

POLITICS

Luxon claims \$52k accommodation payment to live in own apartment

Christopher Luxon is the first Prime Minister in at least 34 years to claim the payment as previous titleholders have either lived in Premier House or were already based in Wellington



by Marc Daalder 8 hours ago

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Christopher Luxon campaigned on reducing public expenditure and ensuring taxpayers get value for money. Photo: Marc Daalder

The Prime Minister will receive a \$52,000 top-up to his \$471,000 salary to cover his accommodation expenses since he is not living in Premier House.

A spokesperson for Christopher Luxon confirmed he will claim the optional accommodation payment, despite living in an apartment in Wellington that he owns mortgage-free.

It makes Luxon the first Prime Minister in at least 34 years to claim the payment. Since Premier House became the official prime ministerial residence in 1990, previous titleholders have either lived there or, in the case of Wellington-based leaders Bill English and Chris Hipkins, stayed in their own homes.

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On Tuesday, [the Australian Associated Press reported Luxon had told visiting Australian cricketers that he was not living in Premier House](#) because of its condition. One of the cricketers said Luxon had told him the building was "condemned" and unliveable, but the Prime Minister disputed using those specific terms.

"I was asked, 'Do I live in Premier House?' and the answer is 'No, I don't'. As you know, Premier House has long-standing maintenance issues. A report was given to the former Prime Minister. That same report has been passed on to me and the Government will consider what options we have available to remedy all the maintenance issues that are there. Until then, I stay in my apartment," Luxon told reporters later that day.

While Premier House received upgrades in 2018 at a cost of \$3 million, it was acknowledged by previous Prime Ministers Jacinda Ardern and Hipkins as needing more substantial work. Ardern noted the building's tendency to leak, while Hipkins told Newsroom it was dated and could do with a "modest modernisation project".

"However, I have not received notice that it is uninhabitable or condemned."

Prior to the election, [Luxon was one of more than 20 MPs who received \\$31,000 a year](#) from Parliament to cover housing expenses in the capital while staying in properties they already owned. At least some of those MPs were still paying a mortgage on their Wellington properties, however, which Luxon is not.

This isn't the first time attention has turned on MPs claiming the allowance while seemingly not needing it. While English did not claim it as Prime Minister, [he was criticised for claiming the payment as a minister in 2002](#) and ultimately repaid the money.

As Prime Minister, Luxon is now eligible to claim up to \$52,000 a year under the same scheme. The apartment he owns, without a mortgage, was valued at more than \$1 million in 2021, although property values have declined since then. Luxon also owns a family home in Auckland, a bach on Waiheke Island and four investment properties in Auckland.

Ministerial expense returns released on Thursday covering the final three months of 2023 did not show the expense being claimed, but the spokesperson said this was due to a late filing which will be reflected in future releases.

"At the end of 2023, the Prime Minister had just received the Premier House Board Report and was unclear whether or not he was going to move in," the spokesperson said.

"The reports suggest Premier House requires a significant amount of work so the Prime Minister is considering that before making any decisions around residing there. The Prime Minister has since claimed the allowance for the period and it is expected this will be reflected in the next release of expenses."

Luxon campaigned on reducing public expenditure and ensuring taxpayers get value for money. Finance Minister Nicola Willis has asked all public sector departments to seek savings of 6.5 percent.

The returns released on Thursday also show six other National Party ministers, two other National MPs, one Act Party MP and five Labour MPs claimed the accommodation supplement last year while owning property in Wellington.

These figures exclude MPs who weren't in Parliament before the election, as their financial interests haven't yet been released.

The other MPs are Andrew Bayly, Gerry Brownlee, Judith Collins, Simon Court, Barbara Kuriger, Melissa Lee, Mark Mitchell, Deborah Russell, Jenny Salea, Stuart Smith, Jan Tinetti, Louise Upston, Arena Williams and Duncan Webb. Some of them may have mortgages on their Wellington properties.

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Andrew Riddell
01/03/2024 at 6:19 am

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