

s 9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe s 9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email dated 8 June 2022 to Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (the Ministry) requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA):

“Could you please give me information on how many people are/were in the covid motels during the 2020 lockdown and whether or not they are still in operation? Any information would be appreciated.

These are separate from Emergency Housing that MSD provide, I know they were heavily used during the first lockdown, yet I would like to know how many people utilised this service and if it is still in operation as well. Could I also have that information broken down by age, ethnicity and number of dependant children?

The costs of the motels as well would be appreciated

Again, as far as I am aware, this is an operation that is handled by HUD, yet little public information is available for the program, these are not the isolation motels either. It was suppose to be a temporary measure but due to high rent, people ended up staying longer, if available a timeline as well as a total number of people who used the service would be appreciated”

Before I turn to your specific questions it may be useful to provide some background about the use of COVID motels. When the first COVID-19 lockdown was announced in March 2020, the Government funded 1,200 temporary places for some of our most vulnerable people including those experiencing chronic homelessness. A large number of those people had high and complex needs and therefore wrap around support was also put in place to support them to find long term housing.

The Ministry is committed to ensuring that people accommodated in these places do not return to homelessness and therefore, the funding currently continues. Part of the funding goes towards providing wrap around support services to enable providers to identify and then help address the specific needs of those concerned.

The collective work done across agencies in response to the March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown meant that we were in a much stronger position to respond quickly to the August 2021 level 4 lockdown and the ongoing support being provided meant there was less need for additional accommodation. During the Delta and Omicron COVID-19 outbreaks, some of the places have been used as accommodation for people needing to self-isolate.

The changing alert levels and self-isolation requirements have meant that the need for COVID-19 response accommodation has fluctuated since March 2020.

The use of COVID motels will be phased out as the people living in them are transitioned to more suitable accommodation. This will reduce the number of people who may otherwise return to homelessness or place pressure on other parts of the system.

In terms of your question regarding the number of people who were in COVID motels during the 2020 lockdown I can advise that the peak number of COVID response motel places was 1,195 as of 31 July 2020. At 31 May 2022, there were 799 COVID response motel places. The Ministry holds data on the number of places rather than the number of people in COVID motels (for example a place could be an individual or a family).

Although the Ministry receives reporting from our providers on the number people staying in COVID motels, this reporting has been incomplete, particularly during the 2020 lockdown when providers were focussed on finding accommodation for some of our most vulnerable people. Therefore, your request for the specific number of people who stayed in COVID motels, broken down by age, ethnicity and number of dependant children, is declined under section 18(e) of the OIA because the information does not exist.

As noted previously, funding for places in COVID motels currently continues, but will be phased out as people are transitioned into more suitable accommodation.

With regard to your question about the costs, I can advise that the total spend on COVID accommodation from 1 March 2020 – 31 March 2022 is \$110,366,526 and the total spend on services to support those staying in the motels is \$17,413,071.

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

William Barris
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