



23 September 2024

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 26 August 2024, requesting information sent to dental providers regarding the dental treatment grant from October 2023.

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

I have compiled all the documents in scope within the attached **Appendix One**.

You will note that the information regarding some individuals is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act in order to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

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

Magnus O'Neill
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

From: Cathy Stephenson

Sent: Wednesday, May 1, 2024 2:53:39 PM

s9(2)(a)

Subject: Concerns around misuse of the Dental Special Needs Grant

Kia ora NZDA colleagues

I got your details from Antoine, one of our Comms team, who I believe worked closely with you on the webinar that went out to your providers regarding our increase in dental funding.

I am the Principal Health Advisor here, and some of our Regional Health and Disability team members have raised concerns around an increase in charges to clients/patients over the last few months, co-inciding with the time we increased our funding. At times clients have been presenting to case managers with quotes as high as \$10,000, which obviously leaves them with a massive shortfall to try and fund.

When there have been repeated concerns raised about a particular dentist or service, I will forward this to our Fraud team to follow up – this has happened on one occasion to date. However, I would love your thoughts around how we could address this concerning trend at a more general level. My suspicion is that a small number of providers are possibly capitalising on the increased funding for their own gains, which is definitely not the intent of the grant as you can imagine! I wonder if some communication out to your members might be worth thinking about?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ngā mihi
Cathy

Dr Cathy Stephenson she/her

FRNZCGP | Principal Health Advisor | Ministry of Social Development

Mobile s9(2)(a)

Ministry of Social Development, National Office, The Aurora Centre 56 – 66 The Terrace

PO Box 1556, Wellington 6140

www.workandincome.govt.nz

From: [Toni Kane](#)
To: [s9\(2\)\(a\)](#)
Cc: [Antoine Ellis](#); [Sonia Eriksen](#); [s9\(2\)\(a\)](#)
Subject: RE: Message from the Ministry of Social Development on grants for dental treatments
Date: Friday, 16 August 2024 4:27:33 pm
Attachments: [image002.png](#)
[image001.png](#)

IN-CONFIDENCE

Kia ora everyone

Thanks [s9\(2\)\(a\)](#) for getting in touch. I apologise with the delay in responding to your query, which was forwarded to me.

The Nov 2022 version of the form is the version. We updated it then to support the policy changes at that time. It's not needed any further updates since, so the version dated NOV 2022 is still correct. I understand how you may have expected to see a new form, however that's not what we intended. Sorry about the confusion.

Here are links to the pages where you can find it:

- [Forms for providers - Work and Income](#)
- [Dental treatment — information for dentists and health agencies - Work and Income](#)
- [Forms - Work and Income](#) (this is our main index targeted to clients)

You can also order hard copies of the form as well. We prefer you to either download a few at a time or order the hardcopies monthly so you're always assured of having the most up-to-date version (in case we update it).

Once again, I'm sorry for the long time you've waited.

If you have further queries about the form, please get in touch.

Regards
Toni

Toni Kane – Production Advisor | Service Delivery Communications

Phone: [s9\(2\)\(a\)](#) | www.msd.govt.nz
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MSD Purpose: We help New Zealanders to be safe, strong and independent
Manaaki tangata, Manaaki whānau

MSD logo with mana manaaki koru pattern - cool colours



Reminder on the changes to Work and Income's grants for dental treatment

As you will be aware, on 1st December 2022, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) made changes to the Special Needs Grant for dental treatment. We do review these grant applications as they come in, and sadly have received several reports from clients around the motu over the past 18 months, stating that their dental quotes have increased dramatically since we made these changes. We understand that some provider costs may have increased over this period, but we would like to remind you that the intended recipient of this increased funding was our clients, who cannot otherwise afford this essential treatment.

In essence the changes made in December 2022 meant that:

- The available balance of non-recoverable assistance for dental treatment (i.e., the money a person doesn't have to pay back to MSD) was increased from \$300 to \$1000 per 52-week period
- The "emergency treatment" criteria were replaced by "immediate and essential treatment" (*see below)
- People can now receive more than one grant in a 52-week period, as long as it doesn't exceed the maximum total of \$1000.

To qualify for the Special Needs Grant, people must first meet an asset and income test, depending on their age and family circumstances. There are other criteria as well, including whether other options are available to meet the need, like asking family members for help.

More information about criteria is available [on our website](#).

To apply, dentists and health organisations need to complete a Dental Treatment Information Form with their patients. We've introduced a new form with updated information. You can access the form (PDF) [on our website](#).

*Definition of immediate and essential dental treatment

This means dental treatment is required immediately to treat an oral health issue that:

- has deteriorated or would begin to deteriorate if left untreated, **and**

- is having, or is likely to have, a detrimental effect on the person’s oral health and/or wider physical health.

For example, where a person has active and open tooth decay, there would be an immediate need for essential dental treatment to prevent further deterioration.

| What treatments are included? | What treatments are not included? |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations (including x-rays) which result in immediate and essential treatment • Extractions (not for orthodontic purposes) • Fillings (tooth restorations) • Root canal treatment (excluding molars, unless exceptional circumstances exist) • Treating infections, including antibiotics and any temporary measures needed to enable permanent treatment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular dental check-ups • Cosmetic treatments • Clean, scale and polish*1 • Cast restorations • Orthodontic treatment • Molar root canal treatment*2 • Dentures*3 • Treatments that are co-paid by ACC. |

Extra details

1. The cost of teeth cleaning can be included if it’s required to treat a gum infection.
2. Unless there are exceptional circumstances that mean a molar root canal is essential for the person, e.g., because they’ve had previous radiation therapy in the area.
3. People may be eligible for recoverable assistance for dentures.

Disability Allowance funding for ongoing dental care

Aside from the Special Needs Grant that is available to clients, Work and Income may also be able to fund some **ongoing** dental costs under Disability Allowance, for clients who meet the criteria [Dental treatment – information for dentists and health agencies - Work and Income](#)

When **on-going** dental care is required (e.g. regular appointments every few months to treat or prevent dental disease) and this relates directly to a client's disability, they may be eligible for Disability Allowance. Examples where this could apply include clients with rheumatic fever, gum disease, or other ongoing health conditions where regular dental checks are recommended and of therapeutic value to the stated disability.

If you would like to discuss this with the Ministry, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local Regional Health and Disability Team, or our Principal Health Advisor Dr Cathy Stephenson cathy.stephenson006@msd.govt.nz . If you don't have the contact details for your local team, Cathy will be able to share those with you.

RELEASED UNDER THE
OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT