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# Information on Quarterly Welfare Assistance Tier 1 Statistics (‘the Benefit Fact Sheets’)

The Benefit Fact Sheets are published here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/>

**Composition of the Benefit Fact Sheets**

The Benefit Fact Sheets consist of:

* an A4 snapshot, which provides key points of the Benefit Fact Sheets release
* ten Excel data files, containing timeseries information for:
	+ national totals for main benefits, other benefits, New Zealand Superannuation (NZS), Veteran’s Pension (VP), selected supplementary and hardship assistance, number of dependent children, and number of non-beneficiaries
	+ national totals of benefit grants and cancellations, broken down by Work and Income region
	+ main benefits, broken down by Work and Income region
	+ selected supplementary assistance, broken down by Work and Income region
	+ main benefits, broken down by Regional Council area
	+ main benefits, broken down by Auckland board area
	+ main benefits, broken down by Territorial Authority area
	+ main benefits, broken down by service centres (latest quarter only)
	+ New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension, broken down by key recipient characteristics
	+ national totals of benefit sanctions, broken down by Work and Income region.

**Comparisons over time**

On 15 July 2013, the Welfare Reform changes came into effect. Three new benefits replaced most of the previous benefits: Jobseeker Support (JS), Sole Parent Support (SPS) and Supported Living Payment (SLP).

For benefit counts prior to 15 July 2013, we report estimates of the number of clients receiving the new benefit categories. These estimates are backcast based on the type of benefit received and other characteristics recorded for the client. Numbers from 15 July 2013 are actual numbers based on benefit and work obligations post the Welfare Reform changes.

Further information on comparing current benefits to old categories can be found here: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/benefit-factsheet-changes-2013.html>

Backcast data is not included after the September 2018 Benefit Fact Sheets. This is due to the timeseries either beginning from or after the September 2013 quarter, or there not being timeseries data available.

Starting March 2018, reporting was changed to 2017 Regional Council boundaries and 2017 Territorial Authority (TA) boundaries, from the 2001 boundaries used in earlier quarters. However, figures for 2001 boundaries have been retained in timeseries for quarters up to and including December 2017. Comparisons between March 2018 quarter data and earlier quarters should be undertaken with caution.

On 1 April 2018, the Families Package was implemented. This had an effect on the Accommodation Supplement, and Temporary Additional Support/Special Benefit figures.

From 2 December 2019, forms and online applications were updated to include three gender options for clients to choose from: “Male”, “Female”, and “Gender Diverse”. Due to the recent addition of the gender diverse category, there is currently a low count of these clients. We expect numbers to increase over time. Gender Diverse is currently included in the total, but not shown as a separate category. As a result, the sum of Male and Female may not add up to the total in some cases.

The Benefit Fact Sheets quarterly report for September 2020 covers the periods in which New Zealand was at different COVID-19 Alert Levels, which had an impact on the country's economy, labour market, health and wellbeing. The figures in this report reflect the impacts of COVID-19, and MSD’s response to support our clients. The Benefit Fact Sheets Snapshot is standard reporting that serves to support interpretation of the Ministry's Tier 1 Statistics.

Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic included a number of temporary operational changes to support people affected by the pandemic, and to ensure the health and safety of our clients and of MSD’s essential workers. Some of the changes made included deferring the need to provide subsequent medical certificates, review of Disability Allowance, suspending obligation failures, and extending the 52-week reapplication period for JS and SPS clients. Details of these changes are available at the Work and Income website: [https://workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/changes-to-how-we-work.html](https://workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/changes-to-how-we-work.html#null).

However, some of the temporary business processes such as work-related obligation failures that were suspended, between 23 March to 27 May 2020, and an increase in the amount people can access for food assistance, between 23 March and 10 August 2020, have returned to their normal business rules.

The Benefit Fact Sheets Snapshot supports interpretation of the Ministry’s Tier 1 statistics. To provide more information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on New Zealand’s people, society, and economy, MSD also increased the frequency with which we report key benefit data and additional income support. This new COVID-19 reporting, such as data on the Wage Subsidy and Leave Payment Scheme, and the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment, is not included in the regular quarterly reporting. COVID-19 focused reporting is available on MSD’s COVID-19 response webpage: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/index.html>.

