



10 August 2022

Patsy Hill

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Tēnā koe Patsy Hill

On 13 July 2022, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) through the FYI website requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

- *I would like to know how standard food costs for gluten free foods are obtained for disability allowance rate purposes, and what these rates are.*
- *I would also like to know what evidence was used in determining these rates, when they have been reviewed, and what methods there are to achieve consistency across Aotearoa for all those with health conditions that require them to follow a gluten free diet.*

The Ministry has interpreted your request for information regarding rates to relate to the amount paid for special food costs through the Disability Allowance (DA).

DA provides non-taxable assistance to people who have on-going, additional costs because of a disability. DA provides assistance for a number of costs, including the additional costs of special foods that a person needs because of their disability. The maximum amount payable per week for DA is \$70.04.

The amount paid to each client is estimated in relation to the actual costs that have been, or will be, incurred on a regular basis. Every DA application is assessed based on the guidelines available on the Work and Income website.

The cost of special foods can be included in a client's DA payment if they are:

- For additional food or food supplements beyond most people's everyday needs
- Above usual food costs (for example soya milk costs more than cow's milk), and

- Part of a diet supervised by a registered dietician.

For a client to have special foods included in their DA, they must first meet all other relevant qualifications for DA. You can read more about the qualifications and payment of DA here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/index.html.

A health practitioner must verify that the special food costs are additional, ongoing, is beneficial and of therapeutic value and are related to the client's disability. The client must provide a DA Disability Certificate completed and signed by a registered medical practitioner, nurse practitioner or dietician, and proof of their food costs.

The diet or special food must be confirmed as not being funded, subsidised, or provided by health authorities. For further information about specific food items funded through PHARMAC, please see: www.schedule.pharmac.govt.nz/ScheduleOnline.php.

When a client applies for assistance for gluten-free food costs, Ministry staff generally need to see comparable receipts or quotes for gluten-free and non-gluten free foods. This calculation can be completed by using a supermarket online shopping website for the lowest price standard product, compared to the cost of the special food item that the health practitioner has specified. The formula used by Ministry staff when determining additional food costs can be found on the Work and Income website, here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/assessing-additional-food-costs-01.html.

A client's DA entitlement and eligibility can be reviewed for different reasons. For example, if a client advises the Ministry of a change in circumstances or costs, the Ministry may request additional information or evidence to determine whether this affects the client's rate of payment. Additionally, DA can be reviewed through the 'Confirming Your Circumstances' form. This form allows the Ministry to determine whether the client's entitlement or eligibility has changed. More information about changes and reviews to DA can be found here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/disability-allowance/changes-and-reviews-disability-allowance/changes-and-reviews.html.

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 regarding the costs of special foods through the Disability Allowance, 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

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