



10 June 2026

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 16 April 2026, requesting information about advice to the Minister for Social Development and Employment, or within the Ministry, regarding the Supported regarding the Living Payment (SLP) Totally Blind category between 1 December 2023 to the date that your request was received by the Ministry.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on your request set out below.

The Ministry has not prepared any official advice about the SLP for totally blind people category between 1 December 2023 and 16 April 2026, therefore this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information does not exist.

However, I am able to provide general information about welfare support for totally blind persons.

The welfare system has provided financial assistance to people who are totally blind for many years. Blind Pensions and Blind Subsidy were introduced in 1924. The Blind Pension was only available to those who were completely and permanently incapacitated by blindness. The Invalids Benefit replaced the Blind Pension that had been available since 1924. The benefit was provided to those who met a means test and a medical test (permanent incapacity for work or total blindness). The Invalids Benefit was later replaced by the Supported Living Payment and the provision for the totally blind was retained.

Historical records indicate policies for the blind were developed to provide incentives for blind people to undertake employment as supports available for the blind were basic, severely restricting employment opportunities.

Provisions in the Social Security Act 2018 (the SSA) for those who are totally blind differ from people with other forms of disability or health condition. The provisions include:

- Automatic eligibility to benefit – A totally blind person can be granted SLP without establishing that they are permanently and severely limited in their capacity to work. All other people can only access SLP if they have proven this limited capacity to work.

- No 'hours of work' test – SLP recipients are generally restricted from working 15 hours per week or more in open employment. However, those who receive SLP under the category of totally blind do not have this restriction. There will be some SLP recipients who are totally blind and working full time.
- Additional income exception – SLP clients can have \$20 of personal income exempt, from the income test, with a further discretionary exemption for clients with "severe disablement". Totally blind clients have all personal income exempt, so they can still receive a full rate of benefit despite receiving high wages or salary.
- *Blind subsidy* – An additional allowance of 25 percent of their average earnings can be paid to a totally blind person who is receiving SLP (though there is a limit on the total income that can attract this allowance). There are no provisions similar to the blind subsidy for other severely disabled clients. However, some SLP recipients may qualify for the severe disablement exemption where some or all of their personal earnings may be disregarded.

Under the SSA, the Ministry may require clients to undergo an assessment to qualify for SLP for total blindness. Operational guidance states that the assessment must identify that the client meets one or both of the following criteria:

- the best visual acuity (sharpness), with correcting lenses, does not exceed 3/60 or 1/20 and/or
- state that the visual field is contracted to a maximum of five degrees on either side of the fixation point.

Information about SLP for those that are totally blind is publicly available on the Work and Income website, we are providing the relevant links to this information here:

- Medical qualifications: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/supported-living-payment/medical-qualifications-01.html
- Simplified Access to Supported Living Payment: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/supported-living-payment/simplified-access-to-supported-living-payment-01.html
- Deciding entitlement for blind clients: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/supported-living-payment/deciding-entitlement-for-blind-clients-01.html
- Blind clients subsidy: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/supported-living-payment/blind-clients-subsidy-01.html

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