



24 August 2020

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 26 July 2020 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

- 1) *How many children in New Zealand are receiving early intervention support, of those children how many are diagnosed with ASD;*
- 2) *How many hours of support per month are children with ASD and/or early intervention needs receiving. Can this support including the hours of support per month be broken down into the different early intervention services, which could include but not limited too:*
 - a) *Early Intervention Teacher;*
 - b) *Speech Language Therapy*
 - c) *Education Psychology*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Access to Ministry services and support is not reliant on a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and the Ministry does not routinely collect this information when a request for support is made. Support from the Ministry is based on the needs described by whānau and the referrer, and could include communication, development, social, emotional or behavioural concerns. For this reason I am unable to tell you how many children receiving Early Intervention support in New Zealand have an ASD diagnosis, and also cannot inform you how many hours of support they receive. I am therefore refusing this aspect of your request under section 18(e) of the Act, as the information does not exist.

Further to this, the Ministry does not collate or hold in a centralised manner the number of hours of support children within the Early Intervention programme (EI) receive. The amount of support given is determined by a number of factors including the circumstances of the child but also their individual needs. For this reason I am also refusing this aspect of your request under section 18(g) of the Act, as the Ministry does not hold the information. However, the Ministry currently supports 7,659 children with communication, developmental and/or behavioural needs across our Early Intervention which will include children that have been diagnosed with ASD.

Further information on Ministry support for children with ASD

We provide a range of resources to support the learning needs of children and young people with ASD. The Ministry of Health's guidelines are the basis of our approach to young people with ASD and recommend:

- intervention and support as soon as possible
- responsive services for children, families and whānau
- structured teaching and environments that reflect unique needs

- support in everyday situations alongside their peers.

We know that it is the key adults in children's lives who make the greatest impact. That's why the majority of our programmes and supports are targeted at increasing the confidence and capability of whānau and teachers to support their children on the autism spectrum. A copy of these guidelines can be found at the following weblink: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/disability-services/disability-projects/autism-spectrum-disorder-guideline>

Support for pre-school aged children with ASD and their whānau

The Ministry's Early Intervention Service works with families and early childhood educators who ask for help when they are concerned about the learning and development of young children. This may concern a child's developmental delay, behaviour and/or communication difficulties, including ASD. The service can work with children from birth until they start school and the support that the Ministry of Education provides is based on the needs that are described when parents or teachers seek our support. We also contract 11 Early Intervention Specialist Service Providers (EISSPs) to provide support for pre-school children with high needs. Budget 2018 provided funding of \$6.949 million over four years to provide additional places in EISSPs.

In July 2019, the Ministry entered a new three-year contract with Autism New Zealand to provide an autism-specific programme called 'Early Steps' to 24 children in 2019/20, and 44 children in each of the next two financial years. Autism New Zealand is currently the only EISSP offering ASD-specific services. However, all EISSPs provide support to children with ASD.

Incredible Years Autism

In March 2018 we began offering two new Incredible Years® programmes specifically designed for parents and teachers of children aged from 2 to 5 on the autism spectrum. The budget for this initiative is \$4.19 million over four years. The overarching Incredible Years® programme is a series of interlocking, evidence-based programmes for parents, children and teachers, supported by over 30 years of research. Their goal is to promote social competence, emotional regulation and communication skills.

For Incredible Years Autism Parent, caregivers meet for around 2 to 2.5 hours each week over 14 weeks to explore and discuss parenting strategies together. Caregivers learn to engage and play with their child in ways that support their language development and emotional self-regulation. Caregivers also learn how to support their child's social skills and empathy, and help them to form positive relationships. 305 caregivers of children on the autism spectrum aged 2-5 attended the Incredible Years Autism Parent programmes so far.

Incredible Years Autism Teacher is a six-session, group-based programme for teachers and early childhood educators of children aged 2–5 on the autism spectrum. By supporting the skills and confidence of the key adults in the lives of children on the autism spectrum, it aims to promote children's emotional regulation, positive social interactions and language development. 381 teachers (ECE or new entrant teachers) have attended the IYAT programmes so far.

The programmes are being delivered by specially trained staff from non-government agencies and the Ministry in seven regions: Northland, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Wellington, Christchurch, Nelson and Invercargill. There are 70 practitioners delivering Incredible Years Autism nationwide and additional 40 people will be trained to deliver more programmes 2020 onwards.

ASD Plus (co-funded with the Ministry of Health)

This programme is delivered by Explore, a specialist service, and focuses on providing information and support for parents of autistic children who are zero to six. It focuses on the causes of stress and anxiety for children with autism and their learning styles. The programme supports participants to understand the way that their child thinks, learns and experiences the world. The course provides an introduction to a range of practical strategies to support positive interactions and skill development across 7 sessions. It is typically provided in a group setting, but in some regions families can receive it as an individual programme if attending a group is difficult or there are insufficient numbers to indicate group provision.

Learning Support Action Plan

In July 2019 Minister Martin launched the Learning Support Action Plan (LSAP). The LSAP will drive progress towards an inclusive education system with a range of learning environments where children and young people with learning support needs, including disabilities, are welcome. Strengthening Early Intervention is an identified priority area in the Plan. As part of this, we will identify the mix, volume and additional types of services that are needed to support children. This will include looking at what information and support families and whānau need. We will also be working with other agencies to integrate and provide greater flexibility across the services and supports they deliver. The Ministry is currently working on this as part of Mana Whaikaha — the MidCentral Prototype for disability system transformation led by the Ministry of Health.

We are working with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (TKRNT) to co-design and deliver an awareness campaign to ensure that kaiako, parents and whānau are aware of (and confident to access) learning support (particularly for behaviour, speech and language/communication and autism spectrum disorder). TKRNT and the Ministry are working together to build the capability of staff, whānau and kaiako to respond to the needs of children.

While we are working on strengthening early intervention services, we will also be working to reduce the waiting times for existing services.

I trust that this information is helpful. Should you wish to engage more on this topic please let us know by return email and we will connect you with the right person.

Please note, the Ministry now proactively publishes responses under the Act on our website. As such, we may publish this response on our website after five working days. Your name and contact details will be removed.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Nāku noa, nā



Katrina Casey
Deputy Secretary
Sector Enablement & Support