



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

23 JUL 2020

Dear

On 8 June 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information regarding Emergency Housing.

In regard to your request for the number of motels and caravan parks the Government owns, the Ministry has transferred this part of your request to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This information is not held by the Ministry but is believed to be held by HUD. In these circumstances, the Ministry is required by section 14 of the Act to transfer your request. You will hear further from HUD concerning this part of your request.

As your questions are about motels and caravans, the Ministry has interpreted your request to be about Emergency Housing, as motels and caravans are not used in social housing. Social Housing (or public housing) is provided for people who are most in need of housing for as long as they need it. To be considered for social housing, applicants must have a serious housing need. Emergency Housing is for people who do not have access to adequate accommodation tonight or within the next seven days and require immediate assistance.

The Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) is available to people who cannot remain in their usual place or residence, if any, and do not have access to other accommodation which is adequate for them or their family's needs. The Ministry pays EH SNGs directly to the accommodation supplier, and assistance is generally granted for up to seven nights but can be extended dependant on individual circumstances.

After these seven nights, Work and Income arrange another appointment with the client to discuss their housing situation and if another grant is required. The Ministry works hard to support people in Emergency Housing to secure a long-term housing solution, either through public housing or private rental accommodation. Other options, including transitional housing, can also be explored as an option depending on availability and the individual's circumstances.

The Ministry recognises that motels are not a long-term solution or the solution that we want to deliver for people who are potentially in a vulnerable situation. They provide a short-term solution while more sustainable options are progressed. More information about EH SNGs is available here: www.housing.msd.govt.nz/housing-options/emergency-housing.html.

It is important to note that over 50 percent of people accessing EH SNGs only need between one and three grants before securing more suitable accommodation.

Some people may struggle to access suitable housing due to a lack of available supply or they simply may not be able to meet the high cost of housing which may result in them receiving EH SNG support for an extended period of time.

There are also a distinct group of people that face a range of complex issues that are a barrier, such as mental health and addictions, criminal history, or family violence. There are still others that need to live in a specific area, due to the need to access specialist care or educational needs for them or their family.

For people with high and complex needs, it can sometimes be challenging to identify suitable long-term housing, which can lead to longer stays in Emergency Housing. Work and Income works closely with these people to see what can be done to ensure that once they have a home of their own, they have the skills to sustain it, and the support they need to keep it.

EH SNGs were brought in on 1 July 2016, with the distinct payment category being available from 12 September 2016. Prior to this, payments were made under the "other" category and unable to be reported on without collation. Following the introduction of the EH SNG, it took some time for the new EH SNG payment category to be fully utilised, as such, the December 2016 quarter would contain a mix of EH SNG and "other" payment reasons. Therefore, although you have asked for data dating back to 2015, the Ministry has provided you with data from January 2017 to ensure the most accurate picture possible. As such, I refuse your request for information before this date 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.

Your questions will be answered in turn below.

- *How many motels and caravan parks are currently being used for social housing. Please separate motels from caravan parks in the figures.*
- *How does this number compare per year, back to 2015 (inclusive)?*
- *Please provide a breakdown of motels and caravan parks by region being used for social housing.*
- *Please compare this to previous years back to 2015.*
- *A yearly breakdown back to 2015 of what it costs to house clients in social housing at motels and caravan parks.*

Please find attached, **Table One**, an Excel spreadsheet showing the number of clients, number of grants, distinct supplier count and amount granted for EH SNGs, broken down by region and type of accommodation, for the period between 1 January 2017 and 31 March 2020.

Please note that the type of accommodation recorded may not capture all particular types of accommodation provided by a business. For example, a business may be recorded by staff as a hotel, but also provide camp ground facilities.

