

Collaboration and Access to Services

Engagement with key stakeholders is essential to the Office's achievement of the most efficient and effective outcomes. The Office does this through:

- Working collaboratively with other integrity and accountability bodies – locally, nationally and internationally – to encourage best practice, efficiency and leadership;
- Ensuring ongoing accountability to Parliament as well as accessibility to its services for public authorities and the community; and
- Developing, maintaining and supporting relationships with public authorities and community groups.

Working Collaboratively

The Office works collaboratively with local, national and international integrity and accountability bodies to promote best practice, efficiency and leadership. Working collaboratively also provides an opportunity for the Office to benchmark its performance and stakeholder communication activities against other similar agencies, and to identify areas for improvement through the experiences of others.

International Ombudsman Institute

Background:

The International Ombudsman Institute (**IOI**), established in 1978, is the global organisation for the cooperation of more than 200 independent Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries worldwide. The IOI is organised in six regional chapters (Africa, Asia, Australasia & Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean & Latin America and North America).

The Office's involvement:

The Office is a member of the IOI. The IOI is governed by a World Board, of which the Ombudsman has served as the Second Vice-President since 2016. Before this, the Ombudsman served as Treasurer of the IOI from 2014 to 2016 and President of the Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region (**APOR**) of the IOI from 2012 to 2014. Since February 2020, the Ombudsman is the President-elect of the IOI.

2019-20 initiatives:

In September 2019, the Office delivered investigator training in Fiji as part of a programme led by the Office of the New Zealand Ombudsman. Training was delivered to Ombudsman representatives from the Pacific Island nations of Cook

Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The programme was supported through a funding grant provided by the IOI. Assistant Ombudsman, Marcus Claridge delivered material on multiple stages of the complaint investigation process alongside representatives from the Victorian and Australian Commonwealth Ombudsman offices. The United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also presented to participants.

In September 2019, the Ombudsman welcomed the Chief Ombudsman of Thailand, General Viddhavat Rajatanun, who led a high level delegation from the Office of the Ombudsman Thailand, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (**MOU**) on Bilateral Cooperation between the Ombudsman Thailand and the Office.

The Chief Ombudsman of Thailand was accompanied by Mr Boon Tapanadul, Ombudsman, Mr Somsak Suwansujarit, Ombudsman, and Mr Raksagecha Chaechai, Secretary-General. The MOU on Bilateral Cooperation was the first such agreement for the Office and the first outside of Asia for the Ombudsman Thailand.

The signing of the MOU on Bilateral Cooperation marks a significant step toward closer cooperation and collaboration between the two Ombudsman institutions and fosters further international cooperation in the field of complaint handling, good governance and Ombudsmanship. During the delegation's visit to Perth, formal bilateral discussions were held between the Ombudsman Thailand and the Office and an official high-level program of visits was undertaken to other Western Australian integrity agencies.

From 10 to 15 February 2020, the Ombudsman and Assistant Ombudsman, Rebecca Poole, attended an international seminar in Bangkok, Thailand. The international seminar, *Ombudsman in a Changing World: Resilience amidst Challenges*, was hosted by the Chief Ombudsman of Thailand on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman Thailand. The Ombudsman was a speaker in the first plenary session, *Ombudsman in a changing world: paradigm shift and challenges*, and chaired the closing plenary session, *Future of Ombudsmanship in a changing world: adaptation and cooperation techniques*.

While in Thailand, the Ombudsman met with Mr Allan McKinnon PSM, Australian Ambassador to Thailand, and attended a reception hosted by His Excellency Taha Macpherson, New Zealand Ambassador to Thailand, and Peter Boshier, Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand, to recognise and celebrate the growing role of the Ombudsman in the Asia-Pacific Region.

In February 2020, the Ombudsman was elected President of the IOI. This is the first time in the 42-year history of the IOI that an Australian has been elected President. It is also the first time that a President has been elected by IOI members. Historically, Presidents were elected by the IOI World Board. A new voting system, applicable for the first time in the 2020 election, provided the opportunity for every IOI member globally to vote for the position of President. The Ombudsman will commence his term as President at the rescheduled 12th quadrennial IOI World Conference and General Assembly in Dublin, Ireland.

Information sharing with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions

Background:

Where appropriate, the Office shares information and insights about its work with Ombudsmen from other jurisdictions, as well as with other accountability and integrity bodies.

2019-20 initiatives:

The Office exchanged information with a number of Parliamentary Ombudsmen and industry-based Ombudsmen during the year.

Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association

Members: Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen from Australia and New Zealand.

Background:

The Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (**ANZOA**) is the peak body for Parliamentary and industry-based Ombudsmen from Australia and New Zealand.

