

04 JUN 2020

Liz Pennell
fyi-request-12760-45c6ca0a@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Pennell

Official Information Act 1982 request

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request of 2 May 2020 to the Ministry of Health (MOH). On 8 May 2020, the MOH transferred your request to the Ministry of Justice (Ministry) for response. Specifically, you requested the following:

Please provide me the number of suicides from March and April 2020.

It is important to note that information regarding provisional suicide deaths is held by the Coroner's Court rather than the Ministry. Accordingly, I must refuse your request under section 18(g)(i) of the OIA. The Ministry does not hold this information and there are no grounds for believing that the information is held by another department, Minister of the Crown, organisation, or local authority.

The Courts are constitutionally separate to the Ministry and not subject to the OIA under section 2(6)(a) of that Act. However, on 19 May 2020, the Chief Coroner issued the following statement to media regarding provisional suicides during, and immediately prior to, Alert Level 4:

"I am working closely with Carla na Nagara and her team in the Suicide Prevention Office to monitor suspected suicide numbers.

"Any suspected suicide that has been reported to the coroner during Alert Level 4, and the alert levels that follow, is currently being investigated by the coroner and therefore is yet to have intent established. There are always a number of contributing factors involved when people die by suicide and these are highly personal to each individual.

"It would be irresponsible to release provisional numbers for such a short period of time, or to associate these figures with the pandemic, as the numbers can rise and fall for many reasons. The release of annual provisional figures allows for more accurate comparison.

"However, there have been concerning reports of a reported rise in suicide rates during Alert Level 4. In the interests of addressing this, I can confirm based on the provisional numbers I have, this is incorrect. The provisional trend suggests the suicide rate was lower during the Alert Level 4 period than the 33 days prior to it (22 February – 25 March 2020). The suicide rate during Alert Level 4 was also lower than the rate for the same period from 2008 to 2020.

"I have no further comment to make on this outside of the provisional annual release."

I acknowledge that the statement does not directly address the time period you have requested, however we are unable to release further information to you at this time. As above, the Chief Coroner will not make further comment on suspected suicide numbers regarding the lockdown period until the provisional annual suicide figures are released at the end of the financial year. The 2019/20 figures will be made available at <https://coronialservices.justice.govt.nz/suicide/annual-suicide-statistics-since-2011/> in the coming months.

If you require any clarification of the information contained in this response please contact Hannah Mills, Senior Advisor, Media and Official Correspondence, by calling (04) 918 8836; or emailing media@justice.govt.nz

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to complain to the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the OIA. You can contact the Office of the Ombudsman by writing to PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143; calling 0800 802 602; or emailing info@ombudsman.parliament.nz

I trust that this information assists.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JS', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Jacquelyn Shannon
Group Manager, Courts and Tribunals, Regional Service Delivery

Ref: 81576