

Our work with Aboriginal people

The NSW Ombudsman is an impartial and independent watchdog of NSW Government agencies and certain non-government service providers. Our job is to ensure these organisations act fairly and deliver services to a high standard.

Our Aboriginal Unit helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW to resolve complaints about community services and child protection; policing; out-of-home care; education; disability services; local councils; Aboriginal land councils; housing; juvenile justice and corrections; and a range of other matters.

We also work with agencies and service providers to improve their relationships with Aboriginal communities and deliver better services to them. We regularly travel across the state to talk to communities about the quality of service provision and help them address their concerns.

Handling complaints about government agencies and community service providers

If you think you have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by an agency or service provider, you can make a complaint to us. Usually, you should try to resolve the problem first by contacting the agency or service provider yourself – if you need advice or assistance to do this, you can contact our Aboriginal Unit for advice.

Depending on the issue, we can directly investigate a complaint, look into a complaint you have already made, or take other steps to help you resolve your concerns with the agency or service provider involved. When a concern is affecting more than one individual, we may also bring together community members, agencies and services to identify local solutions and prevent problems from re-occurring.

Generally, we must refer complaints about police officers to the NSW Police Force for action, even when you complain directly to us. Only in special circumstances do we investigate directly. Police must provide us with reports of their inquiries into all serious complaints. You can contact us if at any stage you are concerned about how your complaint is being handled.

Through our audits of the NSW Police Force's *Aboriginal Strategic Direction*, we have a strong record of working with police to improve the way they work with Aboriginal communities. This includes how police respond to concerns raised by community members.

Who can I complain about?

- NSW government departments, agencies and authorities – including Education and Communities, Fair Trading, Housing NSW, Aboriginal Housing Office, Ageing, Disability and Home Care, NSW Trustee and Guardian, State Debt Recovery Office, WorkCover Authority, Roads and Maritime Services, RailCorp and the NSW Police Force.
- Community service providers – including child protection and related support services either directly delivered or funded by Family & Community Services, disability services, home and community care services, out-of-home care services for children and young people, and supported accommodation and assistance program services.
- Local councils and local Aboriginal land councils, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and the Registrar of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*.
- Corrective Services NSW, Justice Health and the Department of Juvenile Justice, and private correctional centres.
- Child protection matters – we handle complaints about the way government and certain non-government agencies, such as independent schools, have investigated allegations of a child protection nature against their employees, as well as how they handle knowledge that an employee has been convicted of an offence involving child abuse.

If you are unsure of whether we can help you or want more information, contact us or go to www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Addressing issues that affect Aboriginal communities

Since 2005 we have made more than 15 major reports and submissions that have included a focus on particular concerns raised by Aboriginal communities, ranging across issues including child protection, policing, domestic violence, asbestos management, access to housing and disability services, the impact of fines, out of home care, and probity standards for funded organisations. These reports have led to a number of practical changes to the way agencies and service providers carry out their work in delivering services to Aboriginal communities.

Our work with Aboriginal people

Aboriginal child sexual assault

A major focus of our work with Aboriginal communities in recent years has been our audit of the *NSW Interagency Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities 2006-2011*, which we were legislatively required to complete by the end of 2012. As part of the audit, we visited and consulted with community leaders and government and non-government service providers in 12 specific locations across the state to hear directly from them about what needs to change to create an environment where children are safe and communities can thrive.

Our final report – which was made public in January 2013 – made 93 recommendations aimed at improving systems and services to respond to Aboriginal child sexual abuse, and to address disadvantage in Aboriginal communities more broadly. Together with our 2011 report, *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently*, it has influenced the recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs and the subsequent development of Ochre – the NSW Government's strategy for Aboriginal affairs which was released in April 2013.

As well as recognising the strong importance for Aboriginal communities of healing; changing the way educational services are delivered; creating genuine economic development and employment opportunities; and building capacity to enable local decision making about local service delivery – the strategy implements our recommendations about the need for improved coordination and oversight, including the establishment of an independent Aboriginal advisory body, to ensure the government is making real progress.

We will continue to monitor the implementation of our recommendations by government agencies, and to work with communities and service providers to assist them to respond more effectively to child sexual assault and related issues.

Children in out of home care

We have a strong record of working to improve service delivery for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care (OOHC). We work with Aboriginal OOHC agencies to strengthen their systems and practices for handling complaints and fulfilling their child protection responsibilities, including responding to child protection allegations about employees. We have also worked to improve the support that is provided to carers of Aboriginal children. With the transition of most OOHC from Community Services to non-government organisations, we will continue to focus on this important area of service delivery.

Aboriginal cultural awareness and working with Aboriginal communities training

Our Aboriginal Unit is available to deliver comprehensive training workshops to staff of other government and non-government agencies. Our *Aboriginal cultural appreciation* training provides an overview of Aboriginal history and culture, as well as culturally appropriate communication protocols and relationship building strategies to assist organisations to provide responsive, flexible and consistent services to Aboriginal people. Our *Working with Aboriginal communities* training focuses on the key elements of good consultation and strategies to assist organisations to more effectively engage and consult with Aboriginal people. Both workshops training provide opportunities for participants to hear personal stories, and to workshop scenarios specific to their situations and responsibilities. For more information about our training, contact us or visit our website.



Contact us for more information

Our business hours are: Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm (*Inquiries section closes at 4pm*)

If you wish to visit us, we prefer you make an appointment. Please call us first to ensure your complaint is within our jurisdiction and our staff are available to see you.

Level 24, 580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Email nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
or email our Aboriginal Unit directly:
AU@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Web www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

General inquiries 02 9286 1000
Facsimile 02 9283 2911

Toll free (outside Sydney metro) 1800 451 524
Tel. typewriter (TTY) 02 9264 8050

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS): 131 450
We can arrange an interpreter through
TIS or you can contact TIS yourself before
speaking to us.