



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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23 SEP 2014

Ms Keri Eagan

fyi-request-1852-13e81113@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Ms Eagan,

Thank you for your email of 29 July 2014 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information relating to the Disability Allowance.

The Disability Allowance is a weekly Work and Income payment for people who have regular, on-going costs because of a disability, such as visits to the doctor or hospital, medicines, extra clothing or travel.

I will address each of your questions in turn.

1. *In the years 2004 - 2013 inclusive how many clients in each year had internet costs accepted by Work and Income as a disability related cost?*

I understand that your system may have difficulty searching for this particular expense because it may be listed under another heading in SWIFT. If this is the case could you please indicate if the Ministry intends to list this expense under its own category in the future?

The Ministry does not centrally collate information about people who are receiving internet costs as a disability related cost. Internet costs are included under the category of 'other costs' in a Disability Allowance. In order to isolate internet costs, Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of individual files. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. 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.

2. *How many clients had disability costs approved by the ministry that exceeded the limit of the disability allowance for each of the years 2008 - 2013 inclusive? Please exclude costs covered by Disability Allowance/Counselling.*

The table below shows the number of people who claimed for costs above the maximum Disability Allowance rate, excluding costs for counselling and transport to counselling between 2007/08 and 2012/13.

As at the end of the month	Number of DA paid with total costs claimed (excluding counselling costs) above the maximum DA rate
Jun-08	18,499
Jun-09	18,936
Jun-10	19,100
Jun-11	17,272
Jun-12	15,533
Jun-13	15,593

3. *For each of the years 2004 - 2013 inclusive how much did the Ministry spend on Disability Allowance/Counselling? Please exclude other disability related costs including transport to see a counsellor.*

Work and Income provides financial assistance for counselling fees through the Disability Allowance. Generally, assistance is limited to a maximum of 10 counselling sessions on first application. A further 20 sessions can be approved on the recommendation of the person's medical practitioner or specialist.

The table below shows the weekly amount of Disability Allowance costs claimed for counselling as at the end of June for the 2004 to 2013 financial years, excluding costs for transport to see a counsellor.

As at the end of the month	Total Weekly DA costs for counselling
Jun-04	\$176,686
Jun-05	\$143,317
Jun-06	\$149,240
Jun-07	\$143,833
Jun-08	\$147,036
Jun-09	\$170,608
Jun-10	\$178,382
Jun-11	\$148,375
Jun-12	\$135,063
Jun-13	\$123,354

Notes: This is a table of costs claimed by people and not necessarily the amount paid

4. *In New Zealand anybody can legally call themselves a counsellor and accept clients for therapy.*

What safeguards (if any) does the Ministry have in place to ensure that clients are not being exploited financially and in other ways by counsellors who are not members of the approved associations but have falsely represented themselves to be in order to have sessions funded or subsidised through Work and Income?

5. *Have any of the counsellors who have made false declarations on a Disability Allowance/Counselling form in order to obtain funding been prosecuted by the Ministry?*
6. *Does the Ministry have any information regarding the forward liability of clients exploited in treatment by counsellors?*

The Ministry only pays for counselling costs when the counselling is provided by a psychologist who holds a current practising certificate, is registered with the Psychologists Board and is registered with either the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists or the New Zealand Psychological Society, or by a bona fide counsellor who is a member (or an applicant or provisional member) of one of the following organisations:

- Psychotherapists Board of Aotearoa New Zealand
- New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC)
- New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association
- Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (Inc)
- Drug and Alcohol Practitioners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand (DAPAANA). This only includes Registered Competent Practitioners and Associate Practitioners; it does not include a support worker.

The practise standards for counsellors are set by the membership organisations named above. As such, if an individual feels that they have been exploited by a counsellor, they should approach the organisation to which the counsellor belongs. The Ministry has no record of counsellors having made false declarations to obtain funding, and therefore no prosecutions have occurred. Therefore, the Ministry does not have any information regarding the forward liability of people who have received a Disability Allowance for a counselling session, and who have been exploited in treatment by counsellors. Your request for this information is therefore refused under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act as this information does not exist.

I hope you find this information 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



Debbie Power
Deputy Chief Executive, Work and Income