



Significant Issues Impacting the Office

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

- Timely Complaint Resolution
- 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 is a significant issue that can impact the provision of effective and efficient resolution of complaints and improving the standard of public administration. In 2021-22, 97% of complaints were resolved within three months and, as at 30 June 2022, the average age of complaints was 37 days, compared to 173 days at 30 June 2007. Further, at 30 June 2022, the percentage of allegations on hand less than three months old was 96%, compared to 33% at 30 June 2007. In 2021-22, timely processes for child death and family and domestic violence fatality reviews resulted in 67% of all reviews being completed within six months.
- Effective and efficient resolution of complaints and improving the standard of public administration is a significant issue that can impact the delivery of the Office's services at least cost. In 2021-22, the cost of resolving complaints was 41% lower than 2007-08.
- The acceptance and implementation of recommendations made by the Ombudsman following investigations is a significant issue that can impact the Office's effectiveness and efficiency. In 2021-22, the percentage of recommendations accepted was 100%. This is the fifteenth consecutive year that 100% of recommendations made by the Ombudsman have been accepted.
- The undertaking of major own motion investigations is a significant issue that can impact improving the standard of public administration regarding the most serious matters. In 2021-22, the Office tabled in Parliament *A report on the steps taken to give effect to the recommendations arising from Preventing suicide by children and young people 2020* and *An investigation into the Office of the Public Advocate's role in notifying the families of Mrs Joyce Savage, Mr Robert Ayling and Mr Kenneth Hartley of the deaths of Mrs Savage, Mr Ayling and Mr Hartley*. The Office also undertook significant work on a major own motion investigation into family and domestic violence and suicide, with the report of this work to be tabled in Parliament in 2022.
- The undertaking of programs to increase accessibility and awareness to the Office's services can impact the provision of effective and efficient resolution of complaints and improving the standard of public administration. In 2021-22, the Office has undertaken programs to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services for Western Australians living and working regionally and remotely. These programs include a focus on enhancing awareness of, and accessibility to, its services for Aboriginal Western Australians.

- In response to the relevant recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Ombudsman has been funded to establish a legislated Reportable Conduct Scheme. In 2021-22, significant work was undertaken on the planning and development of the legislated Reportable Conduct Scheme. The Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021 was introduced into Parliament on 24 November 2021 and was read for a second time in the Legislative Council on 7 April 2022.

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 37 days at 30 June 2022. At the same time, the average cost per finalised allegation has reduced by a total of 41% from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,749 in 2021-22.

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, Monitoring and 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 and children and young people, through a range of strategies, including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program and the *Aboriginal Action Plan*. 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, Monitoring and 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 2021-22, the Office commenced a new function under the *Criminal Law (Unlawful Consorting and Prohibited Insignia) Act 2021 (the Act)*, which commenced on 24 December 2021. Under the Act, the Ombudsman must keep under scrutiny the exercise of powers by the WA Police Force to ascertain the extent of their compliance with the Act. More information about this function is shown in the [Own Motion Investigations, Monitoring and Improvement section](#) of the report.

In 2021-22, significant work was undertaken on the planning and development of the legislated Reportable Conduct Scheme. The Parliamentary Commissioner Amendment (Reportable Conduct) Bill 2021 was introduced into Parliament on 24 November 2021, was passed by the Legislative Assembly on 6 April 2022 and was read for a second time in the Legislative Council on 7 April 2022.