Further information on changes to the way MSD operates can be found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/>

**Suppression and aggregation of data**

In certain circumstances, low numbers may potentially lead to individuals being identified. Due to these privacy concerns, primary suppression (data is withheld) and/or aggregation (categories are combined) is undertaken when there are small numbers to report (i.e. numbers one to five).

In addition, some numbers are also suppressed in order to prevent the calculation of these small numbers (secondary suppression).

| **Aspect** | **Details** |
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| Data source | Recipient information used in the Benefit Fact Sheets is extracted from MSD’s administrative system after the end of the quarter.This information is collected by MSD to allow the Ministry to undertake its statutory functions, including:* data on employment, income support and superannuation services
* data on student allowances and loans.
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| Population | Recipients of main benefits, supplementary assistance, hardship assistance, New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran’s Pension within the last five years. |
| Reporting period | The Benefit Fact Sheets include the most recent quarterly data that is available. Five years of quarterly data plus an additional quarter (21 quarters) are available for all datasets.Most Benefit Fact Sheets show the number of people receiving benefits at the end of the quarter. However, the following sheets show the sum of all events that occur in the quarter. The data in these sheets is a count of events over the quarter, not a count of clients, and includes:* benefit grants and cancellations
* benefit sanctions
* hardship payments.
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| Definitions/concepts | **Main benefits** are income-tested and asset-tested. They include the following:* Jobseeker Support (JS) – a benefit paid for up to 52 weeks while working-age clients look for work, are in training for work, or unable to work due to a temporary health condition, injury or disability. Recipients can reapply for JS, if they still require it, after 52 weeks. From March 2020, the 52-week reapplication period has been temporarily paused as part of the ongoing COVID-19 response.
* Sole Parent Support (SPS) – a benefit for working-age sole parents whose youngest dependent child is less than 14 years of age. Recipients can reapply for SPS, if they still require it, after 52 weeks. From March 2020, the 52-week reapplication period has been temporarily paused as part of the ongoing COVID-19 response.
* Supported Living Payment (SLP) – a benefit for people who have a health condition, injury or disability that severely limits their ability to work on a long-term basis (i.e. unable to work more than 15 hours a week), are caring for someone who requires full-time care, or are totally blind.
* Youth Payment (YP) – a benefit paid to 16 and 17-year-olds who are not being supported by their parents, have no dependent children, and are not in a relationship with someone receiving a benefit. A small number of 18-year-olds can also receive this benefit.
* Young Parent Payment (YPP) – a benefit paid to 16 to 19-year-old parents or guardians of a dependent child or children, who are undertaking or available for approved full-time training or who would be available if care could be found for their dependent child/children. A small number of 20-year-olds can also receive this benefit.
* Emergency Benefit (EB) – a benefit that is granted to people who are in significant hardship as they are unable to earn a sufficient livelihood, but are not eligible for any other main benefit.
* Emergency Maintenance Allowance (EMA) – a benefit granted to sole parents who are in hardship and who do not qualify for other payments.
* Jobseeker Support Student Hardship (JSSH) – a benefit that provides income support for full-time students during breaks in study, who have little or no income, are actively seeking work, and are suffering hardship.
* Widow’s Benefit Overseas (WBO) – a benefit for widowed women who meet certain criteria and are living in certain countries overseas (no longer available for new clients).
* Sole Parent Support Overseas (SPSO) – a benefit available to a widow or widower whose youngest dependent child is less than 14 years of age. They also need to meet certain criteria and be living in certain countries overseas to qualify.

**Supplementary Assistance** is non-taxable, income-tested, and asset-tested assistance to meet specific costs, including: accommodation, childcare, training, and health-related or medical-related costs. The Benefit Fact Sheets report receipt of selected supplementary assistance:* Temporary Additional Support (TAS) – available to people who are having difficulty paying for their ongoing essential living costs. This replaced the Special Benefit (SPB), which is still received by a small number of clients.
* Disability Allowance (DA) – a payment to help cover ongoing additional costs due to a disability, available to both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.
* Accommodation Supplement (AS) – assistance for private housing expenses of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.
* Unsupported Child’s Benefit (UCB)/Orphan’s Benefit (OB) – a payment granted to the primary caregivers of orphaned or unsupported children.

