



24 January 2023

Scout Barbour-Evans

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Tēnā koe Scout Barbour-Evans

On 6 December 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *Any papers, correspondence and advice received regarding the choice to exclude preventative and routine dental care from the grant*

Special Needs Grants (SNGs) for dental treatment from the Ministry provide support for low-income people's oral health in specific circumstances, however, the provision of oral health services is primarily a health issue and is generally addressed through the health system.

Covering preventative dental costs through SNGs would contradict the general requirement for someone to have an immediate and essential need. Therefore, the Ministry is not well suited to cover preventative dental care. This setting has been in place for a number of years and was maintained during the recent policy changes to SNGs for dental treatment.

One document has been identified which contains information in scope of your request:

- *REP/20/11/1040 – Report – Implementing the manifesto commitment to increase emergency dental support for low income households, dated 20 November 2020*

This report provides detailed policy and implementation advice on the changes to SNGs for dental treatment, which included increasing the limit from \$300 to \$1,000 and removing the need for immediate and essential dental treatment to have arisen from an emergency situation.

To expedite a response, I have excerpted the section of the document containing advice to continue to exclude preventative and routine dental care from the SNGs for dental treatment. Please contact the Ministry if this was not the intent of your request.

REP/20/11/1040 excerpt:

- *The Programme does not include SNGs for the costs of periodic dental care such as regular check-ups and cleaning (scaling and polishing), cosmetic (crowns and bridges) or orthodontic treatments such as braces for straightening crooked teeth or treating an improper bite. By removing the requirement for a need to have arisen from an emergency situation, arguably, in some circumstances, more preventative dental treatments such as regular check-ups and cleaning may be considered immediate and essential. However, MSD recommends maintaining current settings and the exclusion of these types of preventative treatments will be explicitly reflected in the Programme. This is because oral health issues are generally addressed through the health system.*

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 and any attached documents available to the wider public. 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, 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.

Ngā mihi nui



Bede Hogan
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Income Support Policy