



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

1 May 2026

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act Request

Thank you for your email of 19 March 2026 to the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry), requesting information about Ministry policies. You have sent 100 questions to the Ministry. This response relates to Questions 51, 65, 68, 70, 77, 79, 84, 94 and 96. Your remaining questions will be addressed by Chief Executive Correspondence and under the Privacy Act 2020.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my response below.

51. What is MSD's policy on accepting third-party verification?

Clients regularly have to provide external verification to support applications for assistance. Section 298 of the Social Security Act 2018 provides the Ministry the right to inquire into the circumstances of a person applying for support.

Special Need Grants (SNG) are provided for by Welfare Programmes and Ministerial Directions, underpinned by the legislation set out in the Social Security Act 2018. The Social Security Act can be found at the following link: www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2018/0032/latest/whole.html.

Information regarding the SNG Programme can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/legislation/welfare-programmes/special-needs-grants-programme/index.html.

Those wishing to receive hardship assistance for SNGs must meet certain requirements. A client that does not meet the full list of requirements will not be eligible for SNGs such as food assistance. You can find the full list of requirements to qualify for SNGs at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/qualifications.html.

Under Clause 11.2 of the SNG Programme, eligibility to a Food grant requires that the client has no other resources to meet the need. It also requires that the need, or the lack of resources to meet it, was caused by an essential expense that had to be met and which left insufficient money to buy food. In order to satisfy these criteria, the Ministry may require additional verification from the client, including bank account statements, whether or not they are already in receipt of income-tested assistance.

65. Does MSD policy allow security to replace case management intervention?

Every Service Centre has tautiaki (security guards) working on site. Tautiaki help to control access to the Service Centre and observe, monitor and report to help keep staff, clients and visitors safe. Managers are able to book additional tautiaki when they have assessed there is an increased risk. For tautiaki working in a Service Centre their day-to-day duties are detailed in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). You can find out more information about this here: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2024/august/30082024-standard-security-operating-procedures.pdf.

Allied Security also provide after-hours patrols and alarm responses and can be used to serve trespass notices or for ad-hoc services such as offsite or after hours work activities.

In supporting our clients and staff, the Ministry must also take into consideration our obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 and the New Zealand Government Protective Security Requirements, which are mandatory on Government agencies. These considerations, taken together, are why we use our current guard-based model.

68. What training do staff receive in conflict resolution?

The Ministry provides a range of training and guidance to support staff to manage challenging and conflict situations appropriately and safely. This includes:

- a four-hour facilitated “De-escalation in Action” programme, focused on recognising escalating behaviour, de-escalation techniques, and safe, respectful responses
- training related to mental health awareness, empathy and respectful communication, family violence awareness, and suicide prevention, and ‘unconscious bias’ to help staff respond appropriately to complex and sensitive situations
- clear practice guidance and tools available through MSD’s intranet, including Security at MSD guidelines and direction, which set expectations for managing safety risks and challenging behaviour

Managers reinforce this training through coaching, advice, and oversight of day-to-day practice. Where concerns arise about how conflict has been managed, managers review the situation and provide coaching, refresher training, or additional support to ensure staff capability and appropriate service delivery.

77. Are staff audited for compliance with MSD policies?

Ministry staff are required to follow clear policies, procedures, and practice guidelines, supported by training and ongoing guidance. Managers are responsible for overseeing day-to-day practice, setting expectations, and monitoring how policies are applied. Where concerns are identified, through feedback, review, or a complaint, managers take action such as coaching, retraining, or closer support. More serious or ongoing issues are escalated through formal processes to ensure service standards are met.

79. What safeguards exist against staff bias or assumption?

The Ministry expects staff to make decisions based on policy, evidence, and individual circumstances, not personal assumptions or bias. Practice guidelines, training, and tools support consistent and fair decision-making. Managers play a key role by reinforcing expectations, reviewing decisions where needed, and supporting staff to reflect on their practice. When concerns are raised, managers address them through coaching, additional training, or closer guidance, and take further action if required to ensure appropriate service delivery.

84. What monitoring exists for unequal service outcomes?

Clients who disagree with any decision regarding their benefit can make a complaint through the Review of Decision process. Information about this can be found here: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/feedback-and-complaints/review-of-decisions.html>

Clients who wants to raise any other concerns, can make a complaint through the Ministry website at: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint.html>

94. How frequently are complaints of this nature received?

I have interpreted this part of your request to mean the number of complaints received by the Otahuhu Service Centre. In the period 1 May 2025 to 30 April 2026 the Ministry received 128 complaints of various types.

The Ministry would need to manually review each to determine whether the complaints are related to front of house or about processes. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. 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.

96. Are frontline procedures regularly audited?

Yes, frontline services are regularly audited. The Ministry's National Quality Team provides independent checks of actions processed in our service centres, contact centres and centralised services offices providing assurance that we are delivering an accurate and timely service to our clients.

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 this response, 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.

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