



Our Community Engagement Strategy



Aim

The aim of this Community Engagement Strategy is to demonstrate and further develop our commitment to listening to, providing accurate and meaningful information to, and engaging with members of the public and communities across NSW.



Our role

As the State Parliamentary Ombudsman of NSW, we:

- seek to resolve complaints about the conduct of NSW public authorities (including local councils) and NSW Government-funded community service providers¹
- conduct investigations where those public authorities or community services providers may have engaged in unlawful or otherwise wrong conduct (whether or not we have received a complaint)
- monitor and assess certain government programs (including Aboriginal Programs)
- oversight the NSW public interest disclosures (whistleblowing) regime
- conduct inquiries and reviews of systemic issues affecting the public and community sectors, and
- review the deaths of children and people with disability in supported group accommodation in NSW, with a view to preventing similar deaths in the future.



Our key statutory relationships

The NSW Ombudsman is fully independent of the NSW Government. We are also independent of both those who complain to us and those about whom complaints may be made. We act impartially in the public interest, and report directly to Parliament.

Under the legislation, our key relationships are with:

- The ***NSW Parliament***, from whom we derive our powers and funding, and to whom we report and provide advice.
- Individuals who complain to us about the services or treatment they have received from NSW public authorities or community service providers, or about other wrong conduct they witness (***complainants***).
- NSW public authorities, other agencies delivering public services (including correctional centres and state-owned corporations) and agencies delivering community services about:
 - whom we may receive and resolve complaints,
 - whose conduct, systems or programs we investigate, monitor, keep under scrutiny and/or review
 - whom we make recommendations and suggestions, as well as provide educational and other guidance to support improved practice.
- The ***NSW Child Death Review Team***, which we support and provide assistance to, and the ***Public Interest Disclosures Steering Committee***, which provides advice to the Minister on the Public Interest Disclosures Act and on our PID reports.

¹ There are some public authorities that we cannot receive complaints about. These include Courts and judges, as well as the NSW Police Force and its officers.



Engagement with people and communities across NSW

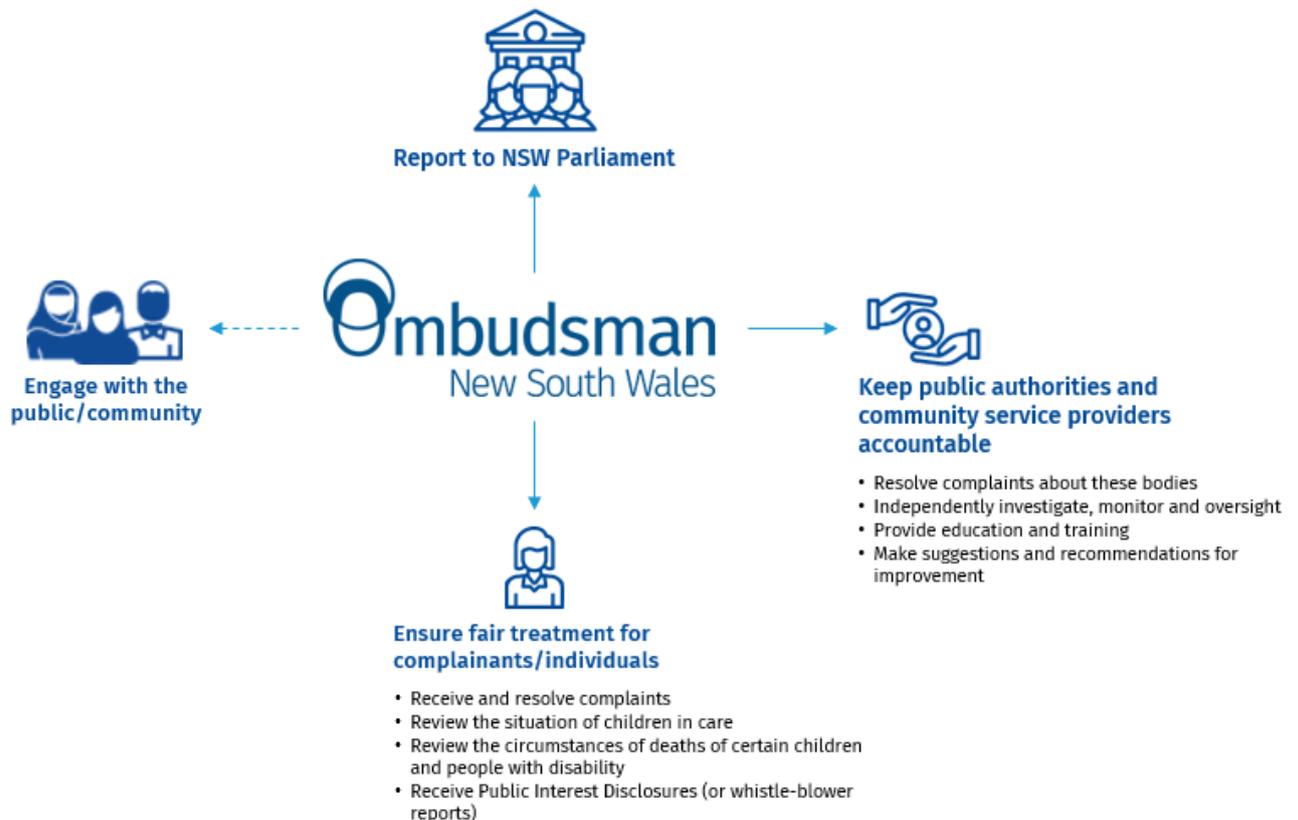
We are committed to serving all people and communities in NSW, and our vision is to ensure that everyone receives the right services and fair treatment from those we oversight.

