

## 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 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 with integrity and accountability bodies to promote best practice, efficiency and leadership. Working with these bodies 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.

#### 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.

##### **The Office's involvement:**

The Office exchanged information with other 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.

### Our involvement:

The Ombudsman is a member of ANZOA. The Office periodically provides general updates on its activities and has nominated representatives who participate in interest groups in the areas of Indigenous engagement, systemic issues and policy influence, people and development, data and analytics, 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 sessions held during regional visits assist them to make their complaint. Other initiatives in 2023-24 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 sessions 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 online. The importance of providing an accessible online service is demonstrated by the online complaint form overtaking email as the preferred method to lodge complaints for the first time. This year 45% of all complaints received were lodged through the online complaint form compared to 40% by email and the remaining 15% by post and other methods;
- 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. People with hearing and speech impairments can contact the Office using the National Relay Service;
- The Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program targets awareness and accessibility for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians;
- The Office attends events to raise community awareness of, and access to, its services, such as information stands at:
  - The City of Armadale NAIDOC Festival in July 2023;
  - The Financial Counsellors' Association of WA Conference marketplace in October 2023;
  - Seniors Recreation Council of WA 'Have a Go Day' in November 2023;
  - The Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2024; and
  - The Financial Counselling Australia Conference in May 2024.
- 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.



Staff from Ombudsman Western Australia (also representing the Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia) with staff from the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and Consumer Protection at the Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show, March 2024.



## 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;
- Organisations that work with children on the Reportable Conduct Scheme;
- 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/](https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/youth/);
- People from diverse backgrounds, including information in a wide range of [community languages](#);
- Access to the Ombudsman's reports such as *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the Investigation into family and domestic violence and suicide*;
- The latest news about 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 2023-24:

- The total number of visits to the website was 198,430; nearly double the year before;
- The top five most visited pages (besides the homepage and the Contact Us page) on the site were *How to make a complaint*, *What you can complain about*, *Making your complaint*, *Reportable Conduct*, and *Complaints by Overseas Students*; and
- The *Effective Handling of Complaints Made to Your Organisation Guidelines* and *Procedural Fairness Guidelines* were the two most viewed documents.



## Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program

The Office continued the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program (**the Program**) during 2023-24. Regional visits were conducted to:

- Carnarvon in the Gascoyne Region in September 2023;
- Esperance in the Esperance-Goldfields Region in December 2023; and
- Geraldton and Mullewa in the Mid-West Region in May 2024.

The visits include activities such as:

- Drop-in sessions, which provided an opportunity for members of the local community to raise their concerns face-to-face with the staff of the Office;
- Information sessions for the Aboriginal community, Elders and service providers, which provided an opportunity for Aboriginal communities to discuss government service delivery and where the Office may be able to assist;
- Liaison with community, advocacy and consumer organisations to provide information about our role;
- Liaison with public authorities, including a workshop on *Effective Complaint Handling* in Geraldton in May 2024; and
- Liaison with organisations that work with children to provide information about the Reportable Conduct Scheme, including an *Introduction to the Reportable Conduct Scheme* information session in Geraldton in May 2024.

The Program is an important way for the Office to raise awareness of its services and provide access to its services for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians. In 2023-24, the visits were coordinated with the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman, the Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, the Australian Financial Complaints Authority, the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety – Consumer Protection, and the Aboriginal Legal Service. This collaborative approach provides additional benefits to people in the regions as it helps provide a ‘one-stop-shop’ model for complaints.

The Office also held an information stall at the Wagin Woolorama Agricultural Show in March 2024, in collaboration with the Energy and Water Ombudsman and Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman.

The Program enables the Office to:

- Deliver key services directly to regional communities, particularly through drop-in sessions and information sessions;
- 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.





Staff from the Equal Opportunity Commission, Ombudsman Western Australia, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, Health and Disability Services Complaints Office, and the Australian Financial Complaints Authority at the drop-in session in Carnarvon, September 2023.



Staff from the Equal Opportunity Commission, Commonwealth Ombudsman, Aboriginal Legal Service, Ombudsman Western Australia, Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, and Health and Disability Services Complaints Office in Esperance, December 2023.



## Aboriginal engagement

In 2018, the Office established the Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration Branch led by an Assistant Ombudsman, the first time an executive-level position was created for the Office's work with Aboriginal people.

The Office also engaged an Aboriginal artist in 2018 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 Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration Branch members:

- Attended events and meetings with government and non-government service providers;
- Engaged with Aboriginal organisations to provide an opportunity to raise issues affecting the Aboriginal community and to raise awareness of the Office's role; and
- Participated in Aboriginal community information sessions in the regions as part of its Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.

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



## Prison Program

The Office continued the Prison Program during 2023-24. Three 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, Presentations and Training

The Ombudsman and staff delivered speeches, presentations and training throughout the year:

- Address by the Ombudsman and (then) IOI President on the occasion of the Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association annual *Meeting of the Minds* Conference in July 2023;
- *The Role of the Ombudsman* by the Manager Community Engagement and Business Intelligence to the Aboriginal Legal Service in July 2023;
- *Role of the Child Death Reviews and Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews by the Ombudsman* by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Reviews to the Youth Justice Services Team Leaders Conference in August 2023;
- An information session and roundtable meeting with staff from state government agencies and local governments as part of the regional visit to Carnarvon in September 2023;
- The Senior Assistant Ombudsman Energy and Water participated in the *Ask an Ombudsman* panel at the Financial Counsellors Association of WA Conference in October 2023;
- An information session and roundtable meeting with staff from state government agencies and local governments as part of the regional visit to Esperance in December 2023;
- *The Ombudsman and Energy and Water Ombudsman* by the Manager Community Engagement and Business Intelligence to financial counsellors hosted by the Financial Counselling Association of WA in March 2024;
- *Effective Complaint Handling* workshop by the Senior Assistant Ombudsman Energy and Water for staff from state government agencies and local governments as part of the regional visit to Geraldton in May 2024;
- *Introduction to the Reportable Conduct Scheme* presentation by the Oversight and Investigations Officer to government and non-government organisations that work with children as part of the regional visit to Geraldton in May 2024; and
- The Senior Assistant Ombudsman Energy and Water and the Principal Consultant Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration participated in the *First Nations Yarning Circle* at the Financial Counselling Australia National Conference in May 2024.

Speeches by the Ombudsman are available on the [Speeches by the Ombudsman](#) page of the website.

Staff from the Reportable Conduct Team also held 32 information sessions, in person and online, about the Reportable Conduct Scheme to various government and non-government organisations. More information is provided in the Reportable Conduct Scheme section of this report.



## Liaison with Public Authorities

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

See further details in the following sections:

- [Complaint Resolution section](#)
- [Child Death Review section](#)
- [Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Review section](#)
- [Reportable Conduct Scheme section](#)
- [Own Motion Investigations, Inspections and Monitoring section.](#)

## Publications

The Office has a comprehensive range of publications about the role of the Ombudsman, which are available on the Ombudsman's website.

A range of new publications were developed during 2023-24, particularly for the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

