



Overview

This section provides an executive summary of the Office's performance, general information about the Office and the Office's Performance Management Framework.

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Deputy Ombudsman's Overview

The Ombudsman's primary role is to investigate and resolve complaints. In 2023-24, we received 14,516 contacts from Western Australians, comprising 12,079 enquiries and 2,437 complaints.

Complaints must be resolved effectively and efficiently. In the last year, 95% of complaints were resolved within three months. The average age of complaints on 30 June 2024 was 41 days. The average cost of resolving complaints in 2023-24 was \$1,314.

The Ombudsman also reviews certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities.

At the completion of investigations and reviews, the Ombudsman has the power to make recommendations. In 2023-24, we made eight recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. This year, all our recommendations were accepted.

2023-24 was the first full year of the Reportable Conduct Scheme (**the Scheme**). The Scheme aims to make Western Australian children safer. The Scheme requires heads of organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children to notify allegations of, or convictions for, child abuse by their employees to the office of the Ombudsman and then investigate these allegations. We monitor, oversee and review these investigations.

The Scheme implements key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and provides that child abuse in organisations will be notified to an impartial and independent body; investigated and dealt with to ensure children are protected from abuse within institutions.

We also continued work on two other relatively new functions; scrutinising the exercise of powers under the Protected Entertainment Precincts provisions of the *Liquor Control Act 1988* and, as the Western Australian Charitable Trusts Commission, receiving and investigating complaints about charitable trusts.



The Ombudsman serves all Western Australians. To increase awareness of, and accessibility to, our services by those living in the regions, we visited the Gascoyne region in August 2023, the Esperance region in December 2023 and the Mid West region in May 2024. The office also conducted a range of other engagement and collaboration initiatives in the metropolitan area and as part of the regional outreach program. Members of the Ombudsman's Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration team played an important role in this work ensuring that the office was accessible to Aboriginal people in the areas we visited.

I would like to thank all staff for their professionalism and commitment to the work of the office over the last 12 months. This annual report shows only a small part of the hard work they do every day in the service of all Western Australians.

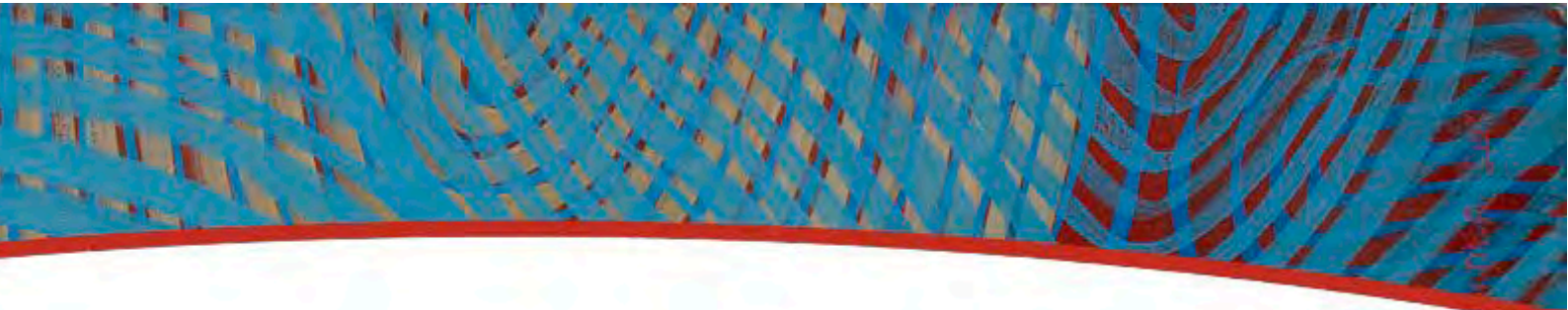



David Robinson
DEPUTY OMBUDSMAN



Year in Brief 2023-24

- We received 2,437 complaints and 12,079 enquiries.
- We finalised 95% of complaints within 3 months.
- All our recommendations were accepted.
- In relation to our review of child deaths and family domestic violence fatalities, we:
 - Received 139 notifications of child deaths of which 49 went to investigation;
 - Received 29 reviewable family and domestic violence fatalities; and
 - Made eight recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce these deaths and fatalities.

