

## About the Western Australian Ombudsman

### Who is the Ombudsman?

The Ombudsman is an independent officer of Parliament with responsibility to investigate the actions of State Government departments, prisons, hospitals, schools and technical colleges, local governments and public universities.

### What is the need for an Ombudsman?

The creation of the office of the Ombudsman recognised both the growing power of public authorities to affect people's daily lives and the need for these agencies to be accountable for this power as well as the desirability of creating a body that provides timely, accessible and low cost means for people to resolve their disputes with these agencies.

### What does the Ombudsman do?

The Ombudsman has two principal functions. First, the Ombudsman investigates complaints from the public about public administration. Second, to improve, over time, the standard of public administration. In 2007-08, over 5,000 people contacted the Ombudsman's office. The majority of concerns raised with the office are dealt with informally. In 2007-08, the office dealt with 1,119 formal complaints for investigation. The Ombudsman always observes an independent and impartial approach to the conduct of investigations as well as observing procedural fairness at all times. Information obtained by the Ombudsman in an investigation is confidential.

At the conclusion of an investigation, the Ombudsman may make formal recommendations, including to:

- refer the matter to another agency;
- rectify administrative actions;
- vary administrative practice;
- reconsider the law which underpins administrative action; or
- give reasons for a decision.

The Ombudsman places a strong emphasis on making practical recommendations about materially significant matters. The Ombudsman does not make recommendations unless it is considered that they will be beneficial to the public. In addition to this, however, the Ombudsman also considers whether recommendations made as a result of an investigation will have costs for agencies, both direct costs, including implementation and compliance costs, as well as opportunity costs. Put another way, the Ombudsman seeks to make recommendations that have a net beneficial outcome for the Western Australian public. Where the Ombudsman is not sufficiently clear about the cost and benefit of a given recommendation, the Ombudsman will seek the advice of the agency and possible external advice.