



18 November 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your email of 22 October 2024, requesting information about food grants and budgeting obligations.

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

- *The total number of applications for special needs grants for food in the September quarter 2024 compared to the same quarter in 2023 and 2019 - showing number of applications approved and declined and reason for declining in the way MSD records this.*

Please see the attached **Appendix**, containing the following information:

- **Table One:** The number of Special Needs Grants granted for Food from 1 January 2019 to 30 September 2024, by quarter.
- **Table Two:** The number of Special Needs Grants declined for Food from 1 January 2019 to 30 September 2024, by quarter and reason for decline.
- **Table Three:** The number of Special Needs Grants applications for Food from 1 January 2019 to 30 September 2024, by quarter.

Special Needs Grants for food are an example of how we help people with one-off urgent costs that cannot be met through other means.

The vast majority of Special Needs Grants we provide are to help people buy food, and the vast majority of those are approved. People don't need to be on a benefit to apply and they don't have to pay the money back. More information is available in this link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/food.html

For some time, the Ministry has been working to bring our Special Needs Grants processes back to pre-Covid practices. In December 2023 we implemented some changes to how we process applications for hardship assistance.

For example, when people apply for more than \$400 in a single Special Needs Grant payment, we've added an additional layer of sign-off. In some cases, we may require clients to meet hardship obligations as part of the grant for food, for example taking steps to improve their financial situation by taking reasonable steps or engaging with budgeting services.

We're also having more face-to-face meetings with clients to understand their situation fully. In some cases, we may require applicants to use budget advice services when they receive a grant. These changes are likely to have contributed to an increase in the number of declined applications.

- *For the same periods, the number of applications for special needs grants for food that triggered a budgeting activity obligation as described in this link and the outcome ie approved or declined*
<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/recoverable-assistance-payment/budgeting-activity-obligation-01.html>

I am unable to provide you with this information 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.

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 for information on food 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 or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi

pp.



Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services