



Western Australia's Reportable Conduct Scheme: A review of systems to protect children

April 2025

Aim of the Scheme

- The *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* highlighted the numerous times and ways in which children reported abuse and were not believed, or no action was taken. The Royal Commission recommended that States and Territories establish Reportable Conduct Schemes to prevent harm to children by holding organisations accountable for the conduct of their staff.
- Western Australia's Reportable Conduct Scheme (**the Scheme**) commenced on 1 January 2023. The Scheme compels heads of organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children to notify the Ombudsman of allegations and convictions for child abuse by their employees and then investigate these allegations.
- The Scheme covers organisations in a range of settings including schools, religious institutions, childcare centres, hospitals, detention centres and out-of-home care.
- Organisations covered by the Scheme are required to have systems in place for preventing, notifying and dealing with reportable conduct. Implementation of these systems is fundamental to the protection of children and compliance with the Scheme's requirements.

Purpose of this report

- The purpose of this report is to build the capacity of organisations and inform Parliament of the operation of the Scheme. To do this we examined allegations notified to the Ombudsman over an 18-month period and asked organisations about their compliance with requirements to have systems in place under the Scheme.
- More specifically, we:



- examined 889 notifications to the Ombudsman from the first 18 months of the Scheme;



- administered and analysed a survey completed by 1,191 organisations on the systems they had implemented under the Scheme; and



- reviewed over 6,000 pages of documents provided by 39 organisations to identify, in further detail, areas of good practice and where improvement is required.

What we found

- We found that there has been an increasing number of notifications over the duration of the Scheme. Between January 2023 and June 2024, the number of notifications to the Ombudsman increased from 8 per month to 85 per month.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 (87.6%) notifications were from the education, out-of-home care and early childhood education and care sectors. Allegations of physical assault were by far the most common.
- Our analysis suggests there is likely to be under-reporting. The types of conduct and organisations introduced in the second year of the Scheme were subject to a lower than anticipated number of notifications.
- The survey results suggest that awareness and understanding of the Scheme is still developing. Overall, 72.6 per cent of organisations reported at least partially implementing all required systems. This includes 39.3 per cent reporting they have fully implemented all required systems. Local governments and religious organisations reported the lowest level of compliance.
- Areas where improvement is required included:
 - the lack of integration of the Scheme into the reporting systems of organisations;
 - the readiness of organisations to investigate allegations of reportable conduct; and
 - the adequacy of procedures in place for the storage, access and disclosure of investigation information.
- Common barriers to the implementation of systems included a lack of understanding of the systems required; the management of the Scheme's obligations alongside other reporting obligations; and, the availability of staff. Barriers to the implementation of systems were dependent on the size and sector of the organisation – no single predominant barrier was reported.

Next steps

- The implementation of systems is essential to ensuring allegations of child abuse are not dismissed, ignored or mishandled.
- We will continue to educate and build capacity of organisations covered by the Scheme through guidance materials, webinars, training sessions and a dedicated enquiries line, as well as through individual engagement with organisations that have submitted notifications. As this report demonstrates some organisations are not complying with key parts of the Scheme, we will closely monitor these issues and target our efforts to areas of greatest need and risk.

The full report is available on the [Ombudsman's website](#).

