

Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner

Strategic Plan

2012 to 2017



Table of Contents

1.	Message from the Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner	1
2.	Background	1
3.	The 2012-17 Strategic Plan	2
3.1.	Our Purpose	2
3.2.	Our Values	2
3.3.	Our Stakeholders	2
3.4.	Our Outcomes and Outputs	3
3.5.	Planning Framework.....	3
3.6.	Risks and Opportunities.....	3
3.7.	Our Strategic Objectives	3
3.8.	Our Strategic Challenges	3
3.9.	Meeting our Strategic Challenges	3
3.9.1	Funding.....	3
3.9.2	Partnerships.....	4
3.9.3	Skills.....	4
3.9.4	Relevance	5
3.9.5	Flexibility	5
3.9.6	Cost Effectiveness.....	5
3.9.7	Our Work Environment	5
3.10.	Our Future - 2017.....	6

I. Message from the Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner

This plan was developed at a time when all State Government Departments and Agencies (including this Office) are facing significant budgetary pressures, now and into the foreseeable future. These budgetary pressures affect not only our ability to fulfil our statutory functions, but also have a significant impact on the quality and timeliness of the administrative decision-making of Departments and Agencies and the ability of government-run health services to meet consumer expectations. This, in turn, flows back on this Office as a rise in complaints against those Departments and Agencies.

In order to deal with the continuing increase in complaints across all jurisdictions, processes have been reviewed and revised, and resources concentrated on complaint handling (rather than the investigation of systemic issues). We acknowledge that this is a short-term and unsustainable strategy. Without substantial funding for own motion investigations, systemic issues cannot be properly addressed and strategic change achieved. Moreover, the budget pressures on the Office are squeezing our ability to handle the volume of complaints; without a sustainable funding model for the Office, service levels will continue to deteriorate and staff workloads will become unmanageable. This Plan, in part at least, seeks to find ways to address these pressures.

2. Background

The role of the Ombudsman is to provide independent assurance to Parliament and the Tasmanian community about the administrative practices of Tasmanian government agencies, local councils and public authorities. The role of the Health Complaints Commissioner is to receive, assess, and resolve complaints against health service providers and suggest ways of improving health services and preserving and increasing health rights.

The Office of the Ombudsman is currently divided into three principal sections, dealing separately with the functions of the Ombudsman, the Health Complaints Commissioner, and the Energy Ombudsman.

Under the *Ombudsman Act 1978*, the Ombudsman investigates and resolves complaints related to the administrative actions of State and Local Government and public authorities; and works in partnership with those bodies to achieve optimum standards of equity and fairness in public administration.

Under the *Health Complaints Act 1995* the Health Complaints Commissioner receives, assesses and resolves complaints about health service providers. The Commissioner works in conjunction with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency to improve the standards of health care in public and private health services, and to preserve and increase health rights.

Additional statutory functions fall to the Ombudsman, including the receipt of complaints under the *Energy Ombudsman Act 1998*, undertaking reviews under the *Right to Information Act 2009* and the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004*, and a range of functions under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002*.

The Ombudsman also provides administrative support and oversight to the Mental Health Official Visitor Scheme and the Prison Official Visitor Scheme.

This Strategic Plan establishes the overall strategic direction for the activities of the Office; it establishes clear objectives, sets out what we aim to achieve over the next five years, and why and how we will deliver these objectives. The issues it identifies are carried through into the various planning and management documents within the Office as a whole.

While this Plan covers the period 2012 to 2017, it is not a static plan. Annual reviews will ensure that the changing expectations and priorities of Parliament and the Tasmanian community are incorporated in the Strategic Plan and Direction of the Office.

3. The 2012-17 Strategic Plan

3.1. Our Purpose

To serve the Tasmanian community through the independent and impartial resolution of complaints and investigation of systemic issues relating to public administration, health care and water and energy services.

3.2. Our Values

Those who have dealings with the Office of the Ombudsman and the Health Complaints Commissioner can expect those dealings to be characterised by:

- integrity – “we will behave with integrity”;
- respect – “we will respect others”;
- accountability – “we will be accountable for our actions and decisions”;
- creativity – “we will seek to solve problems creatively”; and
- cooperation – “we will be cooperative, inclusive and open in our dealings”;

These values will also be reflected in our individual interactions as staff members of the Office.

3.3. Our Stakeholders

Our planning identified key stakeholders as Parliament (in particular, the Joint Standing Committee on Integrity), the Tasmanian community, our staff, Tasmanian government departments and agencies, local councils, public authorities, the University of Tasmania, health service providers, the energy and water corporations, prisoners, and those with mental health issues.

3.4. Our Outcomes and Outputs

We have one outcome and one output. The outcome is: *improvements in the quality and standard of public administration and the delivery of health services.*

The output we deliver to enable achievement of this outcome is *the independent and impartial resolution of complaints and the investigation of systemic issues relating to public administration, health care and energy services.*

3.5. Planning Framework

This strategic plan adopts a planning framework that focuses on the seven strategic challenges that we have identified.

