



7 July 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 29 April 2025, requesting information about the Ministry of Social Development's (the Ministry's) Emergency Housing early intervention work.

- *I request documents explaining which part of the programme to prevent people ending up in emergency housing was scrapped, the reasons for scrapping it, and any impact assessments on how this decision affects vulnerable populations.*

The Ministry of Social Development cited workload issues as the reason for scrapping parts of the program, prompting concerns about support for at-risk groups.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). One document has been identified as in scope of your request.

Please find attached a copy of **REP/24/11/1050** – Report - *Update on early interventions to prevent an urgent housing need*, dated 5 December 2024.

Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials. The release of this information is likely to prejudice the ability of government to consider advice and the wider public interest of effective government would not be served.

I would like to point out that not all early intervention work to stop people from entering emergency housing has been halted. Instead, it was decided not to further progress phase one of the workstream, which was focused only on the Ministry's interventions within the current system.

The Ministry, as part of its normal processes, regularly reviews its work programmes to ensure they are aligned with government priorities and that the programmes are continuing to deliver value. Where necessary, some initiatives

may be paused, stopped or deferred. As with any agency, programmes of work need to be managed within available resources and provide expected value.

A range of other changes have recently been implemented to help people get into or maintain suitable and stable accommodation. These changes need time to bed in and planned evaluations need to take place. This will enable the Ministry to fully understand the extent of potential need, whether current measures are working well together, or if changes are required. Early intervention work to explore housing insecurity will continue, as will work to evaluate the success of existing initiatives.

I would also like to refer you to a number of Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs) which relate to your information request, that were submitted to the House of Parliament on 30 April 2025. I list the particular WPQ numbers below, and you can find the response to these questions on the New Zealand Parliament website here: <https://questions.parliament.nz/written-questions>.

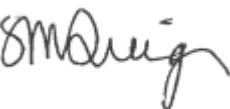
- 19420(2025)
- 19344(2025)
- 19346(2025)
- 19349(2025)
- 19350(2025)
- 19357(2025)

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
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services

Report



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Date: 5 December 2024 **Security Level:** In Confidence

To: Hon Tama Potaka, Associate Minister of Housing

Cc: Hon Chris Bishop, Minister of Housing
Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Social Development and
Employment

File Reference: REP/24/11/1050

Update on early interventions to prevent an urgent housing need

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report:
 - 1.1 provides you with an update on phase one of the early interventions work, which considers current the Ministry of Social Development's (MSD) housing processes and aims to ensure they provide early supports and systems to reduce the likelihood of an urgent housing need arising
 - 1.2 seeks your agreement to phase one work not being progressed further at this time due to emergency housing numbers falling rapidly, alongside MSD frontline capacity constraints and organisational pressures.

Recommended actions


It is recommended that you:

- 1 **note** progress made on early interventions work, including:
 - 1.1 seeking feedback from stakeholders on what is working well and where there are risks and opportunities for improvement
 - 1.2 identifying MSD supports that may have a role in preventing an urgent housing need arising
 - 1.3 exploring housing insecurity

- 2 **note** that the number of households in Emergency Housing has rapidly declined since February 2024 and we are approaching the Target of 800 households
- 3 **note** that MSD's frontline capacity is currently oversubscribed, and has been impacted by wider organisational pressures including the need to focus on supporting other Government targets, such as the Jobseeker target
- 4 **note** that MSD does not currently have capacity to implement new systems and processes at the front line
- 5 **note** that MSD will be better placed to assess potential need and whether new systems or processes are required, if more time is given to understanding how recent changes in the housing system (that support Target 8 and help people into sustainable accommodation) are interacting, and once full evaluations have taken place in 2025 and early 2026
- 6 **agree** not to further progress phase one of early interventions work at this time

AGREE / DISAGREE

- 7 **note** that you will receive advice from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in April 2025 on phase two of early interventions work (phase two does not require the phase one work to be completed to progress)
- 8 **note** that MSD will continue to explore housing insecurity, and continue work on evaluations of existing initiatives.



Alex McKenzie
Policy Manager
Housing Policy

Date

Hon Tama Potaka
Associate Minister of Housing

Date

Early interventions work aims to prevent a future emergency housing need from arising

- 2 The Emergency Housing Target 8 Delivery Plan (the Delivery Plan) sets out three workstreams aligned with the goal of ending large-scale emergency housing, including reducing demand for emergency housing (EH).
- 3 One workstream under reducing demand is considering early interventions to prevent an EH need. This work, led by MSD and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) aims to provide support earlier, to reduce the likelihood of an urgent housing need arising in future. Effective early interventions can reduce the demand on EH by ensuring households are supported to stay in stable housing.

