



Significant Issues Impacting the Office

Fair
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Significant Issues Impacting the Office

The significant issues affecting the Office are:

- The Office has reduced the average age of complaints from 173 days on 30 June 2007 to 33 days on 30 June 2013 and, for the fifth consecutive year, reduced the cost per complaint. This is in the context of a significant increase in the number of complaints across all sectors that occurred in 2009-10 that has been maintained for the last three financial years.
- The Office undertakes own motion investigations aimed at improving administration across the public sector. In 2012-13, the Office tabled in Parliament a report of an own motion investigation into ways that State Government departments can prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths. The report contained 23 recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths.
- The Office has continued with its program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services by Indigenous and regional Western Australians through a range of strategies, including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. The Office also continues to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision-making through a range of mechanisms including guidelines and training.
- In addition to investigating complaints, reviewing certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities and undertaking own motion investigations, the Office undertakes a range of additional functions, including the inspection of telecommunication interceptions and overseas student appeals. In recent years, the trend has been for an increasing range of functions to be undertaken by the Office.

Increased Demand for Complaint Resolution Services

Complaint numbers continue at the increased levels that commenced in 2009-10. Overall, the Office has experienced an 86% increase in the average number of complaints received in the last four years (2009-10 to 2012-13), compared to the average for the previous three years (2006-07 to 2008-09).

In this context, the timeliness and efficiency of complaint handling has substantially improved due to a major complaint handling improvement program introduced in 2007-08. Building on the program, the Office developed and commenced a new organisational structure and processes in 2011-12 to promote and support early resolution of complaints. As a result of the program, the Office has reduced the average age of complaints from 173 days on 30 June 2007 to 33 days on 30 June 2013 while at the same time reducing the average cost of finalised allegation for five consecutive years. The delivery of a high quality, timely and efficient complaint handling service will continue to be a principal area of focus in 2013-14.

Own Motion Investigations

One of the ways that the Office endeavours to improve public administration is to undertake investigations of systemic and thematic patterns and trends arising from complaints made to the Ombudsman and from the review of child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities. These investigations are referred to as own motion investigations. Own motion investigations are intended to result in improvements to public administration that are evidence-based, proportionate, practical and consider the costs, as well as the benefits, of proposed improvements.

In 2012-13, the Office tabled in Parliament a report of an own motion investigation into ways that State Government departments can prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths. The report contained 23 recommendations designed to prevent or reduce sleep-related infant deaths, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved. The Office will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of these recommendations. Significant work was also done on own motion investigations relating to suicide by young people and local government collection of outstanding rates.

Providing Awareness of, and Access to, Ombudsman Services

The Office continues to seek to ensure its services are accessible to all Western Australians, with a particular focus on Aboriginal and regional Western Australians, through a range of strategies including the Office's Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program. The Office also has a number of other strategies to promote awareness of, and access to, the Ombudsman's services, as shown in the [Collaboration and Access to Services section](#) of the report, including undertaking significant work in relation to a series of new measures to ensure the Office's services are as accessible as possible to children and young people.

The Office is continuing to undertake a range of strategies to engage effectively with public authorities to strengthen their capacity in complaint handling and decision-making through a range of mechanisms, as shown in the [Own Motion Investigations and Administrative Improvement section](#) of the report.

Increasing Diversity of Functions

In recent years the Office has increased the diversity of functions it undertakes. In addition to complaint resolution and own motion investigations, the Office's functions currently include a child death review function, a new family and domestic violence fatality review function, which commenced on 1 July 2012, an inspection function for telecommunications interception activities, dealing with complaints from overseas students and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy Ombudsman.

Other functions to be undertaken by the Office arise from the [Criminal Code Amendment \(Infringement Notices\) Act 2011](#), which introduces a new scheme into Western Australia for the issue of Criminal Penalty Infringement Notices by Western Australia Police for certain offences and the [Criminal Organisation Control Act 2012](#).

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