



Ombudsman's Overview

As Western Australian Ombudsman, and an officer of the Western Australian Parliament, it is a privilege to present the report of our work in 2016-17.

The Ombudsman is an independent and impartial officer who reports directly to the Western Australian Parliament. The Ombudsman receives, investigates and resolves complaints about State Government agencies, local governments and universities, initiates major own motion investigations, reviews certain child deaths, reviews family and domestic violence fatalities and undertakes inspection and monitoring functions.

The Ombudsman concurrently holds the roles of Energy and Water Ombudsman and Chairman, State Records Commission.



In 2007-08, we commenced a major program to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of how we received, investigated and resolved complaints. This program, alongside of a range of subsequent continuous improvement initiatives, has seen the average age of complaints reduce from 173 days as at 30 June 2007 to 32 days as at 30 June 2017. In the last year, 94% of complaints were resolved within three months. Moreover, since 2007-08, the efficiency of complaint resolution has improved very significantly, with the average cost per finalised allegation reduced by a total of 36% from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,889 in 2016-17.

We also undertake important roles in relation to the review of certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. In 2016-17, timely review processes have resulted in nearly two-thirds of all reviews being completed within six months.

In response to the issues identified in reviews, we make recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, including 40 recommendations in 2016-17.

We also undertake major own motion investigations into ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities including, in 2016-17, significant work on a report on a major investigation into ways to prevent or reduce child deaths by drowning to be tabled in Parliament in 2017-18.

It is critical that major investigations undertaken by the Ombudsman are thoroughly considered, deeply rigorous and scrupulously fair - in their initiation, their undertaking and in their conclusions. In particular, recommendations made by the Ombudsman must be evidence-based, be targeted to the problem to be solved, be proportionate to the problem and carefully consider the costs and the benefits of implementing and complying with the recommendations, as well as considering any unintended, undesirable consequences of the recommendations.

At the same time, if recommendations are made after this thorough consideration, and are accepted by government agencies (as every one of our recommendations in the last ten years has been), it is critical that steps are taken to give effect to these recommendations. It was for this reason that, in 2016-17, we gave a commitment to the Western Australian Parliament that, following the tabling of each major own

motion investigation, we would undertake a comprehensive review of the steps taken by government agencies to give effect to our recommendations and then table the results of this review in Parliament.

To this end, we tabled in Parliament on 10 November 2016, *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the investigation into issues associated with violence restraining orders and their relationship with family and domestic violence fatalities*. We also undertook significant work on *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people*, to be tabled in Parliament in 2017-18.

In addition to investigating complaints, reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, and undertaking major own motion investigations, we undertake a range of functions, including the inspection of telecommunication interception records and overseas student appeals. In 2016-17, we undertook significant work on a major report on the monitoring of the Infringement Notices provisions of *The Criminal Code* to be provided, in accordance with *The Criminal Code*, to the Minister for Police and the Commissioner of Police in 2017-18.

We have continued our major program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services by Aboriginal Western Australians and those living or working in the regions. In 2016-17, we visited Broome in July 2016 and Carnarvon in June 2017. Building on this program, we commenced implementation of our inaugural *Aboriginal Action Plan* which includes a range of strategies to enhance our services for, and engagement with, Aboriginal Western Australians.

In addition, we continued work on a program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, our services for children and young people, including a dedicated visiting program to vulnerable groups of children and young people in the child protection system and a range of strategies to enhance awareness of, and access to, our services for children and young people.

In 2006-07 our Annual Report was 99 pages in length. This year our Annual Report is over 240 pages in length. This increase reflects two critical matters. First, over the past decade, we have commenced a wide range of new functions with concomitant public reporting and, second, our strong commitment to improving our reporting to Parliament and the people of Western Australia. The information we provide in our annual report is designed not just to ensure transparency of our work, but information that can contribute to improving the administration of the laws of the Western Australian Parliament.

All of this work is undertaken by a small team of 69 FTEs. My staff team have a singular commitment to achieving what Parliament has asked us to do - at the highest level of quality and the least cost to the Western Australian taxpayer. I sincerely thank each of them for their professionalism, dedication, integrity and commitment to service.



Chris Field
Ombudsman

