



11 JUL 2018

Ms Julie Howard  
[juliehowardnz@gmail.com](mailto:juliehowardnz@gmail.com)

Dear Ms Howard,

On 15 May 2018, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information regarding Emergency Benefits, Special Needs Grants and other assistance grants.

In her letter to you of 7 June 2018, Ms Sue Rissman wrote to you regarding your request for information. As noted in that letter, the Ministry is unable to provide you some of the information you have requested in the form you have requested it in due to reporting parameters. As such, I have endeavoured to provide information that best responds to your questions in the attached four tables. This data supplements the data publically available on the benefit factsheets at [www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html](http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/index.html).

As you are aware, the Emergency Benefit is an income and asset tested benefit payable to people who are in hardship and who:

- are unable to earn enough income for themselves (and any dependent family), and
- cannot receive another benefit.

Further information on the Emergency Benefit may be found on the Ministry's Manuals and Procedures page, available at [www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/emergency-benefit/](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/emergency-benefit/).

The Ministry also provides a range of supplementary assistance, such as the Accommodation Supplement and Temporary Additional Support. More information regarding the supports offered by the Ministry is available at [www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/index.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/index.html).

In addition, the Ministry may be able to assist people with urgent requirements through the Recoverable Assistance Payment Grant. Further information regarding recoverable assistance is available at [www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/recoverable-assistance-payment-grant.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/recoverable-assistance-payment-grant.html).

For clarity, your questions are responded to in turn.

- *Total number of non-recoverable Emergency Benefits (EB) paid out in last 14 days in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Rotorua, South Auckland, total amount paid out in each city,*

As you will be aware, individuals' circumstances change and, as such, their entitlements can change from day-to-day. The value of the amount spent for each type of benefit on a fortnightly basis is not generated by the Ministry for the management of the welfare system.

The Ministry does, however, regularly report financial data on a point-in-time basis. From this reporting, the Ministry is able to provide the number of Emergency Benefit recipients, and the net weekly amount paid, as at the end of the March quarter.

Table 1 shows the number of Emergency Benefits granted and the amount paid in each Work and Income region in the final week of March 2018.

- *Total amount of EB in NZ declined for 2018, 2017, 2016*

Table 2 shows the total number of declined Emergency Benefit applications for the 2016 and 2017 calendar years, and the first quarter of 2018. Please note that these figures are totals rather than point in time data and as such cannot be compared to table 1 or the data available on the benefit factsheets. This data includes declined applications for people who may subsequently have been granted a benefit and is a count of applications, not individuals, as an individual may be counted more than once if they have had more than one application declined in the reporting period.

- *Total number of Special Needs Grants approved and declined in NZ for 2018, financial year 31 March 2017, 31 March 2016.*

Special Needs Grants are available to assist clients in certain circumstances in paying for a specific need. Further information regarding Special Needs Grants is available at [www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html](http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/special-needs-grant.html). Table 3 shows the total number of Special Needs Grants granted and declined, and the amounts granted, in the 2016 and 2017 calendar years, and in the first quarter of 2018. Please note, this data is presented in calendar years rather than financial years so as to be easily comparable to the benefit fact sheets.

- *Total amount of debt, and total number of people owing debt to WINZ for 2018, 2017, 2016.*

Table 4 shows the total amount of debt owed to the Ministry, and the number of people who owe debt to the Ministry, as at the end of the financial year for 2016 and 2017, and as at the end of the first quarter of 2018. Please note that this includes debt incurred by both current and former clients of the Ministry for a range of reasons, and providers, such as Childcare Centres.

- *break-down of formula and calculation for each EB paid out, in each of these cities.*
- *Total amount of Advanced Benefit @ 6 x benefit rate paid out in NZ for YTD 2018, financial year 31 March 2017, 31 March 2016.*
- *Total number of other assistance grants paid out at entitlement of \$500 per family member assistance for YTD 2018, at 31 March 2017, 31 March 2016.*
- *Total number of other assistance grants paid out at entitlement of \$500 per family member assistance at 31 March 2017, 31 March 2016.*

The Ministry does not generate this information for its own purposes. I am unable to provide you with this information as it is held in notes on individual case files, and as such cannot be electronically collated. In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act, as this would require substantial manual collation. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

- *Total amount of EB in NZ paid out in last 14 days*
- *Total amount of EB in NZ paid out in last 14 days 2017*

As per the answer to your first question, the Ministry does not report this data on a fortnightly basis. In order to carry out this collation, new code would need to be written, and then run separately for each of the 28 days included in these questions. In order to carry out this work, the Ministry would need to divert personnel from their core duties and allocate extra time to complete this task. The diversion of these resources would impair the Ministry's ability to continue standard operations and would be an inefficient use of the Ministry's resources. As such, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act, requires substantial collation.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request more fully 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 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 shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attachments on the Ministry of Social Development'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](mailto: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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Cassandra Wise  
**Team Manager, Issue Resolution, National Office**

**Table 1: The number and weekly net amount paid to working-age Emergency Benefit clients as at March end 2018.**

<b>Work and Income Region</b>	<b>Number of Clients</b>	<b>Net Weekly amount</b>
Wellington	77	\$16,220
Nelson	19	\$4,071
East Coast	22	\$5,735
Waikato	83	\$14,498
Southern	37	\$7,916
Taranaki	22	\$4,713
Northland	42	\$9,609
Bay of Plenty	128	\$26,910
Central	55	\$11,857
Auckland Metro	301	\$61,905
Canterbury	76	\$14,027
Other	45	\$11,091
<b>Total</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>\$188,553</b>

**Notes:**

- The table includes working age only (18 to 64 years)
- Net amount paid is the dollar value of benefit paid to client after tax.
- If a payment rate is not available due to a future commencement date, their payment rate is '0'.

**Table 2: Number of Emergency Benefit applications declined for working-age clients broken down by calendar year for 2016 and 2017, and for the quarter ending 31 March 2018.**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Applications Declined</b>
2016	1,215
2017	1,605
to March end 2018	268

**Notes:**

- The table includes working age only (18 to 64 years) at the time of decline.
- This is a count of applications declined, not clients. One client may have multiple declined applications.

**Table 3: Number of Special Needs Grants approved and declined and total amount granted by calendar year for 2016 and 2017, and for the quarter ending 31 March 2018.**

Year	Applications declined	Applications approved	SNG Amount granted
2016	43,580	547,166	\$86,631,495
2017	48,265	681,188	\$123,284,325
to March end 2018	12,778	186,119	\$28,972,490

**Notes:**

- This is a count of grants and declines. A client may have more than one grant and/or decline in the period.
- This table includes all clients across all age groups.
- SNG Amount granted is the approved amount of assistance available to a client. This may not be the same as the amount spent.
- SNG Applications declined do not have a financial amount recorded.
- Figures are for calendar year except where noted.
- SNG is Special Needs Grant.

**Table 4: Total debt owed to the Ministry and number of people owing debt at point of time from 2016 to 2018**

Date	Total debt owed	Number of people who owe debt to the Ministry
June 2016	\$1.343b	469,265
June 2017	\$1.429b	488,754
March 2018	\$1.505b	509,571

**Note:**

- This data includes current and former Ministry clients and providers. The information provided in this table is reported from the Ministry's Legacy Audit Trail system. This is a financial management system that provides a high level financial picture of debt transactions and collection activities in our operational systems.