**Hardship Assistance** is non-taxable, income-tested, and asset-tested assistance available to non-beneficiaries and/or beneficiaries. Figures contained in the Benefit Fact Sheets are based on grants made, including:* Special Needs Grants (SNGs) – one-off payments made to those who have immediate or emergency needs and who have no other means of paying the cost to meet those needs. Most Special Needs Grants are non-recoverable.
* Recoverable Assistance Payment (RAP) – non-taxable, interest-free financial assistance to people on a low income, who aren’t receiving a benefit or pension. The aim is to enable them to meet essential immediate needs for specific goods and services.
* Benefit Advances (ADV) – up to six weeks' worth of benefit payments are available in advance to recipients of a main benefit. The advance enables benefit recipients to meet one-off needs that are immediate and essential, but cannot be met from their regular income.

**Civil Defence Payments** are payments that are available to meet the immediate needs of people who are affected by a Civil Defence emergency or adverse event. This assistance is not income or asset tested.**Winter Energy Payment,** starting 2018, is a non-taxable benefit paid in addition to the recipient’s main benefit, New Zealand Superannuation or Veteran’s Pension to support eligible recipients to meet their household heating costs during the winter period, from 1 May to 1 October. During 2018, this period was 1 July to 29 September. **New Zealand Superannuation (NZS)** is a fortnightly, non-income-tested payment for people aged 65 years and over who are New Zealand citizens or permanent residents, and normally live in New Zealand at the time New Zealand Superannuation is applied for. It may be paid to people who do not meet the eligibility criteria, but are in a relationship (i.e. married, living as married or in a civil union) with qualified recipients of NZS.**Veteran’s Pension (VP)** is a fortnightly payment for veterans who have served in the New Zealand Armed Forces in a war or other emergency, are New Zealand residents and normally live in New Zealand, and are aged 65 years or over. Recipients of Veteran’s Pension are not eligible for New Zealand Superannuation.**Benefit sanctions** are penalties imposed on clients’ benefits for failure to fulfill their work or youth activity obligations. Work obligations are reported in the Benefit Fact Sheets and include work preparation steps, attending arranged appointments, and accepting offers of employment. The majority of clients who have work obligations are receiving Jobseeker Support or Sole Parent Support. Most clients re-comply with their work obligations before a sanction is imposed.Operational processes for work-related obligation requirements were suspended from 23 March to 27 May 2020.Sanctions affect clients in several ways, depending on their circumstances (e.g. sole parents, couples with dependent children or subject to money management), and the number of times they have had a sanction imposed over the last 12 months. Sole parents and couples with dependent children face a maximum 50 per cent reduction of their main benefit when sanctioned. For single clients with no dependent children, the first sanction is a maximum 50 per cent reduction of their main benefit; for a second failure, they face a 100 percent suspension of their main benefit; a third sanction results in the main benefit being cancelled. There are three grades of benefit sanctions:* A Grade 1 sanction means the client has failed their obligations for the first time in the last 12 months and has not re-complied within five working days.
* A Grade 2 sanction occurs if a client has failed their obligations for the second time in the last 12 months and has not re-complied within five working days.
* A Grade 3 sanction means the client has failed their obligations for the third time in the last 12 months or has not accepted an offer of suitable employment (job refusal) and has not re-complied within five working days.

Note: Sanctions for youth activity failures impact on a young person’s in-hand allowance or incentive payment.**Working-age** clients are aged 18–64 years. This definition reflects the minimum age of eligibility for most main benefits and the age of qualification for New Zealand Superannuation (65). In some cases, benefits may be received by individuals outside of working age. Examples of this include:* individuals receiving Youth Payment or Young Parent Payment, or individuals being eligible for a main benefit from a younger age
* people over 65 years receiving a benefit due to residency issues impacting on their eligibility for New Zealand Superannuation.

