



14 April 2026

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email 7 November 2025, requesting information on Special Needs Grants for dental assistance.

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 separately below.

Question 1. Budgeting and Expenditure

- *Annual total expenditure on the Dental Special Needs Grant from 2021–2022 to the most recent financial year available.*
- *The number of recipients per year during the same period.*
- *The average grant amount per recipient.*

Question 2. Use of Advanced Benefit Payments

- *Annual data on the number and total value of advance benefit payments used for dental treatment from 2021–2022 onward.*

Please refer to **Appendix One** which provides the number of clients, grants, amount granted, and average amount granted per client for Dental Special Needs Grant and Advance Payment of Benefit 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2025.

- *Any analysis or commentary on whether the 2022 increase in the Dental Special Needs Grant affected demand for advance payments.*

In order to respond to this part of your request the Ministry would need to create new information. Therefore, we are refusing this part of your request under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you had requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

Question 3. Patterns of Dental Treatment

- *Any internal reports, summaries, or analyses (since 2022) on how the grant has been used by recipients — including common treatment types, average treatment costs, and comparisons with pre-2022 usage patterns.*

- *Any data or evaluations on whether there has been an increase in consultation, examination, or assessment fees charged as part of grant-funded dental visits.*

Question 4. Monitoring or Evaluation

- *Any internal reviews, audits, or correspondence assessing the impact of the Dental Special Needs Grant increase (for example, on access to dental care, cost inflation, or service utilisation).*

These parts of your request are refused under section 18(g) of the Act as the information you had requested is not held by the Ministry and I have no grounds to believe that the information is either held by or closely connected to the functions of another department, Minister of the Crown or organisation.

- *Any communications between Health NZ, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Development about the design, funding, or evaluation of the grant since 2022.*

We have interpreted this part of your request as commencing from 1 December 2022, when the changes to the Dental Special Needs Grant were implemented.

Some preliminary searches were conducted by the Ministry alongside consultation with Ministry of Health (MoH). As a result, it appears that there will be more information in scope, but that a significant amount of searching and collating will need to occur in order to find and collate all of that information. We therefore cannot fully respond to this part of the request as it stands, and we are refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the 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.

However, we are providing you with a summary of some of the email communications that have been located pursuant to section 16(1)(e) of the Act.

This summary is provided as follows:

MoH and the Ministry communicated around the design, funding, and evaluation of the Dental Special Needs Grants (SNGs) changes since they were implemented in 2022.

Specifically, MoH queried with the Ministry the possibility of extending coverage of Dental SNGs to allow them to be used to fund treatment by non-dentist oral health practitioners. The Ministry has indicated there is no work at this present time to explore this.

MoH raised with the Ministry about whether not allowing for care by non-dentist oral health practitioners (such as oral health therapists) would limit potential accessibility to Dental SNGs for Ministry clients.

MoH and the Ministry discussed the effective communication of the changes to Dental SNGs in 2022 out to dental providers, stakeholders, Ministry staff, and clients, including what treatment the grants can cover and who can provide that treatment.

The Ministry clarified with a Dental Public Health Specialist at MoH whether the placement of a cover over the whole tooth with a composite filling after doing a root canal filling can be covered by a Dental SNG. It was determined that this could be funded by a Dental SNG as it is defined as a tooth restoration/filling.

MoH asked whether there was any available post-implementation reporting, monitoring or analysis done by the Ministry on the impact of the changes to Dental SNGs.

The Ministry confirmed that they received positive feedback on the change and shared some data which demonstrated a positive impact for clients. However, the Ministry was not able to provide the level of data analysis MoH was seeking, in part due to technical limitations.

MoH sought to clarify with the Ministry whether clients receiving a Dental SNG would be entitled to help with prescription charges, either as covered by the Dental SNG or by Disability Allowance. The Ministry directed them to the following public guidance available on the Work and Income Map website:

- Qualifications: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/qualifications.html
- Pharmaceutical charges: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/pharmaceutical-charges-01.html

Taking into account the summary that we have provided, if there are any further specific types of communications that you are interested in where the Ministry has engaged with Health NZ and the Ministry of Health about the design, funding, or evaluation of the Dental Special Needs Grant, please get in touch with us and we will consider your request.

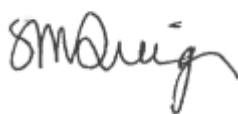
I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course.

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**