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- The Reportable Conduct Scheme expanded on 1 January 2024 to cover additional categories of conduct and additional sectors. The Scheme provides independent oversight of how organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children handle allegations of, and convictions for, child abuse by their employees. In 2023-24, we received 696 notifications of reportable conduct and, arising from the Ombudsman's involvement, organisations took 97 actions to prevent reportable conduct.
 - We tabled a report in Parliament: *A report on giving effect to the recommendations arising from the Investigation into family and domestic violence and suicide*.
 - We completed *A report of the monitoring activities of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations under Part 4 of the Criminal Law (Unlawful Consorting and Prohibited Insignia) Act 2021 for the period ending 23 December 2022*, which was tabled in Parliament by the Attorney General.
 - We enhanced regional awareness and access to the Office, including visits to:
 - Carnarvon in the Gascoyne Region;
 - Esperance in the Goldfields-Esperance Region; and
 - Geraldton and Mullewa in the Mid-West Region.
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Operational Structure

The Role of the Ombudsman

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations – more commonly known as the Ombudsman – is an independent and impartial officer of the Western Australian Parliament. The Ombudsman is responsible to the Parliament rather than to the government of the day. This allows the Office of the Ombudsman to be independent in exercising its functions.

Functions of the Ombudsman

The Office has five principal functions derived from its governing legislation, the [*Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971*](#), and other legislation, codes or service delivery arrangements.

Principal Functions

<u>Investigating and resolving complaints</u>	Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about State Government agencies, local governments and universities.
<u>Reviewing certain deaths</u>	Reviewing child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities.
<u>Undertaking own motion investigations</u>	Improving public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations.
<u>Reportable Conduct Scheme</u>	Monitoring, overseeing and reviewing investigations undertaken by organisations into allegations of, and convictions for, abuse of children involving any of the organisation's employees.
<u>Other functions</u>	Undertaking a range of additional functions, including statutory inspection and monitoring functions.

Other Functions of the Ombudsman

<u>Complaints and appeals by overseas students</u>	Under the relevant national code, the Ombudsman can receive complaints or appeals by overseas students.
<u>Charitable Trusts</u>	The Western Australian Charitable Trusts Commission, constituted by the Ombudsman, can receive and investigate complaints about charitable trusts.
<u>Public Interest Disclosures</u>	The Ombudsman can receive disclosures of public interest information relating to matters of administration, and public officers.
<u>Complaints from residents of the Indian Ocean Territories</u>	Under a service delivery arrangement between the Ombudsman and the Australian Government, the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about public authorities in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction that provide services in the Indian Ocean Territories (Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands).
<u>Complaints from persons detained under terrorism legislation</u>	Persons detained under relevant terrorism legislation can make a complaint to the Ombudsman.
<u>Inspection of Telecommunications Interception records</u>	The Ombudsman inspects the records of the Western Australia Police Force (WA Police Force) and the Corruption and Crime Commission to ascertain the extent of compliance with relevant telecommunications interception legislation.
<u>Scrutiny of police powers in relation to unlawful consorting and prohibited insignia</u>	The Ombudsman keeps under scrutiny the exercise of powers by the WA Police Force to ascertain the extent of their compliance with unlawful consorting and prohibited insignia legislation.
<u>Scrutiny of powers in relation to Protected Entertainment Precincts</u>	The Ombudsman keeps under scrutiny the operation of, and exercise of powers under, the Protected Entertainment Precincts provisions of the relevant liquor control legislation.
<u>Energy and Water Ombudsman</u>	The Energy and Water Ombudsman Western Australia resolves complaints about electricity, gas and water providers. The Ombudsman undertakes the role of the Energy and Water Ombudsman. The costs of the Energy and Water Ombudsman are met by industry members.

A full list of legislation governing these functions can be found in the Appendices Section in [Appendix 2](#).

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

Lawful, reasonable, fair and accountable decision making and practices by public authorities.

Our Mission

To serve Parliament and Western Australians by:

- Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about State Government agencies, local governments, universities and charitable trusts;
- Reviewing child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities;
- Overseeing and monitoring that relevant organisations are accountable for, and are, preventing, notifying and dealing with reportable conduct;
- Improving public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with public authorities; and
- Undertaking a range of additional functions, including statutory inspection and monitoring functions.

Our Values

- **Fair:** We observe the requirements of our legislation at all times, use a 'no surprises' approach in all of our work and provide our services equitably to all Western Australians.
- **Independent and impartial:** The Ombudsman is an officer of the Parliament, independent of the government of the day and impartial in all of our work.
- **Accountable:** We should be, and are, accountable for our performance and proper expenditure of taxpayers' money. Being accountable means being:
 - **Rigorous:** We undertake work that is important to the community and our decisions are supported by appropriate evidence.
 - **Responsible:** All recommendations for change to public administration are practical and proportionate to the problem identified and have a net public benefit.
 - **Efficient:** We undertake our work in a timely way at least cost. We value working with other agencies that further good public administration but we never duplicate their work.

