



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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25 FEB 2014

Mr Lance-Desmond Lavery
fyi-request-1269-6b405d78@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Lavery

Thank you for your email of 2 November 2013 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information regarding Child, Youth and Family notifications.

I will address each of your questions in turn.

Does CYF encourage the Ministry of Health to make notifications concerning suspicions of child abuse to them?

The Ministry of Social Development works hard with communities, partner agencies and Non-Government Organisations to create community environments where abuse and neglect of children and young people is not tolerated. Child, Youth and Family always works with the best interests of the child or young person in mind and is guided by the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989.

As you may be aware, as part of the Children's Action Plan the Ministry is currently developing tools to enhance information sharing between public sector agencies such as the Ministry of Social Development, Housing New Zealand, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Police.

Furthermore, the White Paper for Vulnerable Children recommends the introduction of compulsory child abuse policies for agencies working with children. The White Paper aims to change the law so all agencies working with children must have policies covering how to recognise and report suspected child abuse and neglect. This will be supported by a code of practice that makes it clear that everyone working with children has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect.

Child, Youth and Family have had a social worker based full-time at Auckland's Starship Hospital through the Auckland District Health Board for over 10 years. In December 2009, Child, Youth and Family social workers were introduced into six key hospitals around the country. This was expanded to include all District Health Boards in December 2010.

These social workers are available to support hospital staff in responding to children and young people who have been or are at risk of abuse. They provide a valuable link between the hospital and Child, Youth and Family sites to ensure a close working relationship between the two agencies. The social workers are senior practice leaders, recognising the importance of this collaborative role. Along with providing advice on individual cases, the practice leaders will provide training to hospital and Child, Youth

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and Family staff on each other's roles and provide education and support. Further information supporting health professional's decision making to help keep children and young people safe can be found on Child, Youth and Family's website:

<http://www.cyf.govt.nz/working-with-others/working-together-to-keep-children-and-young-people-safe.html>

The table below shows the number of notifications made by health professionals' that required further action.

Financial Year	Notifier Type	Number of Notifications requiring further action
2012	Doctor - General Practitioner	340
	Doctor- Specialist Private Practise	73
	Health (public health nurse, hospital)	7,127
	Plunket	566
	Total	8,106
2013	Doctor - General Practitioner	481
	Doctor- Specialist Private Practise	29
	Health (Public health nurse, hospital)	7,545
	Plunket	593
	Total	8,648

Are Ministry of Health agents held responsible for unfounded notifications?

It is expected that health professionals will act ethically at all times and keep in mind what is best for their patients. Many Health practitioners have a code of conduct that sets standards, and a professional body that oversees their behaviour such as the Medical Council of New Zealand on behalf of doctors, the Nursing Council of New Zealand and the Social Workers Registration Board.

The legislation in relation to notifications of suspected abuse or neglect is designed to encourage people or agencies to report suspected abuse when they have a genuine belief that a child or young person is at risk of harm. Therefore a notifier cannot be pursued in civil or criminal proceedings unless the information was disclosed or supplied in bad faith.

Section 16 of the Young Persons, and Their Families Act states: "that no civil, criminal, or disciplinary proceedings shall lie against any person in respect of the disclosure or supply, or the manner of the disclosure or supply, by that person pursuant to section 15 of information concerning a child or young person (whether or not that information also concerns any other person), unless the information was disclosed or supplied in bad faith."

How many notifications to CYF by the Ministry of Health have been found groundless and untrue?

Notifications form one part of an overall assessment into concerns held about a child or young person and their family. As part of this overall assessment Child, Youth and Family reviews all of the facts held about a child or young person and their family, not just notifications. Once Child, Youth and Family have completed its assessment it will determine whether the child or young person and their family requires further intervention from Child, Youth and Family. As such, your request for this information is refused under section 18(e) of the Act on the basis that this information does not exist.

Is there a breakdown analysis of notifications per each ethnic group and what is the percentage of notifications that are made about Maori families?

The Ministry is not able to provide information on actual notifications received concerning ethnicity as the information we have at the notification stage has not been verified so it would be inappropriate to provide demographics for these notifications. However we are able to provide statistics showing the total number of notifications requiring further action which is listed in the table below.

Please note ethnicity is recorded according to the information provided by the child or family. In instances where a child does identify with an ethnic group or where an ethnic group is not stated the ethnicity will be recorded as unknown.

The percentage of notifications requiring further action where a child is identified as Māori is 45 per cent for the financial year 2011/12. The percentage breakdown of notifications requiring further action where a child is identified as Māori for the period 2012/13 is 46 per cent.

The table below provides a breakdown of the notifications requiring further action by ethnic group for the last two financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13:

Year	Ethnic Group	Notifications requiring further action
2011/12	Asian	1,184
	European	538
	Māori	27,352
	New Zealand Pakeha	18,659
	Pacific	6,435
	Other	988
	Multiple ethnic group/Unknown	5,174
	Summary	60,330
2012/13	Asian	1,269
	European	441
	Māori	28,620
	New Zealand Pakeha	17,521
	Pacific	7,002
	Other	1,126
	Multiple ethnic group/Unknown	5,898
	Summary	61,877

I hope you find this information regarding notifications helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsman
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bernadine Mackenzie', written in a cursive style.

Bernadine Mackenzie
Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family