It is critical that we engage with people and communities across NSW to ensure that:

- everyone who needs our services is aware of their right to complain to us, understands what we do, and is able to access our services
- we understand the issues of importance affecting communities in relation to matters within our jurisdiction, including so that we can better target our limited resources toward matters of serious or systemic concern, or toward key stakeholders
- the information we provide is always accurate, meaningful and easy to understand
- we are continuously improving the way we deliver our services and perform our functions, to ensure that they are as effective and efficient as possible, and meet community expectations
- when we find that the conduct of public authorities or community service providers is unreasonable, wrong or unlawful, there is awareness and confidence that those agencies are being held accountable
- we can make recommendations and suggestions for public and community sector improvements that are practical, effective and impactful.

The diagram below highlights how this Community Engagement Strategy fits connects with our stakeholder network:

Our Community Engagement Strategy





NSW communities

There is little agreement about the nature of ‘community’. In some circumstances this term is used to mean people who live in a particular neighbourhood or place. However, community is not limited to a geographic neighbourhood group and people may belong to multiple communities.

For our purposes, we mean community in its broadest sense, to include all formal and informal groupings or cohorts within the broader public of NSW.

Our work supports the public of NSW at large and all of its individual members, and we are committed to broad engagement with communities across NSW.

However, we also recognise that there are some communities whose members are more likely than others to **need** our services and assist us to effectively perform our functions. This may be because their interactions with public authorities or community services providers are more frequent or more intensive. It may also be because they have limited access to other ways of ensuring that agencies and service providers treat them in a lawful, reasonable and appropriate way.

These same communities may also be ones whose members would be less able to **access** our services, unless we can proactively reach out to them. This may include because they are less aware of, or find it more difficult to understand, their rights or because they otherwise face challenges in accessing necessary information or services.

Because of this, our Community Engagement Strategy includes specific focus communities, with whom we may need to do more work proactively (and, where possible, with assistance from or in partnership with relevant community stakeholders) to ensure that we are listening to, informing and involving all relevant communities in our work.

The focus communities we have identified as areas of focus for the actions under this Strategy include:

- Aboriginal people and communities
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- people in, or recently released from, custody
- children and young people
- people with disability.

As well as the above focus areas, we recognise other groups and communities that may face particular vulnerabilities or service access challenges, including the elderly, those living in remote and regional areas, and those who are homeless or in unstable accommodation. We will continue to also engage with these communities and may consider the inclusion of additional focus communities under this strategy in future.

We also note that, for some of the focus communities above, there will be different cohorts within them whose needs may also differ. We will seek where we can to identify areas where specific attention may be warranted, such as for young people identifying as LGBTIQ+, members of the CALD community who are more recently arrived including refugees and temporary arrivals, and Aboriginal people living in rural and regional communities.



Our commitment to Engagement

Our level of engagement with communities will vary depending on the communities we are working with and the activities we are undertaking at the time.

This Community Engagement Strategy identifies five levels of engagement. These levels can be thought of as representing a spectrum from one-way communication (inform) through two-way dialogue (consultation) to working together (collaborative engagement). They also represent a

spectrum from reactive (listen and respond) to more proactive (outreach, consultation and collaborative engagement) approaches.

However, the levels are overlapping and multiple levels will often be relevant at the same time.



Inform:

Provide relevant and accurate information and advice about our services and the work we have done in a timely manner, in a way that is accessible, understandable and useful to those who receive it.



Listen:

Listen and respond to community members and representatives who raise issues that are of concern to them, including complaints about, and suggestions for ways we can improve, our own services. This requires the competency to appreciate the diverse contexts and communication needs of different communities.



Outreach:

Be visible in the community, and proactively engage communities in dialogue, providing opportunities for them to share their insights and to raise issues of concern to them.



Consultation:

Proactively seek information, insights and views from communities about both where we should focus our efforts as well as on the particular issues we are examining; and take this advice into account in our own decision-making.



Collaborative engagement:

Work co-operatively with community-based agencies and other stakeholders who represent or have close connections with communities, to enable us to better reach, inform, listen to and consult with those communities and their members.



How we engage

Currently the channels and activities through which we undertake community engagement at each of the above levels is outlined below.

