

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 President since May 2021, following a term as the Second Vice-President between 2016 and 2021. 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.

2020-21 initiatives:

In May 2021, the Ombudsman commenced his four-year term as President of the International Ombudsman Institute at the Closing Ceremony of the 12th quadrennial

World Conference of the Institute held (virtually) in Dublin. The Ceremony was attended by the Honourable Gary Gray AO, Australian Ambassador to Ireland.

This marks the first time in the 43-year history of the Institute that an Australian has been elected President. Among his first priorities will be strong engagement with the United Nations following the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the resolution, [*The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*](#). It is also the first time a President was elected by vote of the entire membership of the IOI (of over 200 Ombudsman institutions). Previously, the position of President was elected by members of the Board of the IOI. The Ombudsman received 94% of the vote.

In June 2021, the Ombudsman, as President of the IOI, delivered an opening address to the 3rd Latin American Restorative Justice Congress, held virtually. The Congress was held over three days, with more than 60 presenters from 15 countries, including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Australia, Honduras, Uruguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Great Britain. More than 4,000 people registered for the Congress.

In June 2021, the Ombudsman attended the virtual presentation of the 2020 Annual Report of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City. The Ombudsman, as President of the IOI, was invited as a special guest to the presentation by the President of the Human Rights Commission of Mexico City, Ms Nashieli Ramírez Hernández.

The virtual presentation was held in the presence of the Head of Government of Mexico City, the President of the Superior Court of Justice of Mexico City, the members of the Human Rights Commission of Congress and representatives from civil society organisations. The presentation also included a speech by Dr Raúl Lamberto, Ombudsman of the Province of Santa Fe and Regional President, IOI Caribbean and Latin America region.

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.

2020-21 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 Indigenous engagement, complaints management, corporate services and people and development, systemic issues, data and analytics, vulnerable consumers, 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 drop-in clinics held during regional visits assist them to make their complaint. Other initiatives in 2020-21 include:

- Regular updating 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 presentations and participating in events in the community; 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 drop-in clinics and engages with 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 80% of all complaints received;
- Information on how to make a complaint to the Ombudsman is available in 17 languages in addition to English 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 Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2021; 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 *Preventing suicide by children and young people 2020*;
- 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 2020-21:

- The total number of visits to the website was 105,165;
- 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.

The total number of visits to the website in 2020-21 was 105,165.

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](https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/community-languages/) and is accessible to people with disability.

Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office continued the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**) during 2020-21. A regional visit was conducted to Northam and Merredin in the Wheatbelt Region in March 2021 and the Indian Ocean Territories in June 2021. The visits include activities such as:

- Information stalls and drop-in 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.

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 and people living and working in the Indian Ocean Territories. The visits were coordinated with the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office and the Equal Opportunity Commission, with the Wheatbelt visit also coordinated with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, and the Indian Ocean Territory visit coordinated with the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (Consumer Protection).



The Office held events in Northam and Merredin in March 2021, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Equal Opportunity Commission, and Health and Disability Services Complaints Office.



Principal Investigating Officer, Deidre Govindan, and Principal Project Officer, Lindon McKenna, held events in the Indian Ocean Territories in June 2021 in collaboration with the Equal Opportunity Commission, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office and Consumer Protection.

The Office also:

- Held an information stall at the Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2021; and
- Hosted a webinar, *Independent Agency Forum for Service Providers* for community service organisations and Aboriginal organisation across the Pilbara Region in May 2021. The webinar was delivered in collaboration with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Corruption and Crime Commission, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office and the Equal Opportunity Commission.



The Office held an information stall at the Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2021.

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.

Aboriginal engagement

In 2016, the Office recruited a Principal Aboriginal Consultant, and 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 established two additional Aboriginal positions and in 2021, created a critical new executive position, Senior Assistant Ombudsman Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration (all 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 Consultant 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; 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.

In 2020-21, the Office produced a poster for children and young people translated into 15 community languages.

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



The Office also has colouring-in versions of its postcard, which were popular with children visiting the Office's information stall at the Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2021.



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

- *Role of the State/Guarantee of Rights in Exceptional Situations* presented to the eleventh assembly and seminar of the Instituto Latinoamericano del Ombudsman - Defensorias del Pueblo in November 2020;
- *The Ombudsman's role during and post COVID-19 pandemic* presented to the International Webinar Commemorating 21st Anniversary of the Establishment of the Thai Ombudsman, Bangkok, in April 2021;
- *Victims of gender-based violence or discrimination* presented to the 12th International Ombudsman Institute World Conference in May 2021;
- *Closing address* to the 12th International Ombudsman Institute World Conference in May 2021; and
- *Opening Ceremony Address* to the Third Latin American Congress on Restorative Justice in June 2021.

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

Speeches and presentations by other staff

- *The Role and Functions of the Ombudsman*, presented by the Director Complaint Resolution to staff of the City of Wanneroo in August 2020;
- *The Role of the Ombudsman*, presented by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Reviews, Senior Assistant Ombudsman Complaint Resolution and Senior Assistant Ombudsman Own Motion Investigations and Monitoring to lawyers at the Women's Legal Service WA in November 2020;
- *The Role of the Ombudsman*, presented by the Principal Project Officer in collaboration with the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office to clients of the Lorikeet Centre in November 2020;
- *The Role of the Ombudsman*, presented by the the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Reviews and the Principal Aboriginal Consultant to the Family Inclusion Network of Western Australia Inc in April 2021; and
- *The Ombudsman's Fatality Reviews*, presented by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Reviews to staff of the WA Police Force in May 2021.

Liaison with Public Authorities

Liaison relating to complaint resolution

The Office liaised with a range of bodies in relation to complaint resolution in 2020-21, including:

- The Department of Communities;
- The Department of Education;
- The Department of Justice; and
- The Corruption and Crime Commission.

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](#).

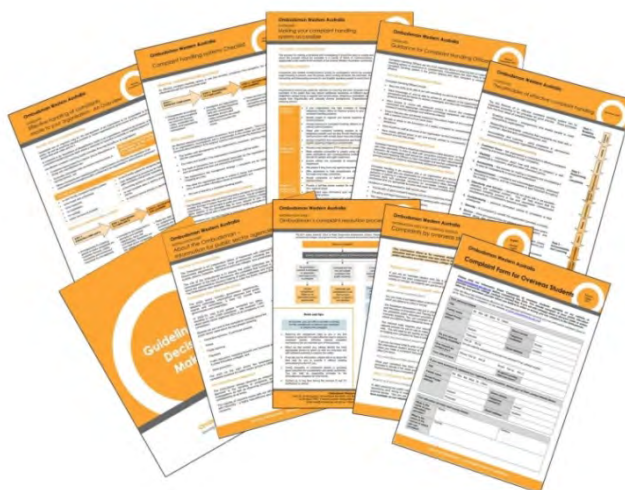
Liaison relating to inspection and monitoring functions

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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