Our Strategic Focus

- Complaint resolution that is high quality, independent, fair and timely, with an emphasis on early resolution, practical remedies for members of the public and improvements to public administration.
- Improved public administration through own motion investigations, making practical recommendations for improvement and monitoring their implementation.
- Review of child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, identifying patterns and trends and making recommendations to public authorities about ways to prevent or reduce these deaths.
- Protect children from harm by ensuring that organisations are preventing abuse of children involving any of the organisation's employees, and notifying the Ombudsman and taking appropriate action in response to allegations.
- Keep under scrutiny the operation of, and the exercise of powers of relevant agencies under, specific legislation, and inspect the records of the WA Police Force and the Corruption and Crime Commission in relation to telecommunication interceptions to ensure statutory compliance.
- Collaboration with other Ombudsman and accountability agencies, raising community awareness, making our services accessible and promoting good decision making practices and complaint handling in public authorities.
- Strong and effective governance and attracting, developing and retaining a skilled and valued workforce with a culture that supports high quality, responsive and efficient service.

Management

Management of the Office is undertaken by the Ombudsman and the Office's Corporate Executive which includes the leaders of the teams in the Office.

The role of the Corporate Executive is to:

- To ensure that operational activities and priorities align with the strategic direction of the Office.
- To facilitate informed decision making on policy, resource allocation, and operational effectiveness and efficiency.
- To assess the Office's performance against key performance indicators, identifying areas of success and opportunities for improvement.
- To identify, assess, and mitigate risks and challenges that may impact the achievement of organisational objectives, ensuring resilience and continuity of operations.
- To develop strategies for stakeholder relations, fostering appropriate and constructive relationships with all external stakeholders.
- To ensure the application of the principles of good governance, integrity, and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, safeguarding the agency's reputation and public trust.
- To promote a culture of innovation, service excellent and continuous improvement.

For more information, see the [Disclosures and Legal Compliance section](#).

Chris Field PSM Ombudsman

Chris Field PSM is the Western Australian Ombudsman. He concurrently holds the roles of Energy and Water Ombudsman and Charitable Trusts Commissioner. He is an Adjunct Professor in the School of Law at the University of Western Australia.



Chris was awarded a Public Service Medal in the 2023 Australia Day Honours List for 'outstanding public service as Ombudsman and President of the International Ombudsman Institute.' Also in 2023, in a formal ceremony in Taipei, he was awarded the highest honour of the Control Yuan, the First Grade Medal. The Medal was granted in honour of 'His extraordinary contribution to the promotion of international ombudsman and human rights work.' He was the 2022 recipient of the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award granted by the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights of Hungary for 'those who have achieved extraordinary, exemplary results in the field of protecting fundamental rights.'

Chris is currently Australia's longest serving ombudsman, having been appointed in 2007 at age 39 by a Labor Government, reappointed twice by a Liberal Government and then reappointed by a Labor Government. From May 2021 to March 2024, Chris served as IOI President. The IOI is the global organisation for the cooperation of 205 independent Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries, organised in six regional chapters - Africa, Asia, Australasian and Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America and North America.

He is the author of journal articles on the ombudsman and teaches an advanced administrative law unit at the University of Western Australia. He commenced his career as a lawyer at one of Australia's leading law firms, Arthur Robinson and Hedderwicks (now Allens Linklaters). Chris holds Arts and Law (Honours) degrees from La Trobe University, graduating in 1996.

Chris has been on extended leave since April 2024.

David Robinson

Deputy Ombudsman

David was appointed in February 2024. David has previously served as the Acting Deputy Director General, People, Culture and Standards in the Department of Justice and prior to that spent 20 years at the Corruption and Crime Commission, including eight years as Director Operations and 18 months as acting as Chief Executive.



Belinda West

Principal Assistant Ombudsman

Own Motion Investigations and Monitoring

Belinda joined the Office in 2008 and commenced in her current role in March 2020. Prior to this, Belinda was an Assistant Ombudsman from 2014. She has more than 30 years of experience working in the public sector in financial and performance auditing and leadership roles in both line and accountability agencies.



Natarlie De Cinque

Principal Assistant Ombudsman

Reviews

Natarlie joined the Office in 2009 and commenced in her current role in July 2019. Prior to this, Natarlie was an Assistant Ombudsman from 2016. She has worked in the State public sector for over 25 years, and has extensive experience working with the issues of child safety and wellbeing, and family and domestic violence.



Alison Cameron

Principal Assistant Ombudsman

Reportable Conduct

Alison joined the Office in 2017 and commenced acting in her current role in November 2023. Prior to this, Alison has been an Assistant Ombudsman, Director and a number of roles in Complaint Resolution. She was admitted to legal practice in 2009 and has extensive experience working in the public sector, both within Australia and Canada.



