



19 August 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 1 July 2025, requesting information about dental hardship applications made by clients enrolled at the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Please find my decision on each part of your request set out below.

- 1. The number of Advance Payments of Benefit (ADV) (recoverable) for essential dental treatment, totalling \$1000 or above which the Ministry approved for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
- 2. The total amount paid (\$) for Advance Payments of Benefit (ADV) (recoverable) for essential dental treatment, totalling \$1000 or above which the Ministry approved for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
- 3. The number of Special Needs Grants (SNG) (non-recoverable) for essential dental treatment, totalling \$1000 or above which the Ministry approved for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
- 4. The total amount paid (\$) for Special Needs Grants (SNG) (non-recoverable) for essential dental treatment, totalling \$1000 or above which the Ministry approved for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*

5. *The number of Special Needs Grants (SNGs) (non-recoverable) for essential dental treatment that were declined for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
6. *The number of Advance Payments of Benefit (ADVs) (recoverable) for essential dental treatment that were declined for clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
7. *A list of the dental practices that provided the essential dental treatment approved for the clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*
8. *A list of the dental practices that provided the essential dental treatment approved for the clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre between 1 July 2024 and 31 June 2025*

Your request for the above information is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to collate this information.

The Ministry does not centrally record information about the number of dental hardship applications approved, and the amount approved, based on the Service Centre the client is enrolled at. This information is only contained in individual client files.

To provide a response to your request, Ministry staff would need to manually review the individual file of every client enrolled at the Flaxmere Service Centre over a 12-month period. This would likely take hundreds of hours. 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 Ministry, however, does centrally record the name of the Service Centre that processes dental treatment hardship assistance applications. I have provided data on this for the Flaxmere Service Centre, for the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, for you in **Appendix One**. This data represents the number of dental hardship applications (and the amounts granted) by staff based at Flaxmere Service Centre.

9. *What are the criteria informing case workers to decline grants?*

Hardship assistance for dental treatment may be provided by way of a Special Needs Grant, an Advance Payment of Benefit (for people who receive a benefit) or a Recoverable Assistance Payment (for people who are not on a benefit).

Eligibility criteria for each type of payment and criteria Ministry staff apply when assessing these applications are available publicly on the Ministry of Social

Development's (the Ministry's) Manuals and Procedures (MAP) website, at the following links. More detailed information is also available if you click on the links on the following pages.

- a. Special Needs Grants (non-recoverable)
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/essential-dental-treatment.html>
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/qualifications.html>
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/legislation/welfare-programmes/special-needs-grants-programme/clause-11-9-dental-treatment.html>
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/essential-dental-treatment-costs-covered.html>
- b. Advance Payment of Benefit (recoverable)
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/index.html>
- c. Recoverable Assistance Payment (recoverable)
 - <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/recoverable-assistance-payment/index.html>

A client will not be declined a non-recoverable Special Needs Grant for dental assistance as long as they meet the eligibility qualifications, including that their request meets an 'essential and immediate' need and they have not already been granted \$1000 worth of this assistance within the past 52 weeks.

If a client has an essential and immediate need for dental treatment and has already been granted \$1000 worth of assistance in the past 12 months, any further assistance granted would be on a recoverable basis. In this case, the following factors are taken into account when deciding whether or not to decline their application:

- A client must have met any hardship obligations applied to them before being granted any further hardship assistance. An example could be that they have not sought budgeting advice.

You can find more information on this here:

- <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/hardship-obligations.html>
- <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/failure-to-meet-hardship-obligations-01.html>
- <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/recoverable-assistance-payment/hardship-obligations.html>

- <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/recoverable-assistance-payment/failure-to-meet-hardship-obligations-01.html>
- The client's current debt level with the Ministry
- Whether there are any other options available for obtaining the assistance eg is assistance available through Te Whatu Ora etc
 - See: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/advance-payment-of-benefit/other-sources-of-assistance-01.html.
- The types of treatment mentioned at the following link are not considered to be 'essential' dental treatment for the purposes of the Special Needs Grant: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/dental-treatment-costs-not-covered.html.

10. Can MSD clarify whether clients tagged to the Flaxmere Service Centre formally need to present two separate dental quotes from two separate dental practices to have a grant accepted as been reported by whānau.

There is no requirement in legislation or the Ministry's Manuals and Procedures (MAP) guidelines for any client to provide two quotes when requesting dental hardship assistance.

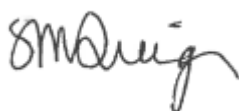
However, in order to be able to assess a hardship application, a staff member can request further evidence to indicate that a client meets the eligibility criteria (for example, evidence from a dentist that the dental work is considered 'essential') or if the cost is not considered to be reasonable.

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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 my decision on your request, 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

pp. 

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services