

Ombudsman's Foreword

I am very pleased to present the 2011-12 Annual Report of the Western Australian Ombudsman. The office of the Ombudsman (**the Office**) has four principal functions, which are to:

- Receive, investigate and resolve complaints about the administrative decision making and practices of the public sector, local governments and universities;
- Improve public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with agencies;
- Review certain child deaths; and
- Undertake a range of additional functions that fit within the broad category of integrity oversight including inspections of telecommunications intercepts and investigation of public interest disclosures.



The Ombudsman also concurrently holds the role of Energy Ombudsman and State Records Commissioner.

This has been an extremely busy and productive year. Our major complaint handling improvement program, introduced in 2007-08, has ensured that over the last five years the Office has been able to manage successfully a significant increase in the level of complaints as well as continuing to achieve our key objectives of quality, timeliness and efficiency. The percentage of aged cases has fallen again this year with 99% of cases finalised within 12 months and for the fourth consecutive year the cost per finalised allegation has reduced, reflecting the efficiency dividends of the program. Overall, since 2006-07, the program has enabled us to achieve a 42% reduction in the average time to finalise complaints and an 85% reduction in the number of cases finalised older than 12 months.

This year the Office has developed and commenced a new organisational structure and processes to further promote early resolution of complaints and even greater timeliness of complaint handling, and this will be a key area of focus in 2012-13.

We have undertaken a significant level of work in relation to our Child Death Review role this year including, reviewing child deaths, identifying patterns and trends arising from these reviews and seeking to improve public administration to prevent or reduce child deaths. Our review of child deaths led to work during the year on two major own motion investigations into issues identified arising from our reviews.

A report of a major own motion investigation titled *Planning for children in care: An Ombudsman's own motion investigation into the administration of the care planning provisions of the Children and Community Services Act 2004* was tabled in Parliament in November 2011. The investigation found that since the introduction of the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (**the Act**), the Departments for Child Protection, Health and Education had worked cooperatively to operationalise the

requirements of the Act. The investigation found that significant and pleasing progress on improved planning for children in care has been achieved, however there is still work to be done, particularly in relation to the timeliness of preparing care plans and ensuring that care plans fully incorporate health and education needs, other wellbeing issues, the wishes and views of children in care and are regularly reviewed. The report included 23 recommendations for improvement, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved and we are actively monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of these recommendations. Significant work was undertaken during the year on an own motion investigation in relation to sleep related infant deaths and a report will be tabled in Parliament in 2012.

Recent years have seen an increasing diversity in the oversight functions undertaken by the Office and this has continued in 2011-12. On 1 July 2012, the Ombudsman will commence a critical new function to review family and domestic violence fatalities and we have undertaken a significant level of work in 2011-12 in preparing for this function.

In 2007, we commenced a new program aimed at addressing the historical under-representation of regional and Indigenous Western Australians in terms of complaints to the Office. The program aims to significantly enhance awareness of and accessibility to the Office and involves a range of strategies including seminars for public authorities and community groups, Indigenous liaison activities, complaint clinics for the general public, and visits to regional prisons. The program has continued this year, including development of a series of new measures to ensure that our services are as accessible as possible to children and young people.

In a particularly busy year for the Office, I take this opportunity to recognise the outstanding contribution of my staff team and thank them for their skill, commitment and hard work.

The Office is an accessible source of administrative justice for Western Australians and also contributes to improving public administration through recommendations that arise from resolving complaints and from undertaking major own motion investigations about matters of public importance. The Office is recognised as one of the key integrity and accountability agencies in government. The Office also has an important role in protecting and promoting the rule of law. In all of its responsibilities, we are committed to ensuring that the Office continues to provide services to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia that are of the highest quality. This is a commitment that I believe we have fulfilled this year.



Chris Field
Western Australian Ombudsman