The Office's involvement:

The Office is a member of ANZOA. The Office periodically provides general updates on its activities and also has nominated representatives who participate in interest groups in the areas of Aboriginal complaints handling, first contact, business improvement, policy and research, and public relations and communications.

Providing Access to the Community

Communicating with complainants

The Office provides a range of information and services to assist specific groups, and the public more generally, to understand the role of the Ombudsman and the complaint process. Many people find the Office's enquiry service and complaint clinics held during regional visits assist them to make their complaint. Other initiatives in 2019-20 include:

- Regular updating and simplification of the Ombudsman's publications and website to provide easy access to information for people wishing to make a complaint and those undertaking the complaint process;
- Ongoing promotion of the role of the Office and the type of complaints the Office handles through 'Ask the Ombudsman' on 6PR's *Perth Tonight* program; and
- The Office's Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program and Prison Program.

Access to the Ombudsman's services

The Office continues to implement a number of strategies to ensure its complaint services are accessible to all Western Australians. These include access through online facilities as well as more traditional approaches by letter and through visits to the Office. The Office also holds complaint clinics and delivers presentations to community groups, particularly through the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. Initiatives to make services accessible include:

- Access to the Office through a Freecall number, which is free from landline phones;
- Access to the Office through email and online services. The importance of email and online access is demonstrated by its use this year in 72% of all complaints received;
- Information on how to make a complaint to the Ombudsman is available in 15 languages and features on the homepage of the Ombudsman's website. People may also contact the Office with the assistance of an interpreter by using the Translating and Interpreting Service;
- The Office's accommodation, building and facilities provide access for people with disability, including lifts that accommodate wheelchairs and feature braille on the access buttons and people with hearing and speech impairments can contact the Office using the National Relay Service;
- The Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program and Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program target awareness and accessibility for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians as well as children and young people;
- The Office attends events to raise community awareness of, and access to, its services, such as the Financial Counsellors' Association of WA conference in October 2019 and Homeless Connect Perth in November 2019; and
- The Office's visits to adult prisons and the juvenile detention centre provide an opportunity for adult prisoners and juvenile detainees to meet with representatives of the Office and lodge complaints in person.



Ombudsman website

The [Ombudsman's website](https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au) provides a wide range of information and resources for:

- Members of the public on the complaint handling services provided by the Office as well as links to other complaint bodies for issues outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction;
- Public authorities on decision making, complaint handling and conducting investigations;
- Children and young people as well as information for non-government organisations and government agencies that assist children and young people, including downloadable print material tailored for children and young people. The youth pages can be accessed at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth/;

- Access to the Ombudsman’s reports such as *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from Investigation into ways to prevent or reduce deaths of children by drowning*;
- The latest news on events and collaborative initiatives such as the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program; and
- Links to other key functions undertaken by the Office such as the Energy and Water Ombudsman website and other related bodies including other Ombudsmen and other Western Australian accountability agencies.

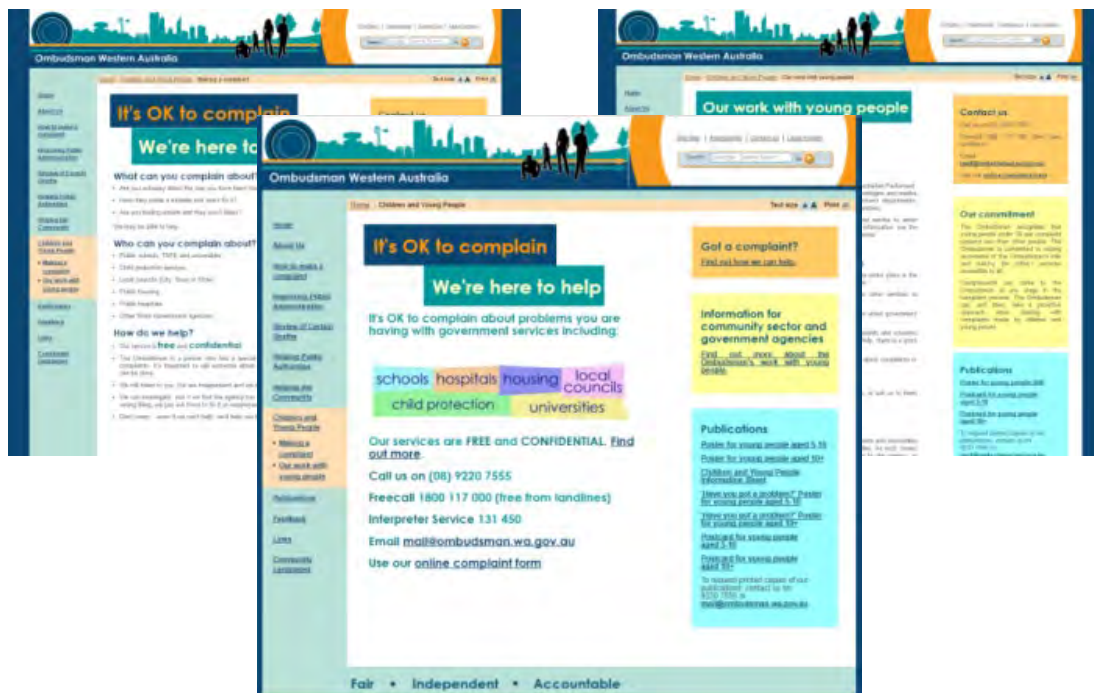
The website continues to be a valuable resource for the community and public sector as shown by the increased use of the website this year. In 2019-20:

