

26 November 2020



Kia ora 

Re: OIA request – Number of foreign nationals invoiced for health services

Thank you for your Official Information Act request, transferred to Waitematā DHB by the Ministry of Health (MoH) on 6 November 2020, about the number of foreign nationals invoiced for services.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services.

Waitematā DHB serves a population of more than 630,000 across the North Shore, Waitakere and Rodney areas, the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country. We are the largest employer in the district, employing around 8,500 people across more than 80 locations.

In addition to providing care to our own resident population, we are the Northern Region provider of forensic mental health services and child rehabilitation services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

As required by the Ministry of Health, Waitematā DHB follows a process to recover the costs of hospital services for ineligible or non-resident patients. Ineligible patients are invoiced and full settlement is required. When a full settlement is not possible, a payment plan is offered. If the payment plan is not fulfilled, the debt is written-off and the account is transferred to a debt collection agency for further recovery. Any payment collected is treated as bad debt recovered and is paid back (less a collection fee) to Waitematā DHB.

In response to your request, we can provide the following information:

I would like information regarding how many foreign nationals have been charged by our public health system categorised by number of charges and nationality/passport region [between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020] ...by charges I mean transactions. e.g ., A foreign national visits Christchurch hospital due to an emergency, spends time in the bed and is medicated (possibly a minor operation is performed). At the end of the day he/she is discharged and charged/invoiced a certain amount for the services. The example above I would consider as one charge.

Information regarding the passport used to establish eligibility or non-eligibility is only available through manual procedures and would require the review of more than 1000 individual files.

Due to the sensitivity of this information, frontline staff would need to review individual clinical files and it would not be appropriate to use a contractor to review the records. This would take the frontline staff away from their work and prejudice our ability to provide core services.

We have considered whether charging or extending the timeframe for responding to this aspect of your request would assist us in managing this work and have concluded it would not. We have, therefore, determined to refuse this element of your request under Section 18(f) of the Official Information Act due to substantial collation and research.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

However, we are able to provide the information you have requested by *country of birth*. Where there are fewer than 10 patients from a single country, we have grouped countries into regions in order to protect patient privacy.

The data provided is for the number of people invoiced and the number of times patients categorised by country or region were charged on the basis that each hospital visit/stay was one charge.

Please note that some charges are credited back where the patient is later able to provide proof of eligibility.

Patients charged by country or region of birth and number of times charged between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020		
Country or region of birth	Number of patients invoiced	Number of times invoiced
Saudi Arabia	10	26
France	11	29
Australia	12	35
Not available	13	11
Canada	14	37
Sri Lanka	15	33
Other Africa	17	73
Other Middle East	19	105
Brazil	19	37
Other East Asia	21	41
Other Oceania	21	40
Eastern Europe	21	129
England	22	54
United States of America	25	42
Germany	25	83
Korea, Republic of (South)	26	42
Other Central/South America	27	88
New Zealand*	28	67
Other South Asia	34	116
Other Western Europe	38	87
Philippines	43	131

Fiji	43	194
South Africa	51	103
Tonga	53	761
Tuvalu	64	460
Samoa	77	310
India	104	355
China, People's Republic of	207	496
Grand total	1060	3985

*These may be patients who are born in New Zealand but are still ineligible because they are minors and their parents are ineligible. Others may have been charged but have subsequently provided evidence of NZ citizenship and their invoice credited.

I trust that this information meets your requirements. Waitematā DHB, like other agencies across the state sector, supports the open disclosure of information to assist the public's understanding of how we are delivering publicly-funded healthcare.

This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you feel that there are good reasons why your response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

Ngā mihi nui,



Robert Paine
Chief Financial Officer
Waitematā District Health Board