



7 September 2023

Tēnā koe

On 11 August 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The total amount MSD has paid to designated doctors for second opinions each financial year since 2018/2019.*

The Ministry has established a panel of independent health practitioners to provide second opinions using designated doctors. The provision of a second opinion assists the Ministry to determine or clarify a person's capacity for work and subsequent entitlement to financial assistance. It also assists us with helping people move towards employment.

Second opinions are used when the medical information provided is inadequate, unclear or does not appear to align with other information the Ministry has available preventing an informed assessment from being made. The designated doctor is expected to provide an unbiased, medically-based opinion to the Ministry.

The Ministry meets the appointment costs for a second opinion, with the practitioners invoicing the Ministry directly.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, health resources were stretched and as a result, the Ministry reduced the reliance on medical certificates during this time. Subsequently, the requirement to send clients to designated doctors was reduced significantly and this can be seen in the drop in use of designated doctors as shown below.

As New Zealand has moved into a post-COVID environment, greater efforts have been made by the Ministry to ensure appropriate, sufficient information is provided by the clients' regular GP, to prevent clients from having to

undertake additional health appointments unless necessary and avoiding the additional stress of another assessment process.

The Ministry has also implemented further training for front-line staff including how best to assist in determining client's entitlement and improvements in analysing existing medical information provided at application. As the quality of information being provided and staff ability to determine the work capacity of clients has improved, this has resulted in a continued reduction in the number of appointments being made with designated doctors for second opinions.

Further information regarding designated doctors is available on the Work and Income website: www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/health-and-disability-practitioners/designated-doctors.html.

Since the 2018/2019 financial year, the Ministry has paid the following costs to designated doctors for second opinions:

Financial Year	Cost (GST exclusive)
2018/2019	\$240,875.00
2019/2020	\$181,723.00
2020/2021	\$69,289.00
2021/2022	\$66,859.00
2022/2023	\$50,914.00

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'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 designated doctors, 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

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