- The total number of visits to the website was 144,228. This is a 50% increase on the number of visits in 2015-16;
- The top two most visited pages (besides the homepage and the Contact Us page) on the site were *Making a complaint* and *What you can complain about*; and
- The Office’s *Effective Handling of Complaints Made to Your Organisation Guidelines* and *Procedural Fairness Guidelines* were the two most viewed documents.

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The website content and functionality are continually reviewed and improved to ensure there is maximum accessibility to all members of the diverse Western Australian community. The site provides information in a wide range of [community languages](#) and is accessible to people with disability.

The youth pages can be accessed at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth.



'Ask the Ombudsman' on 6PR's Perth Tonight

The Office continues to provide access to its services through the Ombudsman's regular appearances on Radio 6PR's *Perth Tonight* program. Listeners who have complaints about public authorities or want to make enquiries have the opportunity to call in and speak with the Ombudsman live on air.

The segment allows the public to communicate a range of concerns with the Ombudsman. The segment also allows the Office to communicate key messages about the Ombudsman and Energy and Water Ombudsman jurisdictions, the outcomes that can be achieved for members of the public and how public administration can be improved. The Ombudsman appeared on the 'Ask the Ombudsman' segment in September and October 2019.

Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office continued the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**) during 2019-20. A regional visit was conducted to Kalgoorlie and Leonora in the Goldfields-Esperance Region in December 2019. The visit included activities such as:

- An information stall and complaint clinics, which provided an opportunity for members of the local community to raise their concerns face-to-face with the staff of the Office;
- Meetings with the Aboriginal community to discuss government service delivery and where the agencies may be able to assist;
- Liaison with community, advocacy and consumer organisations; and
- Liaison with public authorities, including meetings with senior officers and workshops for public officers on *Good Decision Making* and *Effective Complaint Handling*.

The Program is an important way for the Office to raise awareness of, access to, and use of, its services for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians. The visit to Kalgoorlie and Leonora was coordinated with the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office and the Equal Opportunity Commission.

The Program enables the Office to:

- Deliver key services directly to regional communities, particularly through complaint clinics;
- Increase awareness and accessibility among regional and Aboriginal Western Australians (who were historically under-represented in complaints to the Office); and
- Deliver key messages about the Office's work and services.

The Program also provides a valuable opportunity for staff to strengthen their understanding of the issues affecting people in regional and Aboriginal communities.



Ombudsman staff presented workshops on *Good Decision Making* and *Effective Complaint Handling* to state and local government officers in Kalgoorlie on 4 December 2019.

Aboriginal engagement

In 2016-17, the Office developed the *Aboriginal Action Plan*, a comprehensive whole-of-office plan to address the significant disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The plan contributes to an overall goal of developing an organisation that is welcoming and culturally safe for Aboriginal people and meets the unique needs of the Aboriginal community it serves.

In 2018, the Office appointed two additional Aboriginal staff: a Senior Aboriginal Advisor that reports to the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and an Aboriginal Enquiry and Investigating Officer (both of which are identified s. 50(d) positions under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*). The Office also engaged an Aboriginal artist to produce an artwork for the Office. The artwork is featured on the cover of this report and has been used as a theme for new publications.

The Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Senior Aboriginal Advisor attended events and meetings with government and non-government service providers to discuss particular issues affecting the Aboriginal community and raise awareness of the Office's role.

The Office also continued its engagement with the Aboriginal community through:

- Aboriginal community information sessions as part of its Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program;
- Visits to prisons and detention centres accompanied by Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal consultants, as part of its Prison Program; and
- Consultation with the Aboriginal community for major investigations and reports. See further details in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).

