



10 March 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 11 February 2025, requesting information about electricity assistance, including criteria and a breakdown of grants and declines.

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. Excluding the Winter Energy Payment, for the calendar years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024:

- a. what total sums did MSD give out in assistance for electricity costs, by region, and by MSD office? Please break this down into recoverable and non-recoverable (if any).*
- b. how many grants did MSD give out in assistance with electricity costs, by region, and by MSD office? Please break this down into recoverable and non-recoverable (if any).*
- c. How many requests for assistance with electricity costs did MSD decline, by region, and by MSD office? For 2023 and 2024, please further break this data down by quarter, if possible.*

Please refer to the attached **Appendix** for a breakdown of grants and declines for Electricity Assistance during the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2024, by region, site, year and assistance type.

2. What are the criteria to determine whether someone is granted assistance with electricity costs?

- a. Do they need to be the person named on the power bill?*
- b. Is there any maximum number of times they can apply for this assistance within a time period?*
- c. Is there any maximum debt to MSD, after which they will be declined further assistance with electricity costs?*
- d. If they are NOT already on a benefit of some kind, can they access assistance?*
- e. Are there any other criteria?*

As the Ministry advised to you in a previous response dated 22 May 2024, people who need assistance with electricity, gas or water costs can apply for an Advance Payment of Benefit (ADV) or a Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP).

ADV and RAP are recoverable assistance for specific immediate and essential needs, such as electricity, where the person cannot meet the need from their own or other resources. ADVs are available to eligible clients receiving a main benefit, Orphans Benefit, Unsupported Childs Benefit, New Zealand Superannuation and Veterans Pension. RAPs are available to eligible non-beneficiaries.

Eligibility for ADVs and RAPs is assessed on a case-to-case basis, considering a range of factors including, meeting an income and asset test, a person's continued reliance on hardship assistance, whether they are receiving their full and correct entitlement, and whether their needs can be met in another way.

Generally, the person does need to be named on the electricity account, when applying for an ADV or a RAP, however as mentioned above each application is considered on a case-by-case basis.

There is no restriction on the number of times a client can be granted an ADV or a RAP for electricity costs.

To find more information on the eligibility criteria for ADVs and RAPs, please visit the following links:

- ADV - [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/qualifications-map)
- RAP - [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/qualifications-map)

It is important to highlight that if a client has additional power, gas or heating costs due to their disability, exceeding the typical power consumption of comparable households in the area at the same time of the year, the Ministry may be able to assist under Disability Allowance (DA)

If you would like to find out more information on DA and what power, gas and heating costs can be included in DA, please visit the following links:

- [Qualifications - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/qualifications-map)
- [Power, gas, and heating - Map \(workandincome.govt.nz\)](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/power-gas-and-heating-map)

3. Practically, how does someone access this assistance?

- a. Do they always have to go into a WINZ centre? In what circumstances can they do it over the phone?*
- b. What information do they need besides the power bill?*
- c. If the person who's named on the bill is not on a benefit, how does their household access support?*

Individuals in need of testing their eligibility for electricity assistance may have the option to schedule a phone appointment instead of visiting their local Service Centre, provided they can scan necessary verification documents.

Applicants may need to provide identification, proof of income, and documentation of cash assets, such as a bank statement, along with their utility bill, and any other verification documents that will support their application to meet the qualifications for financial support.

If a household requires support with electricity, gas or water expenses and is not currently receiving a benefit, they can assess their eligibility for a RAP.

- 4. Are there any plans to tighten the criteria for assistance with electricity costs?*

There are currently no plans to tighten the criteria for assistance with electricity costs.

5. *Are there any planned changes to the criteria or sums given out in the Winter Energy Payment for 2025? If so, what changes are planned?*

There are no planned changes to the criteria or sums given out in the Winter Energy Payment for 2025.

6. *What is the total sum of debt owed to MSD (or passed on to debt collectors) due to electricity assistance, for 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024? Broken down by quarter, and region (ideally city or town level).*
7. *For each of those years, how many people is this debt split between, and therefore, what is the average debt for electricity assistance per person? Broken down by quarter, and region (ideally city or town level).*
8. *For each of those years, what was the total sum of debt owed to MSD due to electricity assistance that was passed on to a debt collection service?*
- a. *Of that, what proportion is ever recovered by MSD (ie, if they sell the debt, what rate do they sell it for and therefore how much are they effectively writing off by making that transaction)?*

I am unable to provide you with this information as it is not centrally recorded in the format you have requested. 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 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, 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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