

# Significant Issues Impacting the Office

Complaint Resolution	74
Improving Public Administration	74
Child Death Review and Investigations	75
Audit and Review of Statutory Compliance	75
Good Governance and Maintaining a Skilled and Valued Workforce	76

## Significant Issues Impacting the Office

Significant achievements and highlights for the office during the year and key issues identified that will impact the office in the future are described below.

### Complaint Resolution

- The office achieved a reduction in the age of complaints and the number of older allegations on hand. The Ombudsman received 1,238 complaints and 4,000 telephone enquiries from members of the public during the financial year. The quality and efficiency of complaint handling has been improved in 2008-09 resulting in an increase in administrative improvements and significantly improved timeliness in complaint handling.
- The office has commenced a project to further improve the timeliness, consistency and quality of Ombudsman complaint resolution. The project will provide the office with a number of new resources and tools to assist it to further improve the complaint handling function.
- The office has increased awareness of, and accessibility to, its services through:
  - The Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program, which commenced during the year and focuses on regional and Indigenous Western Australians; and
  - Enhanced communication with the Parliament, the public and public authorities.
- The office will evaluate the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program visits held during 2009. Success to date indicates it is likely that the Program will continue into 2009-10 with visits to new regional areas. A comprehensive Communications Strategy will also be finalised during 2009-10.

### Improving Public Administration

- There has been a renewed focus on the Ombudsman's role in improving public administration during the year including:
  - The establishment of the Administrative Improvement Team as a dedicated resource for improving public administration through investigation of systemic issues; and
  - The development of publications and products and the provision of assistance and training to assist public authorities in good decision making and practices.
- The Administrative Improvement Team will continue to work toward improving public administration through identifying emerging topics of public interest suitable for investigation.

Two provisional topics for investigation in 2009-10 are:

- The Management of Personal Information by State Government agencies and local governments; and
- The Effective Administration of Complaint Handling Systems.
- Tools and publications to assist public authorities in good decision making and practices will continue to be developed as required.
- The Ombudsman has continued to work collaboratively with other Ombudsman offices in Australia and overseas, with other accountability agencies – including agencies that constitute the Integrity Coordinating Group (ICG) – and the four agencies co-located with the Ombudsman's office. Examples of this collaboration during the past year include ongoing strategic partnerships, the ICG Forum 2008, the development of the Unreasonable Complainant Conduct Manual and the Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.
- The Ombudsman's office will continue to foster strong relationships and work collaboratively with other agencies to improve awareness and understanding of the role and services of these organisations.

## Child Death Review and Investigations

- The legislative changes to the **Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971** came into effect on 30 June 2009 and allow the Ombudsman to review and investigate notifiable deaths of children known to the Department for Child Protection.
- The Ombudsman's office has established a small, investigative unit known as the Child Death Review Team to carry out the new function. The team will be responsible for reviewing and investigating child deaths and making suggestions and recommendations to the Department for Child Protection and other public authorities regarding the safety and well-being of children in Western Australia, with the aim of reducing preventable deaths.

## Audit and Review of Statutory Compliance

- Structure and processes continue to be improved to enable the cost effective handling of a range of functions undertaken by the Ombudsman under other jurisdictions including:
  - Handling complaints and working with educational institutions in the development of complaint handling procedures under the **National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (the Code)**; and
  - Performing the duties of Principal Inspector and inspecting officers under the **Telecommunications (Interception) Western Australia Act 1996**.
- The office is currently reviewing how the Code is being applied by education providers to support the development of enhanced assistance for educational institutions in 2009-10.

## Good Governance and Maintaining a Skilled and Valued Workforce

- The office developed and implemented the **Ombudsman Western Australia Strategic Plan 2009-11**. The Plan defines the vision, mission and values of the office and provides a strong framework for the direction of the office's activities and initiatives over the next three years.
- Skilled and committed staff are critical to the success of the office in carrying out the Ombudsman's functions. Development of a Human Resources Strategy commenced during the year and will be completed in 2009-10. This will support the attraction, retention, performance development and training of staff to undertake the diverse roles of the office.