Phase one is focused on what could be improved within the current MSD system to intervene early

- 4 Phase one of the early interventions workstream focuses on:
 - interventions within the current MSD system of supports
 - improving understanding of existing supports available (e.g. Housing Support Products (HSPs) and the Accommodation Supplement)
 - consider options for people accessing government supports that may indicate a future EH need
 - internal MSD supports and practices that could be redirected or modified within current policy and legislation
 - referrals to other non-MSD supports and services, where appropriate.
- 5 Phase two work will be delivered by HUD in 2025, and will consider interventions beyond the current system and MSD supports, based on engagement and research findings. This could include Māori-led approaches, and interventions that improve outcomes for Māori. It will also take a system-level lens, considering interventions across social sector agencies. This links to other work underway to reduce demand (including improved transitions out of state care and custody to reduce reliance on EH).
- 6 As phase two work takes a look at the wider system and international evidence of best practice, it is not dependent on phase one being completed to progress. However, HUD has advised that phase one not being completed could mean potential limitations on the work that will need to be mitigated; for example, effectiveness of the wider current system including MSD.

We have completed some work on phase one, including seeking stakeholder feedback

- 7 Initial work on phase one has looked at identifying known issues, potential risk factors, indicators, interventions and opportunities. Engagement to date has been limited, but has included seeking feedback from a range of stakeholders with a provider perspective, on what is working well and where there are risks and opportunities for improvement. To date, we have met with MSD's Housing Reference Group (HRG), the National Beneficiary Advocate Consultative Group (NBACG), as well as MSD's Pacific Reference Group and Housing Brokers.
- 8 Examples of some common themes heard during feedback sessions were that:
 - some society-wide issues that lead to an urgent housing need are not completely unpreventable, e.g. family violence and urgent mental health need
 - breakdowns in system-level connections (e.g. between MSD, Health and Corrections) directly impact the need for urgent housing. We need to better understand the connection across new policies released, and their subsequent impact on homelessness.
- 9 A one page summary of feedback from the Housing Reference Group (see **Annex One**) is attached.

Evaluation of interventions already in place is coming up in 2025

- 10 Existing measures in the housing system that support people to obtain or retain their accommodation include MSD operational supports such as Housing Brokers, Ready to Rent programmes, Housing Support Products, and the Accommodation Supplement, and referrals to the HUD-led Sustaining Tenancies programme.¹
- 11 Some initiatives are yet to receive a full outcomes evaluation. For example, MSD's planned monitoring and evaluation of all EH support services (funded for another two years through Budget 2024) will use improved client-level information to build evidence on client outcomes following their participation

¹ Sustaining Tenancies is a HUD-funded programme providing social services to help support tenants in rental properties (private or social) who are at risk of losing their tenancies, to prevent a loss of tenancy, or if a tenancy is lost, to achieve a new tenancy. Support services are tailored to each individual or family and help address issues such as struggling to pay rent, mental or physical health concerns, or risk factors like addiction or family violence.

in the Housing Broker and Ready-to-Rent initiatives. This will include embedding Kaupapa Māori principles and analysing outcomes for Māori.

- 12 You will have recently received a joint MSD/the Treasury report to Housing Ministers, seeking agreement to the final design of the monitoring and evaluation plan for all EH support services, and a timeline for further advice on the preliminary findings from the evaluation. s9(2)(f)(iv)

- 13 Recent changes to Housing Support Products (HSPs) are due to have some limited evaluation completed by the end of February 2025. This will look at trends in HSP take-up, use and effectiveness (defined as a client leaving and/or staying out of temporary housing following receipt of an HSP).
- 14 Previous evaluations of Sustaining Tenancies have found that the initiative helped tenants stabilise existing tenancies, reduced reliance on EH and TH, and prevented homelessness rates increasing.²
- 15 There was also substantial feedback in support of the Sustaining Tenancies (ST) programme during engagement, but possible operational improvements were noted. This feedback has been passed on to HUD, who will be taking an in-depth look at the effectiveness of ST as part of phase two work. Further details of feedback on ST is at **Annex One**.

We are also exploring housing insecurity

- 16 To support early interventions work, MSD has been exploring possible ways of identifying a population experiencing housing insecurity. Housing insecurity would be defined as people who are either actively, or at high risk of experiencing homelessness. Any measure would need to be a broader measure of need than demand for EH, which is difficult to isolate from shifts in policy and operational practices.
- 17 It is important to note that housing insecurity is difficult to measure, so initial work will focus on the feasibility of such a measure.
- 18 IDI analysis earlier this year provided insights into the cross-government experiences of different cohorts receiving housing assistance. Further IDI analysis (including cohort characteristics) may also deepen our understanding of the cross-government experiences of people who access EH. Further

² Source: Formative Evaluation of the Sustaining Tenancies Trial (July 2019:Housing New Zealand Corporation, MSD and HUD); and Phase 4: Final Design Report of the Sustaining Tenancies Service (see: www.hud.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/Final-design-of-the-sustaining-tenancies-services-1.pdf (January 2020 – developed for HUD).

insights may also be gained over time as learnings from the social outcomes trial and other initiatives are gathered. This may help inform and shape work on future interventions for those at risk of housing insecurity.