Marcus Claridge

Principal Assistant Ombudsman

Energy and Water

Marcus joined the Office in 2011 and commenced in his current role in April 2018. Prior to this, Marcus was Director, Energy and Water Ombudsman and has worked in other investigatory roles. Marcus has over 35 years of regulatory and investigations experience, both within Australia and Asia.



Christina Anthony

Senior Assistant Ombudsman

Complaint Resolution

Christina joined the Office in 2008 and commenced acting in her current role in July 2022. Prior to this, she worked in a number of roles in Complaint Resolution and Executive Services including as a Director from 2015. She has more than 15 years of public sector experience in investigations and complaint handling.



Rebecca Poole

Senior Assistant Ombudsman

Strategic Policy and Projects

Rebecca joined the Office in 2006 and commenced in her current role in April 2022. Prior to this, she was an Assistant Ombudsman from 2018 and a Director from 2010. She has extensive experience managing strategic research, policy and projects and intergovernmental and international engagement on issues of good governance.



Laurence Riley

Assistant Ombudsman

Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration

Laurence joined the Office in August 2022 as the Office's first Assistant Ombudsman for Aboriginal engagement and collaboration. Laurence is from the Wilmen, Menang, Kenang and Ballardong Clan groups of the Noongar nation, and Nanda Clan of the Yamatji nation. Laurence has 24 years of experience in government and non-government sectors in the areas of education, health, social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, justice, housing, employment services and corrective services.



Kyle Heritage

Assistant Ombudsman

Own Motion Investigations

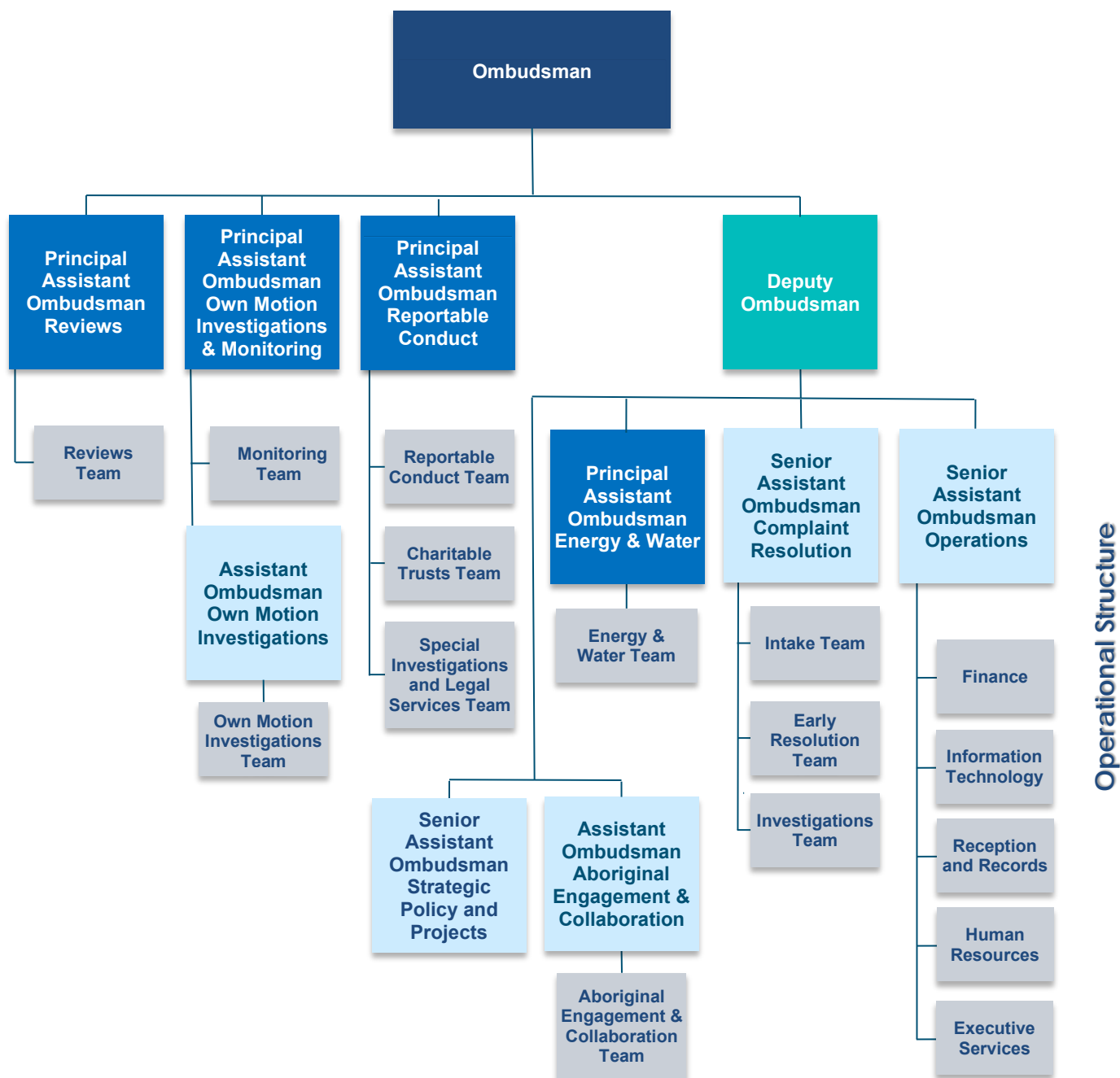
Kyle joined the Office in 2016 and commenced acting in his current role in May 2023. Prior to this, he worked in a number of senior project management, research and international relations roles. He has over 10 years of experience in the public sector in both accountability and central agencies.



