



# Significant Issues Impacting the Office

This section provides information on the significant issues impacting the Office.

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- Own Motion Investigations
- Providing Awareness of, and Access to, Ombudsman Services
- Diversity of Functions

## 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 services to complainants and improving the standard of public administration. In 2019-20, 95% of complaints were resolved within three months and, as at 30 June 2020, the average age of complaints was 47 days (compared to 173 days at 30 June 2007). In 2019-20, timely processes for child death and family and domestic violence reviews have resulted in 60% of all reviews being completed within six months.
- In 2019-20, the Office undertook significant work on a major own motion investigation into ways to prevent or reduce suicide by young people, to be tabled in Parliament in 2020. The Office also undertook significant work on a major own motion investigation into family and domestic violence and suicide, to be tabled in Parliament in 2021.
- The Office has continued programs to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services, particularly by Aboriginal and regional Western Australians and children and young people.
- The Office also undertakes a range of other functions, including the inspection of telecommunication interception records and review of overseas student appeals.

### Timely Investigation and Resolution of Complaints

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 47 days at 30 June 2020. At the same time, the average cost per finalised allegation has reduced by a total of 37% from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,858 in 2019-20.



## 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 2019-20, 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.

## Other 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 other functions, including inspection of telecommunications interception records, overseas student appeals and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman. In 2019-20, the Office undertook work on planning and developing a reportable conduct scheme for Western Australia and expansion of child death reviews.

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