



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

20 FEB 2017

Privacy of another: section 9(2)(a)

Dear Privacy of another: section 9(2)(a)

On 7 December 2016 you emailed the Ministry requesting information, under the Official Information Act 1982, relating to Special Needs Grants for emergency housing and emergency housing providers.

The emergency housing Special Needs Grant (SNG), which was introduced on 1 July 2016, is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place of residence, if any, and will not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for their or their family's needs. Through the use of emergency housing SNGs, the Ministry has assisted thousands of vulnerable families and individuals in these types of situations.

Further information regarding emergency housing SNGs can be found on the Ministry's website: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-housing.html>

For clarity each of your questions have been addressed in turn.

- *How many applied in its first week and has that number gone up or down since?*
- *How many are for applicants in Auckland?*
- *Since the introduction of the special needs grant for emergency housing, how many people have applied for it?*

Although the Ministry records the number of approved emergency housing SNGs, the total number of applications, made up of declines and grants, are not centrally collated. Information regarding declined emergency housing SNG applications is held in case notes on individual files, in order to address your requests Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of individual files. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

When first introduced, emergency housing SNGs were coded in the Ministry's IT system as 'other emergency grants' which included SNGs for various other emergency reasons. The Ministry cannot disaggregate emergency housing SNG payments from other types of assistance granted under that code and any information regarding emergency housing SNG payments for the September quarter

Page 1 of 4

would be held in notes on individual case files. At the time the Ministry's commitment was to ensure that non recoverable emergency housing assistance was made available at the earliest possible time.

In order to provide the number of emergency housing SNG applications made in the first week or any related figures, Ministry staff would have to review thousands of individual case files. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

- *How many have been approved?*
- *How much has it cost?*

The Ministry can provide the below table to address your request for the number of approved emergency housing SNGs, and how much it has cost, interpreted as the total dollar value of emergency housing SNGs paid. As reporting methods were still being developed for this type of grant, the data in the table was collated for reporting purposes as a one-off exercise and is an approximation. The table below shows the number of emergency housing SNGs granted and the dollar value granted between 1 July and 30 September 2016, broken down by Work and Income region.

Recommending Region	Clients	Granted Applications	Granted Amount
Northland	110	300	\$215,000
Auckland Metro	840	2,200	\$1,936,000
Waikato	190	600	\$559,000
Taranaki	20	50	\$26,000
Bay of Plenty	230	700	\$561,000
East Coast	210	580	\$408,000
Central	90	200	\$129,000
Wellington	120	200	\$126,000
Nelson	60	150	\$117,000
Canterbury	100	180	\$97,000
Southern	40	60	\$36,000
Other	130	230	\$134,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,140</b>	<b>5,450</b>	<b>\$4,344,000</b>

**Notes:**

- The data is an approximate and is rounded.
- Multiple applications granted on the same day to the same client, are counted as one application.
- It is possible that a client may not have used their grant.
- Data includes recoverable and non-recoverable payments. These cannot be separated out in this quarter.
- "Other" represents Ministry offices that do not fall into regional categories such as Contact Centres and Centralised Services.
- Clients may have received grants in multiple regions in the quarter. The region their data is displayed in is the recommending region of the last grant in the quarter ending 30 September 2016.

Since the release of the September quarter data, the Ministry has introduced new code dedicated to emergency housing SNGs. The December quarterly figures provide a more detailed breakdown of emergency accommodation assistance granted to clients and can be found on the Ministry's website:

[www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html)

- *What has been the average length of stay in emergency accommodation?*

Emergency housing SNGs can be granted for up to seven days at a time. However, if at the end of the grant period an applicant still has an immediate emergency housing need, they can be assessed for a further payment. Emergency housing SNGs can be made recoverable where it's considered a client has not made reasonable effort to access other sources of housing assistance.

It is not possible to calculate the average length of stay in emergency accommodation as people's emergency housing situation may change along with their circumstances. For example, an applicant may receive consecutive emergency housing SNGs before moving into stable accommodation for a period of time and then requiring further emergency housing assistance at some later point. Without an end date, i.e. the last emergency housing SNG in a sequence for each client, an average amount cannot be determined. As such your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act as the information requested does not exist.

- *How many accommodation providers have been used?*
- *How many campgrounds are among the providers?*

The Ministry contracts with a number of emergency housing providers to provide adequate short-term accommodation. Through the use of these providers the Ministry can provide support to people who cannot remain in their usual place of residence and have no access to other accommodation that is adequate for their needs.

The vast majority of emergency accommodation used by clients are registered with the Ministry as suppliers, this allows the Ministry to make payments to the accommodation on behalf of the client.

In instances when contracted emergency housing places are limited or already at capacity, the Ministry considers other housing options for people who require assistance. In some cases, motels and other short term accommodation may be all that is available.

Where there is a need for a family or an individual to stay at a hotel or motel, Ministry staff manually note the name of the accommodation used, this means the name can be recorded in many different ways i.e. New Zealand Hotels Ltd or NZ Hotels Limited. Additionally, while the Ministry records names of the accommodation used, it does not differentiate accommodation by type.

In order to determine the number of distinct emergency housing accommodation used and the number that are camp grounds, Ministry staff would have to manually

review each accommodation entry and how it has been named in the system, this would amount in the review of thousands of individual files. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information 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.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public after ten working days. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact [OIA\\_Requests@msd.govt.nz](mailto:OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz).

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding Special Needs Grants for emergency housing and emergency housing providers, 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Kay Read

**Associate Deputy Chief Executive, Social Housing**