Engagement level	Channel	What we will do in practice
Inform	Website	Maintain our website to provide information about what we can and cannot do, and how people can access our services.
	Brochures, factsheets and guides	Make information available online and in hard copy formats.
	On-site posters and notices of our service availability	<p>Work with public authorities and community service providers to ensure that their customers are given notice of our services, including their right to complain to us.</p> <p>We do this by installing posters (eg. in correctional facilities), providing brochures (eg. at front-line points of service), and by asking that relevant information be included in any official notice of decision about which a complaint to us may be made.</p>
	Social media	Highlight key issues via a range of platforms including Facebook, twitter and LinkedIn.
	Annual Report	Publish an Annual Report in accordance with the <i>Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985</i> .
	Public Reports	Provide copies of each report to key stakeholders and publicise their release via our website and social media channels.
	Training for agencies and service providers and delivering information sessions for specific groups	Provide a range of training, workshops and information sessions.
Listen and respond	Online complaint form	Provide an online complaint form so that people can make complaints online if this is their preference.
	Call centre	Receive complaints and provide information and advice by telephone between 9-12am and 1-4pm Monday to Friday.

	Drop-in appointments	Receive complaints and provide information and advice in-person, by appointment, in our Sydney CBD office.
	Feedback Assist Widget	Receive and review feedback and, where appropriate, refer feedback to agencies.
	Reviews and complaints	Review, when requested, decisions we have made about complaints.
	Surveys	Consider ways to improve our customer service, including seeking feedback by way of surveys.
Outreach	Community visits	Visit communities to ensure we perform our functions in a robust manner (eg. monitoring Aboriginal programs), learn about issues affecting communities and provide information about our role and the services we provide.
	Correctional centres and youth justice centre visits	Visit custodial facilities to receive and investigate complaints.
	Community events	Participate in community events, such as holding information stalls.
Consultation	Roundtables	Host (and/or participate in) roundtables with agencies or communities to canvass issues relating to certain issues within our jurisdiction.
	Consultation/issues papers and exposure drafts	Seek input into, and feedback on, work we undertake and publications we produce.
	Community consultation meetings	Engage with communities and community members on issues within our jurisdiction that are affecting them, and about our own functions and service provision.
Collaborate	Work with front-line service providers	Work with agencies and service providers who provide front-line services to community members and support them to provide information about our role and functions to their clients.



Annual actions

We will develop annual action plans outlining the practical steps we plan to take as we seek to further develop and deepen our community engagement.

As outlined in our Strategic Plan 2020-25 (see www.ombo.nsw.gov.au) these initiatives are aimed particularly at ensuring that the public, including the most vulnerable members of the community, understand our role, can access our services, and have trust and confidence that we will help.

Our 2021 Annual Action plan is set out in the Annexure, and will be updated annually.



Progress and reporting

Each year we will publish in our Annual Report the progress of activities aligned to this strategy.

We will monitor and review our engagement activities at least annually in order to identify areas for improvement and efficiencies.

We welcome feedback and suggestions about this strategy, and how we can better engage with communities across all the work we do.



Contact us

02 9286 1000

1800 451 524 regional/charges may apply on mobile phones

Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) 131 450

If you are deaf, have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the: [Accesshub | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications](#)

- Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 02 9286 1000.
- **NRS Internet relay** users connect then ask for 02 9286 1000.

Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au



Annexure: 2021-22 Actions

Community Focus	Action	Engagement level
NSW community members	Establish and publish an annual community engagement schedule	Outreach
	Review and update information on our existing website	Inform
	Review and update our online complaints form	Listen
	Continue to provide Plain English training to staff across the office	Inform
	Conduct preliminary analysis of existing customer satisfaction surveys, and commence planning survey process for 2022	Listen & Consult
	Progressively refresh all Ombudsman fact sheets, brochures and guidelines	Inform
	Work to enhance our relationships with community legal centres and support them to provide information about our role and functions to their clients	Collaborate
Aboriginal people	Continue to implement our office-wide Aboriginal cultural competence framework and provide training and support for all staff Continue to implement office-wide Aboriginal cultural protocol consultation and support for all staff	Listen
	Engage with Aboriginal people and communities through scheduled community visits	Outreach
People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities	Promote staff participation in cultural inclusion programs and training	Listen
	Ensure people who contact our office have access to an interpreter if required	Listen and Inform
	Review, in consultation with stakeholders, our information in community languages and work to make it more accessible	Listen and inform
	Develop and publish a new Multicultural Plan to outline how we will better meet the needs of culturally diverse communities	Inform and Collaborate
	Engage in targeted consultation and engagement with culturally diverse communities, and services that support them, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve community members' understanding about our purpose and functions • seek feedback about the accessibility of our services • improve our accessibility and service delivery 	Listen, Inform and Outreach

People in, or recently released from, custody	Implement intensive training and upskilling of staff to respond to custodial complaints	Listen
	Maintain a schedule of regular visits to correctional centres and youth justice centres	Outreach
	Collaborate with the Inspector of Custodial Services to share insights and co-ordinate timing of visits/inspections	Collaborate
Children and young people	Engage in targeted consultation and engagement with children and young people, and services that support them, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve community members' understanding about our purpose and functions • seek feedback about the accessibility of our services • improve our accessibility and service delivery 	Listen, Inform and Outreach
	Engage with children and young people through scheduled community visits	Outreach
People with disability	Work to enhance our relationships with disability services and support them to provide information about our role and functions to their clients	Collaborate