assistance. We have therefore interpreted the first part of this question as how many applications for Flexi Wage Self Employment (FWSE) have been declined by the Ministry.

We are unable to provide you with data about the number of declined FWSE applications as this information is not centrally recorded or reported on by the Ministry. To provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review the records of everyone who has applied for this payment to find out whether their application was declined. This would involve reviewing a substantial number of 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.

Addressing disadvantages in this area

In addition to the FWSE, the following support is available for eligible clients:

- Business Training and Advice Grant

www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/business-training-and-advice-grant.html.

- Self-employment start up payment
www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/self-employment-start-up-payment.html.

The Ministry's focus is assisting people into paid employment and providing income support to those in need. I suggest contacting the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) for guidance and advice on what support might be available for businesses in New Zealand. You may also be interested in the following webpages:

- Support for business: www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/business/support-for-business
- Helping businesses succeed: www.business.govt.nz

2. *How many people are currently receiving a Job Seeker Support (JSS) benefit?"*

This information can be found on Benefit Fact Sheets on the Ministry's public website at this link: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html.

As you will see, the data is broken down into both types of JSS payment (Work Ready and Health Condition & Disability).

3. *How many people are on limited hours of work, such as under 15 hours per week on a jobseeker, sickness, medical currently?*

The Ministry only reports on the number of clients who declare income - whether they work full time or any number of part time hours. The number of hours clients work can also fluctuate from week to week.

To respond to your request, staff would need to manually review individual client files to check if the notes state that the client has worked a particular number of hours for any given week. This would involve reviewing a substantial amount of information and I therefore 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.

4. *Does MSD assist with class 2 licensing or has this assistance stopped?*

The Ministry can assist eligible clients to obtain or renew their driver licence by providing a recoverable Special Needs Grant. Details about the eligibility criteria for this assistance and a list of the applicable driver licence classes (which includes class 2) are available at the following links:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/driver-licence-01.html

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/classes-of-driver-licence-01.html.

5. *How many people were receiving hardship grants last 2 years ago and currently for food, clothes etc?*

The Ministry reports on different types of income support it has provided to members of the community (including the number of food grants approved) in Benefit Fact Sheets on a quarterly basis. This information is available on the Ministry's website here: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html#LatestBenefitFactSheetsrelease1.

The latest Benefit Fact Sheet, for the quarter ending September 2024, can be accessed, at this link: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/2024/benefit-fact-sheets-snapshot-september-2024.pdf.

The Ministry can assist eligible clients with a clothing grant. This support may be available as an Advance Payment of Benefit (an advance - for people receiving a benefit) or as a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP - for those who are not on a benefit). You can find information, including eligibility criteria, for this assistance at the following links: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/advance-payment-of-benefit.html and www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/advance-payment-of-benefit.html.

The Ministry does not publicly report on the number of advance payments or RAPs approved for clothing. However, please find **Appendix One** attached, which provides this information for the period 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2024.

6. *What assistance is available for single parents with parent orders who have their children a certain number of days like 88 days a year. Children required gluten free food additional costs clothes, etc?*

There is no financial assistance available specifically for single parents who have a parent order. A child's primary caregiver is responsible for their day to day living costs and may be eligible for a range of ongoing support to assist with the costs of raising the child. Details of assistance available through the Ministry to help with the costs involved in raising a child are available on the Ministry's website, here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/children/.

If someone is not a child's primary caregiver, support such as one-off hardship assistance may be available, depending on the caregiver's circumstances. Information about hardship assistance can be found on the Ministry's website here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/living-expenses/index.html and here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/index.html.

In addition, you can check what assistance you may be eligible for, based on your circumstances, using the "Check what you might get" function on the Ministry's website here: <https://check.msd.govt.nz/>.

- 7. As the Ministry says everyone's situation is different, yet support is limited? What is the Ministry doing when passing people off regarding hardship, food etc yet sends people to food bank which gives food only 1 or two days and that's even if they can even help community groups?*

We have interpreted your question to be for what assistance is available in the community if a person is unable to obtain a food grant from the Ministry on a particular occasion.

The Ministry, through its Food Secure Communities programme, provides ongoing financial support to community food providers who distribute food to people and whānau experiencing food insecurity. You can find information about the programme and how this funding helps members of the community in need to access food at the following links: www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/community/food-secure-communities/index.html and www.nzfoodnetwork.org.nz/our-food-hubs/?language=enUS.

The Ministry cannot respond on behalf of foodbanks regarding their policies on how they choose to distribute their food – such as how many days in a row they will provide someone with a food parcel. You would need to raise your concerns about this with the foodbank directly.

You can find a list of foodbanks in communities around New Zealand at the following link: www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory/.

- 8. How many people who have lost their jobs from last 2 years and currently now, are now receiving a benefit?*

We have interpreted your question to be of benefits granted in the last 2 years, how many were because of job loss.

When someone applies for a benefit, such as JSS, there is no question on the application form asking them to declare if they are applying for a benefit because they have lost their job. This information would only be available on individual client records, and in addition, this information is not required to be recorded in client notes.

To answer your request, staff would need to review a substantial amount of information and I therefore 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.

- 9. Can you please explain if having less dependency of a benefit, by a self-employed opportunity or self-employment, why this is not fully supportive?*

I interpret your question to be asking the Ministry for an opinion. As mentioned previously, for the Act to apply, the request needs to be for information held by an agency. The Ministry is unable to offer opinions as this information is not currently held by the Ministry.

10. What obligations Work and Income staff have to support people in a fair and communicative way?

Ministry staff are expected to treat people with respect and empathy at all times. We want people to feel manaakitanga (respect and support) whenever and wherever they interact with us.

The following two documents set out standards Ministry staff are expected to adhere to:

- Code of Conduct (Aug 2021)
www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2022/march/30-3-2022-request-for-copy-of-msd-s-internal-policies-including-code-of-conduct-and-overlapping-duties-of-care-policy-msd-code-of-conduct-.pdf
- Our Commitment to You
www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/our-services/our-commitment.html

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
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