



DOIA20/21090483

- 2 NOV 2020

s 9(2)(a)

Dear s 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email dated 21 September 2020 to the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) requesting information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). MSD will respond to parts one to seven of your request as they relate to emergency and public housing clients, and parts eight to ten regarding the Housing Register. Parts one to seven of your request were transferred to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (the Ministry) to respond under section 14 of the Act as they relate to transitional housing and our COVID-19 response. I have addressed your questions in groups below, and provided some contextual commentary up front on transitional and emergency housing.

It should be noted that motels can be used for emergency accommodation, transitional housing, and the government COVID-19 response to homelessness. Emergency accommodation in motels is funded through the Emergency Housing Special Needs Grant (EH SNG) which is administered by MSD. The purpose of the EH SNG is to help individuals and families with the cost of staying in short-term temporary accommodation (usually a motel) when there is an urgent need and they have no other options such as a private rental. The EH SNG pays for short-term accommodation for up to seven days at a time and a client can receive more than one grant.

Separate to the EH SNG provided by MSD, transitional housing provides warm, dry, short-term housing for families and individuals who do not have anywhere to live, and is contracted by the Ministry. Families and individuals stay in transitional housing for around 12 weeks, or more if necessary. In most cases, they receive a further 12 weeks of support services once they have found a more permanent place to live.

A key difference between emergency and transitional housing is that transitional housing includes wraparound support to the individual or household, even if the accommodation is in a motel. Transitional housing providers are contracted by the Ministry to provide this support.

Households may require transitional housing due to a number of difficult circumstances such as unemployment or low income, and/or may face a range of complex issues such as mental health and addictions, criminal history, and family breakdowns. As a result, there are households who require more intense specialised support to seek and maintain housing. Some landlords may consider these circumstances or issues as barriers to accessing their rental properties.

In addition, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2020 \$107.6 million was made available for over 1,200 additional places (predominantly motel units) for people who were living rough or in accommodation where social distancing was not possible. \$31 million of the funding was for wraparound support services to support people's needs. These places were brought on as an emergency and temporary measure and funded separately by the Government until April 2021.

There is an extensive programme of work underway to increase the supply of public and transitional housing to reduce the reliance on motel accommodation.

The Government has committed to increasing the number of public and transitional houses by 8,000 over the next four years. This is in addition to the 6,400 committed between 2018 and 2022. Between November 2017 and July 2020, the number of places increased by 5,308, 116 of which are in Whangārei District.

In response to your specific questions:

1. *How many people are living in motels in Whangareei currently [and] how many rooms is that total?*
2. *How much has that increased by over the last 3 years?*
3. *What percentage of them are Māori?*
4. *What is the average stay of a person living in a motel in Whangareei?*

The table below shows the number of transitional housing motel places in Whangārei as at 30 June 2020 (the latest available data), the number of bedrooms that represents, and the number of clients as at 30 June 2020 and 23 October 2017, when the first transitional housing motel places were contracted in Whangārei.

	23 October 2017	30 June 2020
Number of transitional housing motel places	6	11
Number of clients	8	40
Number of bedrooms	10	16

In Whangārei, as part of the government COVID-19 response to homelessness, there were an additional 45 motel units being used to accommodate 60 people as at 1 June 2020.

You asked how many of these clients identified as Māori. The Ministry does not require applicants for transitional housing to provide their ethnicity in order to receive accommodation. For this reason, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information does not exist.

As part of the COVID-19 response, 76 percent of the people supported identify as Māori (latest available data).

In the 2019/20 financial year, the average stay before exiting a transitional housing motel place in Whangārei was 10.8 weeks.

Data on the average stay of a person in a COVID-19 motel is not currently collected. For this reason, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information does not exist.

5. *How many people are living in other forms of social housing?*
6. *How much has that increased by over the last 3 years?*
7. *What is the average stay of someone living in other accommodation in Whangareei?*

We have interpreted where you refer to social housing to mean transitional housing that is not a motel (eg a house). This was to ensure you received the full number of people in transitional housing in Whangārei, regardless if they were in a motel or not. You will hear from MSD on public housing.

The table below shows the number of transitional housing places (excluding motel places) in Whangārei, the number of bedrooms that represents, and the number of clients as at 30 June 2020 (the latest available data) and how that's increased over the last three years.

	1 July 2017	30 June 2020
Number of transitional housing places (excluding motels)	33	76
Number of clients	70	125
Number of bedrooms	34	128

Please note that 12 of these places did not record how many bedrooms were available.

In the 2019/20 financial year, the average stay before exiting transitional housing (excluding motels) in Whangārei was 25.8 weeks.

Please note that the information provided in this response is based on data collected from providers and reflects only what has been reported. Reporting on occupancy in transitional housing is reliant on manual self-reporting by providers.

Providers worked at pace to house people sleeping rough and the homeless in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the Ministry temporarily relaxed the reporting requirements so providers could focus on their COVID-19 response. This reporting was picked up in July but it may have some impact on data. In some cases, the data was not received in a timely manner or did not meet data quality standards so was not able to be included in this response.

For the reasons noted above, as with any manually collected administrative data, we are aware that there are data quality and coverage issues. The Ministry works with all housing and service providers to continuously improve our data collection processes.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, in accordance with section 28(3) of the Act. The relevant details can be found on the Ombudsman's website www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

As part of our ongoing commitment to openness and transparency, the Ministry proactively releases information and documents that may be of interest to the public. As such, this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on our website.

Yours sincerely



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Housing Supply, Response and Partnerships