



## Significant issues impacting the Office

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## Significant Issues Impacting the Office

The significant issues impacting the Office are:

- Timely investigation and resolution of complaints is a significant factor in providing effective and efficient assistance to complainants and improvements to the standard of public administration. In 2016-17, 94% of complaints were resolved within three months and, as at 30 June 2017, the average age of complaints was 32 days (compared to 173 days at 30 June 2007).
- The Office undertakes 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, the Office makes recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, including 40 recommendations in 2016-17. The Office also undertakes major own motion investigations into ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities.
- The Office has continued its program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services by Aboriginal and regional Western Australians through a range of strategies, including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility program. In addition, the Office has continued work on a program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its 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, the Office's services for children and young people. The Office also continues to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen the Office's capacity in complaint handling and decision-making through a range of mechanisms.
- In addition to investigating complaints, reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, and undertaking major investigations, the Office undertakes a range of functions, including the inspection of telecommunication interception records and overseas student appeals. Over the past decade, the Office has undertaken a range of new functions, including monitoring and reporting under the *Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012* and in relation to the Infringement Notices provisions of *The Criminal Code*. In 2016-17, the Office 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 in 2017-18.

### Timely Complaint Resolution

A principal function of the Ombudsman is to provide a means by which Western Australians can resolve their complaints about the actions of public authorities. Critical principles for the Ombudsman in undertaking complaint resolution are to provide timely, inexpensive and informal resolution processes that provide, where appropriate, remedies for complainants and identify and investigate systemic issues and create improvements in public administration.

In 2007-08, the Office introduced a major complaint handling improvement program with an initial focus on the elimination of aged complaints. Building on the program, the Office developed and commenced a new organisational structure and processes in 2011-12 to support the early resolution of complaints.

As a result of the program, the Office has reduced the average age of complaints from 173 days at 30 June 2007 to 32 days at 30 June 2017. At the same time, the average cost per finalised allegation has reduced by a total of 36% from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,889 in 2016-17.

## Own Motion Investigations

One of the ways that the Office endeavours to improve public administration is to undertake investigations of systemic and thematic patterns and trends arising from complaints made to the Ombudsman and from child death and family and domestic violence fatality reviews. These investigations are referred to as own motion investigations.

Own motion investigations are intended to result in improvements to public administration that are evidence-based, proportionate, practical and where the benefits of the improvements outweigh the costs of their implementation. The Office is currently undertaking a number of investigations as shown in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#) of the report.

Each of the recommendations arising from own motion investigations is actively monitored by the Office to ensure its implementation and effectiveness in relation to the observations made in the investigation.

## Providing Awareness of, and Access to, Ombudsman Services

The Office continues to seek to ensure its services are accessible to all Western Australians, with a particular focus on regional and Aboriginal Western Australians, through a range of strategies including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program and the *Aboriginal Action Plan*. In addition, in 2016-17, the Office has continued work on a program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services for children and young people. The Office also has a number of other strategies to promote awareness of, and access to, the Ombudsman's services, as shown in the [Collaboration and Access to Services section](#) of the report.

The Office is continuing to undertake a range of strategies to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision making through a range of mechanisms, as shown in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#) of the report.

## Diversity of Functions

In addition to investigating complaints, reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, and undertaking own motion investigations, the Office undertakes a range of additional functions, including inspection of telecommunications interception records, overseas student appeals and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman.

In recent years, there has been an increased diversity of statutory inspection and monitoring functions, including:

- Monitoring and reporting under the [Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012](#); and



- Monitoring and reporting in relation to the Infringement Notices provisions of [The Criminal Code](#).

See further details in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).

