

Reporting abuse in Defence – Nominating another person to act on behalf of a reportee

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, within its Defence Force Ombudsman (DFO) jurisdiction, provides an independent, external and impartial mechanism for people to report historical and contemporary serious abuse in the Australian Defence Force.

For a variety of reasons the person making the report of abuse may nominate a person to act on their behalf during the reporting abuse process. The person nominated to act on behalf of a reportee is known as an OBO (On Behalf Of). An OBO can be a partner, family member, friend, or a professional support worker (e.g. advocate or counsellor.)

I am making a report of abuse. Am I required to have an OBO?

A person making a report of abuse is not required to arrange for another person to act on their behalf through the reporting abuse process. **In fact, the majority of our reportees do not nominate another person to act on their behalf.**

How to organise for another person to act on your behalf

If you choose to have another person act on your behalf, and that person is not your legal guardian or legal representative, you will need to give your written consent for that person to communicate with our Office.

You must complete the [permission for another person to act on my behalf form](#).

The OBO role may include the following:

- familiarising yourself with the reporting abuse process
- assisting the reportee to submit the completed statutory declaration reporting abuse form
- contacting the reportee when the DFO requests further information and passing on the further information to the DFO
- once the assessment is complete, informing the reportee of the decision letter(s) and the possible next steps
- informing the DFO if the reportee requests a review of the decision
- passing on direct contact details of the reportee to the DFO to discuss the Restorative Engagement program
- acting in the best interests of the reportee at all times.

Withdrawing from the role of OBO

Contact us

ombudsman.gov.au
1300 362 072

GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

The Ombudsman has offices in:

- » Adelaide
- » Brisbane
- » Canberra
- » Melbourne
- » Perth
- » Sydney

- An OBO can withdraw from their role at any time during the reporting abuse process.
- A reportee can also let us know they no longer wish for the DFO to communicate with their OBO.

Should this happen, we encourage the reportee or the OBO to inform the other party or give the DFO the consent to do so. We can contact the reportee or OBO, advising them the OBO arrangement has been cancelled at your request.

We are aware that communicating with people who have experienced serious abuse can be challenging. In handling reports of serious abuse within Defence, we use a trauma-informed service delivery approach. This approach recognises that the greater the exposure to traumatic material, the greater the risk of vicarious trauma for helpers, including those persons who are acting as an OBO (<https://www.blueknot.org.au/Workers-Practitioners/For-Health-Professionals/Resources-for-Health-Professionals/Vicarious-Trauma>).

With this in mind, our preference is that OBOs have not experienced trauma themselves. We will, in any case, monitor communications with OBOs and may decline an OBO if we have reason to believe there is a risk of vicarious trauma occurring.

Where to find support

Where an OBO finds they are feeling distressed they are encouraged to talk with the Liaison Officer to discuss the suitability of continuing with the OBO role. Additionally below are the contact details for services that can provide further support:

Lifeline: **13 11 14**

Beyond Blue: **1300 224 636**

Open Arms: **1800 011 046**

Providing false or misleading information

A person who intentionally makes a false statement in a statutory declaration is guilty of an offence under s 11 of the *Statutory Declarations Act 1959A*. If you intentionally make a false statement in a statutory declaration you can be charged with a criminal offence which carries the possibility of up to four years imprisonment.

If a reportee or their OBO provides false or misleading information to the Office in relation to the reportee's Application for Reparation Payment under the Guidelines, the Application for Reparation Payment may be rejected.

More information is available at ombudsman.gov.au.

Please note: This document is intended as a guide only. For this reason, the information should not be relied on as legal advice or regarded as a substitute for legal advice in individual cases. To the maximum extent permitted by the law, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is not liable to you for any loss or damage suffered as a result of reliance on this document. For the most up-to-date versions of cited Acts, please refer to the [Federal Register of Legislation](#).