**Ethnicity** data is self-identified and multiple ethnicities may be chosen by an individual as fits their preference or self-concept. Multiple selected ethnicities are then prioritised into a hierarchy. The Māori ethnicity has the highest priority in this hierarchy, followed by Pacific peoples. New Zealand European has the lowest priority. This is to ensure that smaller ethnic groups do not get overwhelmed by the larger ethnic groups. A single ethnicity is assigned to an individual based on this hierarchy. MSD’s ethnic groups do not currently align with Statistics New Zealand ethnicity groupings.**Continuous duration** is the length of time the client has continuously been receiving any main benefit. A client is considered to have continuously been on a benefit even if there has been a break of up to 14 days (e.g. if they have transferred to another main benefit).**Dependent children** (whether own, stepchild, adopted, grandchild or mokopuna) are primarily under the care and responsibility of the person receiving the benefit, living with that person as a member of their family, and substantially reliant on that person for financial support.  |
| Classifications | *Gender* | Male; Female; Gender Diverse |
| *Ethnic group* | New Zealand European; Māori; Pacific peoples; All other ethnicities; Unspecified |
| *Age group [general]**Age group [NZS/VP Excel file]**Age group**[NZS/VP CSV file]* | 18–24 years; 25–39 years; 40–54 years; 55–64 yearsUnder 60 years; 60–64 years; 65–69 years; 70–74 years; 75–79 years; 80–84 years; 85–89 years; 90 years and overUnder 65 years; 65 years and over |
| *Continuous duration on benefit* | One year or less; More than one year |
| *Benefit sub group [Jobseeker Support, Supported Living Payment]* | Jobseeker Support – Work Ready; Jobseeker Support – Health Condition or Disability; Supported Living Payment – Health Condition or Disability; Supported Living Payment – Carers |
| *Incapacity group Jobseeker Support* | Psychological or psychiatric conditions; Accidents; Musculo-skeletal system disorders; Cardio-vascular disorders; Pregnancy-related conditions; Other disorders and conditions |
| *Incapacity group Supported Living Payment*  | Psychological or psychiatric conditions; Intellectual disability; Musculo-skeletal system disorders; Nervous system disorders; Cardio-vascular disorders; Accidents; Cancer and congenital conditions; Other disorders and conditions |
| *Age of youngest dependent child [Sole Parent Support]* | Under 5 years; ages 5–13 years; age unavailable (CSV file) |
| *Reason for hardship assistance* | Food; Accommodation related; Medical and associated costs; People affected by benefit stand downs; Electricity and gas; School education costs; Re-establishment grants; Driver licence; Health related; Long-acting reversible contraception (national level only); Emergency housing (national level only); Other |
| *Client with dependent children [benefit sanctions]* | Dependent child(ren); no dependent child(ren) |
| *First sanction reason* | Recipients who failed to attend appointment(s); Clients who failed to prepare for work; Clients who failed to participate in work; Other reasons |
| *Sanction type* | Graduated; Suspended/cancelled |
| *Duration of graduated sanction* | Up to 4 weeks; 4 to 8 weeks; Over 8 weeks |
| *Work and Income regions**(12 regions, including Other) as at September 2020* | Auckland; Bay of Plenty; Canterbury; Central; East Coast; Nelson (Nelson, Marlborough, and West Coast); Northland; Southern; Taranaki (Taranaki, King Country, and Whanganui); Waikato; Wellington; Other (i.e. clients managed by national units such as contact centres and other processing centres) |
| *Regional Councils/Unitary Authorities(17 regions, including Other/Unknown) as at September 2020* | Auckland; Bay of Plenty; Canterbury; Gisborne; Hawke's Bay; Manawatū-Whanganui; Marlborough; Nelson; Northland; Otago; Southland; Taranaki; Tasman; Waikato; Wellington; West Coast; Other/Unknown |
| *Auckland boards**(20 boards) as at September 2020* | Albert-Eden; Devonport-Takapuna; Franklin; Great Barrier/Waiheke; Henderson-Massey; Hibiscus and Bays; Howick; Kaipātiki; Māngere-Ōtāhuhu; Manurewa; Maungakiekie-Tāmaki; Ōrākei; Ōtara-Papatoetoe; Papakura; Puketāpapa; Rodney; Upper Harbour; Waitākere Ranges; Waitematā; Whau |
| *Territorial Authorities(68 authorities, including Other/Unknown) as at September 2020* | Ashburton District; Auckland City (until March 2018); Auckland Super City (from March 2018); Buller District; Carterton District; Central Hawke's Bay District; Central Otago District; Christchurch City; Clutha District; Dunedin City; Far North District; Franklin District (until March 2018); Gisborne District; Gore District; Grey District; Hamilton City; Hastings District; Hauraki District; Horowhenua District; Hurunui District; Invercargill City; Kaikōura District; Kaipara District; Kāpiti Coast District; Kawerau District; Lower Hutt City; Mackenzie District; Manawatū District; Manukau City (until March 2018); Marlborough District; Masterton District; Matamata-Piako District; Napier City; Nelson City; New Plymouth District; North Shore City (until March 2018); Ōpōtiki District; Ōtorohanga District; Palmerston North City; Papakura District (until March 2018); Porirua City; Queenstown-Lakes District; Rangitikei District; Rodney District (until March 2018); Rotorua District; Ruapehu District; Selwyn District; South Taranaki District; South Waikato District; South Wairarapa District; Southland District; Stratford District; Tararua District; Tasman District; Taupō District; Tauranga District/Tauranga City; Thames-Coromandel District; Timaru District; Upper Hutt City; Waikato District; Waimakariri District; Waimate District; Waipā District; Wairoa District; Waitakere City (until March 2018); Waitaki District; Waitomo District; Wellington City; Western Bay of Plenty District; Westland District; Whakatāne District; Whanganui District; Whangārei District; Other/Unknown |
| *MSD service centres(121 service centres) as at September 2020* | Auckland (31) | Albany; Avondale; Clendon; Glenfield; Glenmall; Grey Lynn; Helensville; Highland Park; Hunters Corner; Māngere; Manukau; Manurewa; Mt Albert; Mt Eden; New Lynn; Onehunga; Orewa; Ōtāhuhu; Ōtara; Papakura; Papatoetoe; Pukekohe; Queen Street; Takapuna; Tāmaki; Three Kings; Waiheke; Waitākere; Waiuku; Warkworth; Westgate |
| Bay of Plenty (10) | Greerton; Kawerau; Mount Maunganui; Ōpōtiki; Rotorua; Taupō; Tauranga; Te Puke; Tokoroa; Whakatāne |

