



**Significant
Issues
Impacting the
Office**



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The significant issues affecting the Office are:

- Timely complaint resolution is a significant factor in providing effective assistance to complainants and improvements to the standard of public administration. The continuation of the Office's major complaint handling improvement program that commenced in 2007-08 has resulted in further improvement to the timeliness of complaint handling. The Office has reduced the average age of complaints from 173 days on 30 June 2007 to 23 days on 30 June 2014. Further, the Office has no complaints older than 12 months as at 30 June 2014 and in 2013-14, 98% of complaints were resolved within three months.
- The Office undertakes own motion investigations aimed at improving administration across the public sector. In 2013-14, the Office undertook work on four investigations, into:
 - Ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people;
 - Local government collection of outstanding rates;
 - Issues associated with Violence Restraining Orders and their relationship with family and domestic violence fatalities; and
 - The implementation and effectiveness of Ombudsman recommendations.
- The Office has continued with its program to enhance awareness of, and accessibility to, its services by regional and Aboriginal 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.
- 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.

Timely Complaint Resolution

A principal function of the Ombudsman is to provide a means by which Western Australians can resolve their complaints about the actions of public authorities. Critical principles for the Ombudsman in undertaking complaint resolution are to provide timely, inexpensive and informal resolution processes that provide, where appropriate, remedies for complainants and identify and investigate systemic issues and create improvements in public administration.

In 2007-08, the Office introduced a major complaint handling improvement program with an initial focus on the elimination of aged complaints. Building on the program,

the Office developed and commenced a new organisational structure and processes in 2011-12 to support the 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 23 days on 30 June 2013. Aged cases have been eliminated, with no complaints on hand older than six months, compared to 40 at 30 June 2007. At the same time, the average cost per finalised allegation has reduced by a total of 37% from \$2,941 in 2007-08 to \$1,858 in 2013-14. These improvements are in the context of a significant increase in the number of complaints across all sectors that occurred in 2009-10.

The delivery of a high quality, timely and efficient complaint handling service will continue to be a principal area of focus in 2014-15.

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 2013-14, the Office tabled in Parliament an own motion investigation report *Investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people*. The report contained 22 recommendations designed to prevent or reduce suicide by young people, all of which were agreed to by the agencies involved. Significant work was also done on own motion investigations relating to issues associated with Violence Restraining Orders and their relationship with family and domestic violence fatalities and local government collection of outstanding rates.

Each of the recommendations arising from own motion investigations is actively monitored by the Office to ensure its implementation and effectiveness in relation to the observations made in the investigation. In 2013-14, the Office also commenced an own motion investigation into the implementation and effectiveness of Ombudsman recommendations.

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 regional and Aboriginal 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.

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 family and domestic violence fatality review function, an inspection function for telecommunications interception activities, dealing with complaints from overseas students and undertaking the role of the Western Australian Energy and Water Ombudsman.

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