3.6. Risks and Opportunities

We apply a risk management framework which addresses strategic and operational risks – these risks are managed and reviewed regularly.

3.7. Our Strategic Objectives

With our outcome and outputs in mind, we identified the following strategic objectives:

- confidence in the performance and accountability of public sector entities and health service providers; and
- improved service delivery by public sector entities and health service providers.

3.8. Our Strategic Challenges

We identified that we face and must address seven strategic challenges:

- a sustainable funding base;
- a cooperative and partnering approach that maintains the independence of the Office;
- an appropriately skilled work force;
- advice and recommendations that are relevant, practicable and achievable;
- a flexible and nimble internal structure;
- cost effective business practices; and
- an appropriate working environment for staff.

3.9. Meeting our Strategic Challenges

Our strategies are deliberately high level and will be supported by annual business plans at the business unit level.

3.9.1 Funding

Why this is an issue:

Without an adequate and stable funding base, the Office cannot deliver the range of services it is required to do by legislation (in particular, own motion investigations into systemic issues).

How we will address it:

- We will develop robust and well-researched budget business cases for consideration by Parliament.
- We will continue to improve our planning and budgeting processes to ensure that we identify and deliver on priority services.
- We will continue to look to identify savings through shared services with other like agencies.

3.9.2 Partnerships

Why this is an issue:

The Office will never have enough resources or expertise to monitor directly the quality and standard of public administration and the delivery of health services in Tasmania. We need to work in partnership with agencies and health service providers to identify and improve service delivery and outcomes in a cooperative and partnering manner.

How we will address it:

- We will develop an audit program in consultation with agencies and health service providers that focuses on identifying and addressing issues of a systemic or quasi-systemic nature.
- We will work with agencies and health service providers to assist them to develop the necessary skills and experience to identify and address issues of a systemic or quasi-systemic nature.
- We will develop training programs and training material in consultation with agencies and health service providers that meets their needs.

3.9.3 Skills

Why this is an issue:

Without an appropriately skilled workforce, the Office cannot properly deliver the range of services it is required to do by legislation.

How we will address it:

- We will ensure that adequate provision is made in each year's budget for the training and development of our staff.
- We will develop a range of plans (including workforce plans, succession plans, recruitment plans, etc) to ensure that we obtain and retain necessary skills within the Office.
- We will provide staff with an induction package, mentoring and support.
- We will continue to look to identify shared training opportunities with other like agencies.
- We will fill the gap that currently exists within the Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner in relation to professional medical advice.

3.9.4 Relevance

Why this is an issue:

If Parliament, agencies and health service providers do not see us as relevant to their needs (“part of the solution”), we risk becoming marginalised and ineffective.

How we will address it:

- We will meet biannually with the Joint Standing Committee on Integrity and Auditor-General and the Attorney-General to discuss our reports, our performance and potential audit projects and own motion investigations.
- We will consult regularly with relevant Ministers, agencies and health service providers to ensure we are meeting their needs.

3.9.5 Flexibility

Why this is an issue:

In a small Office such as ours, we need flexibility in our staffing arrangements and our structures to meet the challenges posed by our various jurisdictions.

How we will address it:

- Our duty statements and recruitment processes will reflect the need for flexibility across the Office.
- We will ensure that our staff are sufficiently skilled and cross-trained to enable them to work across our varied jurisdictions.
- We will offer staff opportunities to work in other parts of the Office on a short, medium or long-term basis.

3.9.6 Cost Effectiveness

Why this is an issue:

The Office is a key component in assisting Parliament to hold agencies and health providers to account. In order to hold ourselves to account, we must demonstrate that our processes are efficient and cost effective.

How we will address it:

- We will apply the principle of “continuous improvement” to all our processes and procedures.
- We will implement relevant risk management and business continuity processes.
- We will identify means of benchmarking our service delivery against similar Offices nationally.

3.9.7 Our Work Environment

Why this is an issue:

A safe and secure office environment, along with appropriate facilities and technology, is essential if our staff are to deliver the services expected of them.

How we will address it:

- We will provide our staff with a professional, safe and secure office environment.
- We will provide our staff with appropriate facilities enabling them to work productively.
- We will continue to look to identify savings through shared office accommodation with other like agencies.

3.10. Our Future - 2017

By 2017 we will:

- Continue to provide the independent and impartial resolution of complaints and the investigation of systemic issues relating to public administration, health care and energy services, reflecting Parliament's confidence and trust in us.
- Provide the exemplar of best practice in public administration.
- Have a strong relationship with Parliament and, in particular, the Joint Standing Committee on Integrity.
- Operate in a business-like manner, under which we set directions and targets and then go about achieving them.
- Be financially sustainable, internally efficient and effective, operating under a business model that minimizes financial risk and results in a build-up of free cash facilitating operational flexibility and greater independence.
- Be responsive to the requirements of Parliament, government departments and agencies, local councils and public authorities.
- Demonstrate high levels of staff engagement, development and satisfaction.