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|  |  | Canterbury (10) | Ashburton; Canterbury Youth Service; Hornby; Linwood; New Brighton; Papanui; Rangiora; Riccarton; Shirley; Sydenham |
| Central (8) | Dannevirke; Feilding; Foxton; Horowhenua; Kāpiti; Ōtaki; Palmerston North; Wairarapa |
| East Coast (8) | Flaxmere; Gisborne; Hastings; Napier; Ruatōria; Taradale; Waipukurau; Wairoa |
| Nelson (6) | Blenheim; Greymouth; Motueka; Nelson/Nelson Region Processing Unit; Richmond; Westport |
| Northland (7) | Dargaville; Kaikohe; Kaitāia; Kamo; Kawakawa; Kerikeri; Whangārei Central |
| Southern (10) | Alexandra; Balclutha; Dunedin Central; Gore; Invercargill; Mosgiel; Oamaru; Queenstown; South Dunedin; Timaru |
|  |  | Taranaki (9) | Hāwera; Marton; New Plymouth; Stratford; Taihape; Taumarunui; Te Kuiti; Waitara; Whanganui |
| Waikato (14) | Cambridge; Dinsdale; Five Cross Roads; Glenview; Hamilton; Hamilton East; Huntly; Matamata; Morrinsville; Ngāruawāhia; Paeroa; Te Awamutu; Thames; Waihi |
| Wellington (8) | Johnsonville; Lower Hutt; Naenae; Newtown; Porirua; Upper Hutt; Wainuiomata; Wellington Central |
| Presentation of data | The following are reported in the Benefit Fact Sheets:* counts (unrounded, except for dollar amounts which are rounded to the nearest whole dollar)
* dollar amounts in the commentary released alongside the Benefit Fact Sheets may be rounded to the nearest one hundred thousand.
* percentages (rounded to first decimal point)
* annual and quarterly changes (counts and percentages rounded as above).
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| Data limitations | The usual limitations for administrative data apply, including:* the possibility of human error in entering data in the administrative system or when processing data
* the possibility of having missing items, incomplete files or duplicates
* the possibility of under-reporting (not everyone eligible for a benefit or assistance applies for a benefit or assistance)
* circumstances that affect recipient responses (e.g. changes to the ethnicity that they report themselves).
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| Revisions | Any revisions to historic data are noted in the content page of the relevant Excel data file. |
| Contact details for further information | <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/contact-us/index.html>  |