



08 MAY 2015

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

On 30 April 2015 the Ministry responded to your request for the following information:

- *How much has Work and Income paid out over the past 3 years for emergency dental work?*
- *In that same period, how much did Work and Income loan to beneficiaries for emergency dental treatment?*

I have been made aware that the previous response to your request for information, dated 30 April 2015, provided incomplete information. I would like to apologise for this.

Following your questions about trends in hardship payments for Emergency Dental Assistance, the Ministry investigated the reduction in payments. We have discovered the information we gave to you under-reported hardship payments in the 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 financial years.

The correct information is attached. The reason the information was under-reported was because the payments made through the Advance system was updated in 2012 and the coding for Emergency Dental Treatment in the system was adjusted. This was not picked up due to reducing trends in other assistance. This meant that when we provided the data to you we did not correctly include the vast majority of Advance payments for this hardship reason.

I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to look into this issue. I am confident this issue was limited to Emergency Dental Assistance only.

The Ministry of Social Development through Work and Income provides recoverable and non-recoverable financial assistance to people to meet an immediate need for essential items such as food, health costs (including medical and dental costs), power and other costs.

These payments are available to any person as long as they meet the income and asset test, and they are unable to meet the cost from any other source.

The Ministry recognises that individuals who are in receipt of a benefit may not be able to budget for unexpected dental costs, and support is available for those who meet the criteria to help with the cost of dental work.

The maximum amount payable to a person applying for a non-recoverable Special Needs Grant towards the cost of dental treatment is \$300 within any 52 week period. Where exceptional circumstances apply, this amount may be exceeded or more than one payment may be made. In situations where there are no exceptional circumstances, or where individuals do not meet the qualifying criteria for a Special Needs Grant, they may qualify for an Advance Payment of Benefit to meet any or all remaining costs.

All dental treatments must be provided by a health agency or registered dental practitioner. Examples of a qualifying dental situation include, but are not limited to, root treatment, tooth extraction, tooth restoration and treatment of acute infection.

Over the past five financial years the Ministry has approved a consistent number of requests for financial support related to dental work, which has enabled individuals to access the immediate and essential dental treatment they required.

I refer you to the enclosed table which provides the total amount of hardship payments for all dental treatments, including the number of payments and whether the payment was made as an Advance Payment or a Special Needs Grant, for the financial years 2009/10 to 2014/15.

The table illustrates that individuals have not been restricted from accessing financial support for dental treatment where there is an immediate and essential need.

I also note that overall, decline rates for hardship applications are falling – from 8.3% of applications in 2010/11 to 6.4% in 2013/14. So we're granting a greater proportion of the applications we receive.

More information regarding dental treatment is available on the Work and Income website at: <http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/emergency-dental-treatment-01.html>

I hope you find this information about dental 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

Table One: The total amount of hardship payments for all dental treatment, broken down number and type of payment, for the financial years 2009/10 to 2014/15.

Financial Year	Values	Hardship Payment Type		Total
		Advance Payments	Special Needs Grants	
2009/10	Number	26,201	48,423	74,624
	Amount (\$)	\$9,510,900	\$12,990,598	\$22,501,498
2010/11	Number	25,316	45,774	71,090
	Amount (\$)	\$9,398,451	\$12,431,686	\$21,830,137
2011/12	Number	26,283	45,714	71,997
	Amount (\$)	\$10,541,737	\$12,596,275	\$23,138,012
2012/13	Number	26,806	44,775	71,581
	Amount (\$)	\$11,368,970	\$12,453,775	\$23,822,745
2013/14	Number	26,319	42,735	69,054
	Amount (\$)	\$11,200,080	\$11,834,780	\$23,034,860
2014/15	Number	20,492	31,030	51,522
	Amount (\$)	\$8,947,676	\$8,578,008	\$17,525,684

Note: The data provided for the financial year 2014/15 is to the end of March 2015. The table is a count of payments made, not individuals. A person may have received more than one payment during the period.