

Significant Issues Impacting the Office

The significant issues affecting the Ombudsman's office are:

- The office has experienced a significant increase in the number of complaints since 2009-10. Managing the workload associated with the increased level of complaints is a key issue for the office.
- The office commenced a child death review function on 30 June 2009 and has undertaken a significant level of work on reviewing child deaths, identifying patterns and trends and achieving improvements in ways to prevent or reduce child deaths.
- The office undertakes own motion investigations aimed at improving administration across the public sector. The two most recent own motion investigations were a report on the effective management of personal information by State Government agencies and a comprehensive survey of the complaint handling practices of State Government agencies, local governments and universities.
- The office continues to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision making through a range of mechanisms including guidelines, workshops and the development of new products.
- The office seeks to enhance accessibility of its services by Indigenous and regional Western Australians through a range of strategies including the office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program.
- The office undertakes a diversity of functions in addition to handling complaints about public authorities and seeking to improve public administration. In recent years, the trend has been for an increasing range of functions to be undertaken by the office.

Increase in Complaints

The office continues to experience increased numbers of complaints. The number of complaints received in 2010-11 was similar to the number received in 2009-10 but significantly higher than historical levels. The average number of complaints over the last two years was 1,999 compared to the average for the previous four years (from 2005-06 to 2008-09) of 1,197 an increase of 67 per cent. The increase in complaints is across all sectors and is not confined to one public authority or sector.

The office has managed the increased workload associated with the higher levels of complaint numbers through the office's continuous improvement program, combined with economies of scale and scope arising from new functions as well as efficiencies from existing management, corporate and administration functions of the office.

Child Death Reviews

The office has developed mechanisms for undertaking child death reviews and to address broader systemic issues. The focus of this work is to identify ways to prevent or reduce child deaths. The office is working with a range of public authorities to address issues arising from specific reviews as well as the patterns and trends that arise from individual reviews. In 2010-11 significant work was done on two own motion investigations relating to the deaths of infants and planning for children in care. Analysis of individual reviews and identified patterns and trends is highlighting a range of other areas for future own motion investigations.

Own Motion Investigations

The office is increasingly using a range of tools to improve public administration across the public sector. This includes undertaking own motion investigations about key administrative practices and developing related tools and products to assist public authorities build their capacity in these areas.

Engaging Effectively with Public Authorities

The office continues to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision making.

During 2010-11 the office reviewed and updated its suite of complaint handling guidelines and workshops and developed workshops on decision making and conducting investigations. During the year, the office worked collaboratively with the [Integrity Coordinating Group \(ICG\)](#) member agencies to develop new [Integrity in Decision Making](#) guidelines which cover four key elements for decision making: power; principles; proper process; and proportionate outcomes. The product was launched at the ICG Forum in June 2011.

Providing Access to Ombudsman Services

The office seeks to ensure its services are accessible to all Western Australians, with a particular focus on Indigenous and regional Western Australians, through a range of strategies including the office's [Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program](#). This program involves a range of activities for the community and public authorities including seminars and workshops, visits to regional prisons, workshops for community groups and Indigenous people and complaint clinics.

Increasing Diversity of Functions

In recent years the office has increased the diversity of functions it undertakes. These include a child death review function, an inspection function for telecommunications interception activities, dealing with complaints from overseas students about the termination of their enrolment and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy Ombudsman.