We do not recommend progressing further with phase one work at this time due to insufficient frontline capacity and wider organisational pressures

- 19 MSD is tracking well towards achieving the EH Target and the number of households on the Priority One fast track has also fallen. At 30 November 2024 the total number of households in EH was 687³ and the number of households on the Priority one fast track was 129.
- 20 However, MSD's frontline capacity is currently oversubscribed, and there are wider organisational pressures because of the focus on implementing initiatives to support other government targets, including the Jobseeker target. This means MSD currently does not have the capacity to implement new or amended systems and processes at the front line.
- 21 MSD has also implemented a range of changes in the housing system this year that support achievement of Target 8, and help people get into or maintain suitable, stable accommodation. These changes include EH gateway and Priority One changes, changes to the Housing Support Programme to extend support to those in non-RTA accommodation, and continuation of EH support services. We will be better placed to fully understand potential need and whether any new processes or changes are required, if more time is given to understand how the changes are interacting with each other and once planned evaluations have taken place (see paragraphs 15 to 17 below). Evaluation work for the EH support services will take place in 2025 and early 2026.
- 22 We therefore recommend you agree that phase one work not continue at this time. If phase one were to continue, because it would require resources from across the organisation, there would need to be a trade-off against other MSD work programme priorities, including supporting the Jobseeker target.

Next steps

- 23 You will receive initial advice from HUD in April 2025 on phase two work.

³ Not including Contracted EH.

- 24 We will continue to explore housing insecurity, as well as continue work on evaluations of existing initiatives.

File ref: REP/24/11/1050

Author: Jacqueline MacKenzie, Senior Policy Analyst, Housing Policy

Responsible manager: Alex McKenzie, Policy Manager, Housing Policy

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Annex one: key themes from early interventions discussions with the Housing Reference Group

Feedback on early interventions

- Will never get away from some issues that lead to an urgent housing need, e.g. family violence and urgent mental health need.
- There is a place for housing facilitation - if someone doesn't necessarily need to be in social housing - but is about to lose their housing.
- Housing Brokers are part of a solution, catching people early before they lose a tenancy.
- Includes people moving into KO housing, they need support to sustain that housing.
- Need a holistic approach, e.g. Finland's approach - ensuring GPs are asking people about their housing at every visit.
- Need to do a better job of collecting and reporting data that's already there. Includes properly resourcing data collection and reporting in contracts.
- Common issues/themes include systemic failures rather than something to do with the person. That breakdown between MSD, Health, Corrections. Has a direct impact on the need for urgent housing.
- Need to understand the connections across the policies released and the subsequent impact on homelessness.
- Housing support needs to move fast and be flexible.
- Need to bring supports together in one place to allow an in-depth assessment of those with housing need.
- Not just about the numbers. About people being in a worse state than they might have been previously. A resounding commonality amongst all providers.
- Seeing an increase in homelessness. A result of EH gateway changes is people stop coming to MSD and getting information from providers for information directly.

Feedback on Sustaining Tenancies⁴

- Sustaining Tenancies works well but is not referred to enough.

⁴ Sustaining Tenancies is a HUD-funded programme providing social services to help support tenants in rental properties (private or social) who are at risk of losing their tenancies, to prevent a loss of tenancy, or if a tenancy is lost, to achieve a new tenancy. Support services are tailored to each individual or family and help address issues such as struggling to pay rent, mental or physical health concerns, or risk factors like addiction or family violence. Feedback has been passed on to HUD for consideration.

- The ST system needs to be better coordinated at a systems level.
- A big part of Sustaining Tenancies work is helping to navigate other support organisations - there's an assumption they exist, but often they don't. Often results in ST provider doing more than the navigation.
- Most organisations are at capacity and can't do any more work.
- Would like to see Sustaining Tenancies' contract rigidity around a tenancy being at risk change. If someone is starting to show early signs of being at risk of losing their tenancy, providers want to help.
- Want to also support people who are precariously housed (such as couch surfers).
- Should be more focussed on client need rather than ticking boxes. Work needs to be more flexible, to prevent people falling into the system of housing support.
- Evidence for the impact of ST - Finland evidences their programmes by one measure: whether someone has kept their tenancy. Annex two: existing interventions

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