

OIA-CE-2025-02871

22 April 2025

s9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe s9(2)(a)

Thank you for your email, received on 25 March 2025, to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) requesting information on caseloads and unallocated cases. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Information about case allocation and case load is complex and reflect different degrees of urgency and children's needs. Oranga Tamariki is working on reducing the number of those less urgent cases which are unallocated at any one time. It is also working on reducing case loads.

I have responded to each part of your request below.

I'm getting in touch to confirm there are today 13 unallocated children...

Before a case (a child or young person) is allocated to a social worker, it is triaged and assigned a timeframe based on urgency of the children's needs. Urgent cases are allocated quickly, less urgent ones can take longer. Cases involving babies and infants, or that involve matters of a nature that require Police involvement, are also prioritised

Unallocated queues are also regularly reviewed and monitored by Practice Leaders at sites. If needed, notifiers are contacted again to ascertain if circumstances have changed in a way that would warrant more urgent attention.

As at 31 March 2025, there were 1,319 children overdue for allocation to a social worker.

The last 12 months has seen a significant increase in volumes of ROCs received by Oranga, meaning there is simply a larger number of cases that need to be allocated to social workers. Almost 75,000 children and young people came to our attention in the 2023/24 financial year through a ROC. As at the end of March 2025, we had received 81,013 ROCs for this financial year to date. The 12 months to the end of March 2025 saw a nearly 45% increase in ROCs received compared to the previous

12-month period. Increased volumes have placed pressure on the timeframes taken to safely allocate cases to a social worker.

...and 276 people with a workload of more than 20 cases.

As at 8 April 2025, 305 care and protection social workers have a caseload of over 20 children. The average caseload for care and protection social workers is 17 children. Please note that these are measures of the number of children and young people connected to each 'phase' on social workers' caseloads. "Intake", "assessment", and "intervention" are examples of different phases. Because it is a measure of phases rather than distinct children, children are counted more than once if they appear in different phases – for example, an intervention and an assessment. This is intended to reflect workload.

Please note that caseload numbers alone, whether measured by number of children or number of cases, are a poor measure of workload in and of themselves. Workload is influenced by factors including numbers of children and families, complexity, the availability of support and community assistance, and the experience of practitioners.

Would Oranga Tamariki be able to [...] state why this is?

A common reason social workers are working with a higher number of children is because they are working with families with large numbers of children. As noted above, higher caseload numbers can also occur because same children are involved in more phase on a social workers caseload, meaning they are counted twice. Working with large families and working with the same children in different phases does reflect real additional responsibilities and workload.

The workload protocol currently in place requires that conversations about workload take place when a care and protection social worker is working with 20 or more children. The protocol also requires that steps are taken to manage high workloads if identified, and that requests for help are escalated as needed. The protocol explicitly recognises that caseload numbers alone are not a sound measure of workload.

Would Oranga Tamariki be able to confirm [...] if this is of concern?

We are always concerned about, and seek to put in place measures to address, high workloads. High workloads contribute to stress and burnout, and make it more difficult for social workers to be their best. This is why the Workload Protocol is in place, and one of the reasons Oranga Tamariki maintain a number of unallocated cases which are monitored through other means.

Oranga Tamariki may make the information contained in this letter available to the public by publishing this on our website with your personal details removed.

IN-CONFIDENCE

I trust you find this information useful. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Oranga Tamariki. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rachel Leota', written in a cursive style.

Rachel Leota
Deputy Chief Executive
Tamariki and Whānau Services