

Emergency food grants' bill tops \$40m - www.radionz.co.nz, 18 August 2009

Work and Income has spent more than \$40 million in the past year on emergency food grants, according to figures obtained by Radio New Zealand.

Officials were directed to review the system of special-needs grants to make sure it is not being abused.

In the 12 months to the end of May, Work and Income approved 414,000 requests for food grants at a cost of \$43 million. That was up from 281,000 request, at a cost of \$27 million, during the previous 12-month period.

The figures also show the number of food grants claimed by people not on a benefit has grown from 61,000 to 83,000 during the same periods.

Social Development Minister Paula Bennett says she is not surprised by the figures.

Ms Bennett says she would like those who claim more than three food grants to be directed to budget advice courses.

But the head of the Federation of Family Budgeting Services, Raewyn Fox, says offering advice is not necessarily the answer.