- *Please specify how many people are in each motel and caravan park within each region.*
- *Please compare this to previous years back to 2015.*

I am unable to provide you with this information as it is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request 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 motels and caravan parks does the Government own?*
- *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015?*

The Ministry has transferred this part of your request to HUD. The information which is referred to in this part of your request is not held by the Ministry but is believed to be held by HUD. In these circumstances, the Ministry is required by section 14 of the Act to transfer your request. You will hear further from HUD concerning this part of your request.

- *What was the average stay in a motel for clients this year.*
- *Please provide an average stay for previous years back to 2015.*

The following table, **Table Two**, shows the annual number of distinct Emergency Housing clients and the average amount of weeks a client stays in Emergency Housing, for all accommodation types for the period between 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2020.

The Ministry is unable to accurately present data broken down to accommodation type, as clients may move around different types of accommodation during their time in Emergency Housing, and only one type of accommodation is recorded on the data for each spell. In order to provide you with any further breakdown accurately, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files to see if references are made to clients changing accommodation type. As such, I refuse your request for this information 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.

Table Two: Number of distinct clients and average consecutive weeks a client stays in Emergency Housing for all accommodation types for the period between 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2020.

Calendar year	Distinct clients	Average consecutive weeks
2017	8,311	3.88
2018	9,828	3.95
2019	14,519	6.11
1 January 2020 – 31 March 2020	6,341	7.71

Notes:

- Calendar year periods are from 1 January to 31 December.
 - For 2020, only the first quarter of the year is provided from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2020.
 - A client's total stay may cross one calendar year. The length of stay at the time of their last grant in each calendar year is what is used to calculate the average stay.
 - This data should be treated with caution. The average consecutive weeks will change as data from additional months is included, as some of these clients will still currently be receiving EH SNGs.
 - Consecutive weeks is a calculation that tries to estimate how long a client has been in Emergency Housing for a continuous period. It looks at the number of weeks a client has had a grant in, where there is no more than four weeks between grants.
 - If a client has two grants in one week, it still only counts this as one week. It assumes that most grants are granted for seven nights.
 - If there is more than four weeks between grants, this is considered the end of a spell in Emergency Housing.
 - If the client comes back into Emergency Housing after four weeks, their consecutive weeks count is reset to 0, and a new spell is started.
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- *How many gang members are registered as using motels or caravan parks as social housing?*
 - *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015?*
 - *How many people with gang affiliations are registered as using motels or caravan parks as social housing?*
 - *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015?*
 - *What is the average stay for a gang member in social housing motels and caravan parks?*
 - *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015?*
 - *How many complaints have been received by the Social Development Ministry from clients about gang activity at these motels and caravan parks?*
 - *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015?*
 - *How many complaints have been received by the Social Development Ministry from clients about anti social activity at these motels and caravan parks? To specify, things like violence, drug use, inappropriate sexual advances, excessive noise etc.*
 - *How does this compare to previous years back to 2015.*

I am refusing your request for this information under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as the information you have requested regarding gang members, gang activities and anti-social behaviour is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is held by another department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

I am unable to provide you with information about complaints from clients about anti-social activity at the motels and caravan parks as the information is held in notes on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such, I refuse your request 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.

- *What is the Social Development Ministry's policy and vetting process for social housing clients at motels and caravan parks?*

The Ministry does not follow a vetting process for Emergency Housing clients. However, the Ministry does refer to an eligibility criteria to test whether a client or their partner is able to receive an EH SNG.

In order to receive an EH SNG, the client must:

- Meet an income and cash asset test (unless there are exceptional circumstances)
- Meet residency and ordinarily resident requirements
- Not be able to meet the need through their own resources and other sources
- Not have received an EH SNG within 52 weeks (unless there are exceptional circumstances)
- Require payment for actual and reasonable costs of the Emergency Housing where not making the grant would:
 - Worsen the client's position
 - Increase or create any risk to the life or welfare of the client or the client's immediate family or
 - Cause serious hardship to the client, the client's partner or dependent children and
 - Have an immediate Emergency Housing need.

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. 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.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants, 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Hocking', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Karen Hocking
General Manager, Housing