The position Senior Assistant Ombudsman Operations was vacant at 30 June 2024.

Our Structure and Teams

Organisational Structure as at 30 June 2024



Team Responsibilities

- The **Intake Team** has responsibility for handling enquiries, receiving and assessing complaints and undertaking the early resolution of complaints, where appropriate.
- The **Early Resolution Team** undertakes the early resolution of complaints through informal investigations.
- The **Investigations Team** handles the investigation of complaints that are lengthy or complex.
- The **Reviews Team** reviews child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities, identifies patterns and trends arising from these reviews and makes recommendations to relevant public authorities to prevent or reduce these deaths.
- The **Own Motion Investigations Team** undertakes own motion investigations and other strategies aimed at improving public administration.
- The **Monitoring Team** undertakes the inspecting, monitoring, and reporting functions as outlined in specific legislation. This includes:
 - the inspection of records relating to telecommunication interceptions;
 - monitoring the exercise of police powers as outlined in legislation relating to unlawful consorting notices, prohibited insignia, and consorting contrary to dispersal notices; and
 - keeping under scrutiny the operation of, and the exercise of, powers as required by legislation relating to protected entertainment precincts.
- The **Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration Team** provides expert advice and support to each of the Ombudsman's functions, including continuing to promote high levels of awareness and accessibility for Aboriginal Western Australians to the Office.
- The **Reportable Conduct Team** monitors, oversees and reviews investigations undertaken by organisations into allegations of, and convictions for, abuse of children involving any of the organisation's employees, and provides education and advice to organisations about identifying and preventing reportable conduct.
- The **Charitable Trusts Team** receives complaints about charitable trusts and undertakes investigations as required.
- The **Energy and Water Ombudsman Team** has responsibility for handling enquiries and receiving, investigating and resolving complaints about electricity, gas and water services providers.
- The **Operations Teams** are responsible for Finance, Information Technology, Records and Reception, Human Resources and Executive Services. These teams support the Office in providing governance, business services, ensuring integrity and compliance of corporate services and are responsible for communications, community outreach and engagement programs and publications.

Performance Management Framework

The Ombudsman's performance management framework is consistent with the Government goal of *Safe, Strong and Fair Communities: Supporting our local and regional communities to thrive*.

Desired Outcomes of the Ombudsman's Office

The public sector of Western Australia is accountable for, and is improving the standard of, administrative decision making and practices, and relevant entities are accountable for, and are, preventing, notifying and dealing with reportable conduct.

Key Effectiveness Indicators

- Where the Ombudsman made recommendations to improve practices or procedures, the percentage of recommendations accepted by agencies.
- Number of improvements to practices or procedures as a result of Ombudsman action.
- Where the Ombudsman made recommendations regarding reportable conduct, the percentage of recommendations accepted by relevant entities.
- Number of actions taken by relevant entities to prevent reportable conduct.

Service Provided by the Ombudsman's Office

Resolving complaints about the decision making of public authorities, improving the standard of public administration, and to oversee and monitor that relevant entities are accountable for, and are, preventing, notifying and dealing with Reportable Conduct.

Key Efficiency Indicators

- Percentage of allegations finalised within three months.
- Percentage of allegations finalised within 12 months.
- Percentage of allegations on hand at 30 June less than three months old.
- Percentage of allegations on hand at 30 June less than 12 months old.
- Average cost per finalised allegation.
- Average cost per finalised notification of death.
- Average cost per notification of reportable conduct.
- Cost of monitoring and inspection functions.

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