



23 December 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 25 November 2025, requesting information about the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry)'s Steps to Freedom grant, including planned changes and number of recipients.

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.

You can find advice about the Steps to Freedom grant on the Ministry's website: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/steps-to-freedom-01.html.

- 1. Are there plans to increase the funding available to individuals under the Steps to Freedom Grant in the future?*

The Government is currently not undertaking work to increase the maximum amount of the Steps to Freedom grant. The maximum remains at \$350 (and less any cash on release). Clients who have already received the maximum amount payable and who continue to face hardship, may qualify for other financial assistance such as a Special Needs Grant. When Steps to Freedom does not cover the full amount needed for bond or rent in advance, Ministry staff can consider whether a client qualifies for any Housing Support Products for the remaining amount.

- 2. Please provide any advice (internally or to Ministers) on changes to the Steps to Freedom Grant including setting the level of the Steps to Freedom Grant in the last three years. In particular, I request the advice referred to in an OIA response from the Ministry dated 11 March 2024, which stated "[t]he Minister for Social Development and Employment has requested advice from Ministry officials regarding the STF. The Minister will consider this advice in due course".*

In 2019, the Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) provided a report with recommendations for New Zealand's social security system. An update was provided to the Minister for Social Development and Employment in January 2024 on work to address these recommendations, including one to review and increase the Steps to Freedom grant. This explained that this work was paused to prioritise

work in other areas of the welfare system. A link to the released paper can be found in an earlier OIA response: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2025/march/26032025-most-recent-assessment-of-the-progress-of-weag-recommendations-and-any-actions-taken.pdf.

The Minister requested further advice following this update, but this was deprioritised due to reprioritisation of initiatives and advice.

3. *The number of individuals each year to receive the Steps to Freedom Grant from 1 Jan 2022.*
4. *Average amount paid out per Steps to Freedom Grant application from 1 Jan 2022.*
5. *The number of individuals who received Steps to Freedom Grants more than once per year since 1 Jan 2022.*

To address your questions 3-5, please see the attached **Appendix** for the following information:

- **Table One:** Number of clients, number of grants and amount of Steps to Freedom grant from 01 January 2022 to 31 October 2025, by calendar year.
- **Table Two:** Number of clients who received a Steps to Freedom grant once and more than once in a year from 01 January 2022 to 31 October 2025, by calendar year

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.



Anna Graham
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Ministerial and Executive Services