



Matthew Whitehead
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10 JUN 2021

Tēnā koe Matthew Whitehead

On 14 May 2021, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *The policies, advice, or guidance MSD and/or Work and Income use to determine whether hardship grants for food should be accepted or declined.*

The Ministry provides hardship assistance to help people pay for essential items or services they need urgently. Hardship assistance includes Special Needs Grants (SNGs) which provide non-taxable, one-off recoverable or non-recoverable financial assistance to people to meet an essential or emergency need, such as food.

A person does not have to be getting a benefit to qualify for an SNG, but they must meet an income and asset test.

With regards to your request for policies, advice or guidance used for Special Needs Grants (SNG) for food. A large amount of information is available on the Ministry's website found at the following links:

- www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/urgent-costs/food.html.
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/about-work-and-income/our-services/what-to-bring/special-needs-grant.html#null.
- www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/index.html.

The information available online includes details about the amount that can be paid, the policies and guidelines. The following information outlines the processes Ministry staff will follow when working with a client to assess eligibility for a SNG for food.

A request for hardship assistance can be approved if a client meets the eligibility criteria and will depend on the client's individual circumstances. As such, decisions to approve SNGs can be discretionary (and are considered on a case by case basis).

When determining the amount granted for a SNG for food, the following factors are taken into consideration:

- Is it reasonable and fair?
- Is the decision justified and lawful?
- When is their next benefit payment?
- What is the usual amount spent on food?
- Is the food amount reasonable based on their family size?

When entering a hardship assistance application, the Case Manager or Call Centre Representative is prompted with the following questions:

- Has the client taken reasonable steps to improve their financial circumstances?
- Has Temporary Additional Support been assessed for this client?
- What is the partner's gross weekly income?
- What cash assets does the partner have?
- What is the client's gross weekly income?
- What cash assets does the client have?
- How many dependent children does the client have?
- Is the client unable to buy food because they have spent money on an essential expense that had to be met?
- Can the need be met in another way?
- Is there an immediate essential need?
- Has the client's need been established?
- How much was the essential expense that the client used money for?

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

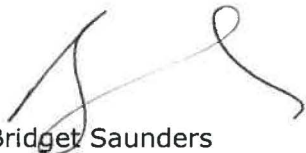
- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry'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.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding guidelines for SNGs for food, 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.

Yours sincerely



Bridget Saunders
Manager
Issue Resolution, Service Delivery