The Aboriginal staff also coordinated cultural awareness information and events throughout the year, including training on *Aboriginal Cultural Awareness* for staff of the Office, and provided information to staff about culturally important dates and events being held in the community.



Youth Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office has a dedicated youth space on the Ombudsman Western Australia website with information about the Office specifically tailored for children and young people, as well as information for non-government organisations and government agencies that assist children and young people, and a suite of promotional materials targeted at, and tailored for, children and young people.

The Office continued its proactive visiting program to vulnerable groups of children in the child protection system. During 2019-20, the Office visited two family group homes and one residential group home in the Kalgoorlie-Esperance Region in December 2019.

The Ombudsman has also continued regular visits to the Banksia Hill Detention Centre and engagement with community sector youth organisations in regional Western Australia under the Ombudsman's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.

The children and young people section of the Ombudsman's website can be found at www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth.



Prison Program

The Office continued the Prison Program during 2019-20. Four visits were made to prisons and the juvenile detention centre to raise awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and enhance accessibility to the Office for adult prisoners and juvenile detainees in Western Australia.

Speeches and Presentations

The Ombudsman and other staff delivered speeches and presentations throughout the year at local, national and international conferences and events.

Ombudsman's speeches and presentations

- *Practices and recent developments of the International Ombudsman Institute*, presentation to the 31st Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Region Conference in September 2019;
- *The Ombudsman*, presented to University of Western Australia Foundations of Public Law students in October 2019;
- *A law and economics analysis of government accountability*, presented to students as part of the University of Western Australia's advanced administrative law subject 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice', and chaired the closing session panel discussion, in February 2020; and
- *Ombudsman in a changing world: paradigm shift and challenges*, presented to the International Seminar Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the establishment of the Ombudsman Thailand in February 2020 and chaired the closing plenary session, *Future of Ombudsmanship in a changing world: adaptation and cooperation techniques*.

Speeches by the Ombudsman are available on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

Speeches and presentations by other staff

- *Theories of society, government and rule making and Theories of Accountability and Integrity*, presented by the Deputy Ombudsman to students as part of the University of Western Australia's advanced administrative law subject 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice' in January 2020;
- *Integrity in government and its agencies*, presented by the Principal Analyst to students as part of the University of Western Australia's advanced administrative law subject 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice' in January 2020;
- *Keeping Accountability Agencies Accountable*, presented by the Principal Analyst and Principal Project Officer to students as part of the University of Western Australia's advanced administrative law subject 'Government Accountability – Law and Practice' in February 2020; and
- *The Role and Functions of the Ombudsman*, presented by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Complaint Resolution to staff of the City of Kwinana, City of Perth, City of Bayswater, Shire of Northam, Shire of Mundaring, City of Cockburn and City of Swan between October 2019 and February 2020.

Liaison with Public Authorities

Liaison relating to complaint resolution

The Office liaised with a range of bodies in relation to complaint resolution in 2019-20, including:

- The Department of Justice;
- The Department of Communities;
- The Corruption and Crime Commission; and
- Western Australia Police Force.

Liaison relating to reviews and own motion investigations

The Office undertook a range of liaison activities in relation to its reviews of child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities and its own motion investigations.

See further details in the [Child Death Review section](#), the [Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Review section](#), and the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#).

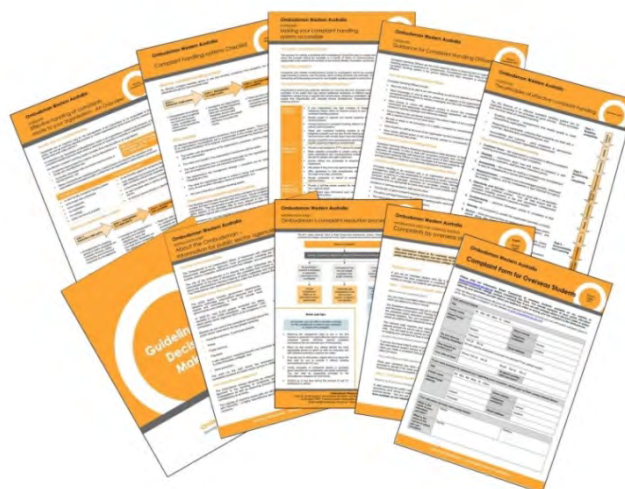
Liaison relating to inspection and monitoring functions

The Office undertook a range of liaison activities in relation to its inspection and monitoring functions.

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

Publications

The Office has a comprehensive range of publications about the role of the Ombudsman to assist complainants and public authorities, which are available on the Ombudsman's website. For a full listing of the Office's publications, see [Appendix 3](#).



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