



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

29 JUL 2020

Dear [REDACTED]

On 2 July 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *What is the average time a person spends on a benefit/payment/allowance excluding the New Zealand Superannuation?*
- *Please break this down by benefit/allowance/payment type.*

The Ministry provides a range of benefits and payments for different purposes and needs. A complete list of the Ministry's benefit and financial assistance system is available at: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/index.html.

Not all payments are granted for a period of time. Numerous types of assistance are made as once-off payments and need to be requested anew if further assistance is required. The average time a person is in receipt of a once-off payment such as this can therefore not be provided.

In addition, please note that average values based on current recipients are misleading because the majority of people in receipt of a benefit at any time are only part way through their time receiving the benefit. Any average underestimates the actual length of time that on average they will stay in receipt of the benefit. Calculation of average time in receipt of a benefit can only be reliably based on research data that spans completed histories of benefit receipt.

For this reason, the Ministry does not generate information to calculate average duration for current recipients of a benefit. To provide you with this information, the Ministry would have to generate new reports, based on raw data. The Act does not require the Ministry to generate new information to answer requests made under the Act.

Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act. This section requires the Ministry to consider whether the information you have requested is held by another department or Minister of the Crown. I have no grounds to believe that this is the case.

However, the Ministry can provide you with the duration which current working age clients have been in receipt of a main benefit for, broken down by benefit type, as at the end of June 2020. Please find the data enclosed to this letter.

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Note, a significant number of people are in long-term receipt of Supported Living Payment. This is because this payment supports people who have, or are caring for someone with, a permanent and severe health condition, injury or disability. Some health conditions, injuries or disabilities remain permanently, which is why people would still receive this payment after an extended period of time.

Similarly, you will note around seven percent of Jobseeker Support recipients have received the benefit for more than 10 years. While this number is significant, it is still within reason as it includes *Jobseeker – Health Condition or Disability* recipients. These clients may not be currently working or may be working at a reduced level because of a health condition, injury or a disability.

Please note, the Ministry cannot provide you with data regarding 'all' benefits/payments. The enclosed table provides data regarding main benefits for working age clients. A breakdown for further benefits/payments would require the Ministry to develop new reporting, which is not a requirement under the Act. Therefore, some benefits and payments are not included in the table.

Furthermore, Supplementary Assistance is often paid in addition to and alongside main benefits. Therefore, this type of assistance is not measured separately and is not included in the enclosed table.

In addition, please note that the Ministry's external reporting standards only cover working age clients.

In order to protect client privacy, some values in the enclosed table are suppressed and are represented by 'S'. The Ministry is unable to provide you with the exact number as releasing this information is likely to risk identifying the individuals concerned. As such, this information is withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in the information.

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
- 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 the enclosed table available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments 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 the duration of current working age clients in receipt of a main benefit, 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 black ink, appearing to be 'Bridget Saunders', with a large, stylized 'B' and a long horizontal stroke.

Bridget Saunders
**Manager, Issue Resolution
Service Delivery**