Ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making

Commonwealth Ombudsman

COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

- What builds trust?

- Robodebt and the Ombudsman

- How do agencies respond to complaints?

- Whistle-blowing

- The importance of remediation

- How can integrity agencies assist?

- What does this mean for AI in the public sector?

Where are we on trust?

- Covid – decline in social cohesion?

- Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 – declining trust in public sector

- 2024 Prime Minister & Cabinet Trust report – stable trust in Australian public services

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What builds trust?

- Competence

- Clear communications that work for the community

- Simple-to-use systems that work for the community

- Transparency and accountability

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My Office's experience

- 24,000 contacts and complaints per year

- 20 statutory functions

- Independent and impartial

- Impartiality v advocacy

- Transparency v confidentiality

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Commonwealth and ACT roles

Private Health Insurance	Overseas Students	National Student Ombudsman (2025)	Australian National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) Coordinator
Postal Industry	VET Student Loans	Immigration Ombudsman	Commonwealth NPM (as Cth O)
Defence Force	Law Enforcement & Integrity Oversight	Public Interest Disclosures	ACT NPM (as ACT O)

Commonwealth and ACT Roles

Inspector of Integrity Commission

Principal Officer to the Judicial Council

Freedom of Information Act oversight

Reportable Conduct Scheme oversight

ACT Ombudsman

Part of the integrity system

Agencies who act independently but share observations

- National Anti-Corruption Commission

- Australian National Audit Office

- Commonwealth Ombudsman

Working with other independent monitoring agencies

Robodebt and thereafter

- Strong criticism by Royal Commission

- How do we deliver public value?

- Being clear on our purpose

- Using our powers

- Engaging with civil society

- Transparency on our performance

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How do agencies respond to allegations?

- Agency convenience and process design

- Defensive or curious?

- "We don't get any complaints"

- Damage control

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Whistle-blowing

- The stigma of PIDs

- The risk of reprisals

- Disproving allegations v curiosity

- Transparency and PIDs

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The importance of remediation

- Agencies should follow the law

- "The law is wrong"

- A remedy for those impacted

- "Should we tell?"

- Remediation and accountability

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How can integrity agencies assist?

- Be willing to call out issues

- Clear advice about the problem

- Clear advice about how to improve

- Aim for penetration with advice

- Follow up implementation

- Identify good practice

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The use of AI in the public sector

- Potential efficiency gains

- The speed of AI can be an issue

- Plan for remediation at scale

- Remediation and accountability

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Q&A session

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