



## Ombudsman's Foreword

I am very pleased to present the 2013-14 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 State Government agencies, local governments and universities;
- Review certain child deaths and family and domestic violence fatalities;
- Improve public administration for the benefit of all Western Australians through own motion investigations and education and liaison programs with public authorities; and
- Undertake a range of additional functions, as set out in legislation, that fit within the broad category of integrity oversight.



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

Independent, impartial, timely and efficient resolution of complaints is a critical role for the Office. During 2013-14, the continuation of our major complaint handling improvement program, introduced in 2007, resulted in 98 per cent of complaints being finalised within three months.

Overall, since June 2007, aged complaints have been eliminated (including a number of complaints over two years of age and as old as five years), and the average age of complaints has reduced from 173 days to 23 days. Over the same period, the cost of handling complaints has reduced by 37 per cent. These improvements have been made in the context of a large increase in complaints that occurred in 2009-10.

This year, we continued to undertake important work in relation to our child death and family and domestic violence fatality review roles. In April 2014, the Office tabled a report in Parliament, *Investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people*. This major own motion investigation found that State government departments and authorities have already undertaken a significant amount of work that aims to prevent and reduce suicide by young people in Western Australia, however, there is still more work to be done including:

- Practical opportunities for individual agencies to enhance their provision of services to young people; and
- Critically, as the reasons for suicide by young people are multi-factorial and cross a range of government agencies, the development of a collaborative, inter-agency approach to preventing suicide by young people.

The report included 22 recommendations for improvement, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved.

Major investigations of our own motion are informed by important systemic issues, patterns and trends that arise from our complaint investigation and review work. During the year, in addition to our investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people, we undertook work on three further investigations:

- Issues associated with Violence Restraining Orders and their relationship with family and domestic violence fatalities;
- Local government collection of outstanding rates; and
- The implementation and effectiveness of Ombudsman recommendations.

In 2007-08, we introduced a new program aimed at significantly enhancing awareness of, and accessibility to, the Office for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians. The program involves a range of strategies, including seminars for public authorities and community groups, liaison activities with Aboriginal communities, complaint clinics for the general public, and visits to regional prisons. The program has continued this year with visits to Kununurra and Wyndham in the East Kimberley Region.

In another very busy year for the Office, this is an important opportunity to thank each member of my staff team for their skill, commitment and hard work.

The Office is an important pathway for access to justice for Western Australians and, at the same time, contributes to improvements to public administration that arise from investigating complaints, reviewing certain deaths and from undertaking major own motion investigations. The Office also undertakes an important range of scrutiny and inspections functions under legislation and additional functions, such as the Energy and Water Ombudsman.

In undertaking all of these functions, the Office is committed to providing services to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia that are of the highest quality and at the least cost. This is a commitment that I strongly believe we have again fulfilled this year.



Chris Field  
**Western Australian Ombudsman**

