



Ombudsman Quarterly Review

The quarterly update from the
Ombudsman New Zealand
with news, reports,
investigations, and more.



From the Chief Ombudsman

Kia ora koutou

This is my first column for the Ombudsman Quarterly Review since my appointment as Chief Ombudsman at the end of March.

I have been very impressed by the calibre of the people who work for us and the high regard in which our institution is held.

I wanted to join the Ombudsman's Office because I knew the organisation had played such an important constitutional role in New Zealand since its establishment in 1962.

I aim to build on the work of my predecessors.

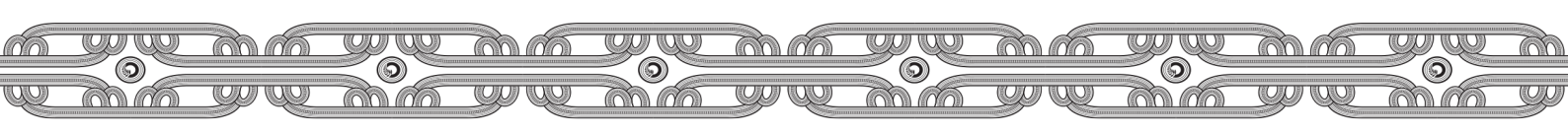
One of the most important roles is the protection of our democracy. The Ombudsman shines a light on elements of government administration and decision-making. The Office oversees our freedom of information laws, which are so important. They provide New Zealanders with the ability to access information they need to engage in decisions that have an impact on us all. This access helps build confidence in public institutions - a fundamental issue at a time when trust in institutions around the world is declining.

We continue to receive a large volume of complaints and one of the key objectives during my term is to resolve them more quickly.

In the past three months, we have been reviewing our processes and priorities to identify efficiency gains so we are able to give complainants and agencies more timely results.

We will be looking to make greater use of technology including such enablers as artificial intelligence (AI). I believe this will also make us faster and more agile.

At the end of the day, we need to deliver results and reports, which have impact and drive systematic change.



We are a national organisation. Our work needs to be visible throughout the country.

A big focus for me will be engaging with people and understanding things from their perspective.

Shortly, we will be ramping up our engagement with the different communities that make up New Zealand to increase trust and awareness in our Office and, in turn, trust in government.

You'll hear more from me on our progress in the coming months.

John Allen
Chief Ombudsman



The Office formally welcomed John Allen with a pōwhiri.

Protected disclosures - survey results and new guidance

The Protected Disclosures (Protection of Whistleblowers) Act 2022 enables a person who becomes aware of serious wrongdoing in their work environment to report this within their workplace (to their employer) or externally to an appropriate authority.

We recently reported the results of our last survey on protected disclosures. There has been an increase in New Zealander's awareness of the Act, to 36 percent. However, only half of those surveyed (48 percent) thought they would be safe to report serious wrongdoing. The most common way to help people feel safe was to provide an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. This demonstrates how important it is for workplaces to have effective processes in place to encourage employees to speak out, protect them from retaliation, and keep their identities confidential.

We have also produced new guidance for both disclosers and receivers.

[Read the media release](#)

Overview of the Protected Disclosures (Protection of Whistleblowers) Act 2022 – General guidance on the PDA's definitions, processes and protections

This guide includes information on the terms used in the Act, the protections available for people who make protected disclosures, and what disclosers can expect after making a protected disclosure.

[Read the guidance](#)

Guidance for receivers - Protected Disclosures (Protection of Whistleblowers) Act 2022

This document provides information and guidance for any employer or appropriate authority who may receive a protected disclosure.

[Read the guidance](#)

Engagement across the motu

The voices of community stakeholders

Our Māori and Community Engagement Team, Rōpū Māori Hononga Hapori are continuing to meet with stakeholders across the motu. While these engagements help raise awareness, and build trust and confidence in the Office, they also give us the chance to hear insights to help inform our work and ways we can better deliver our services.

In May, Ombudsman staff travelled to Palmerston North and Christchurch to attend the New Zealand Collective of Abused in State Care Charitable Trust information days. The engagements were attended by many survivors and supported by several agencies presenting the services they deliver. We listened to issues, concerns and matters of importance to survivors. We received positive feedback to these engagements and we've been asked to support other events throughout the year.

Over winter we plan to meet with Māori, Pasifika, Asian and other community stakeholders in Taranaki, Whanganui and Palmerston North. This series of engagements includes connecting with groups such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, Community Law, and the Law Society. These events are a welcome opportunity for us to promote the Ombudsman's services and to share information.

Check out the [Ombudsman Facebook page](#) to get more details about these and other upcoming engagements.

Teachers' response to the new Ombudsman civics learning resource

The Ombudsman's new teaching resources *Keeping things fair* and *Tuia kia ōrite* is helping children and young people across New Zealand schools understand their rights and the role of the Ombudsman.

Aligned with the national curriculum, and available in English and Te Reo Māori, the resource is designed for students in years 1 to 10. The resource covers fair process, children's rights, the rights of disabled people, the Official Information Act, and the right to make a complaint.

Teachers were introduced to the resource at the 2025 social science teachers' conference SocCon in Wellington held from 14–16 April. Every teacher who visited the Ombudsman kiosk expressed interest in using the materials in their schools. They recognised the importance and need for embedding civics education into their learning programmes. The event also raised broader awareness of the Ombudsman's work with schools, in particular its role in investigating complaints against school boards.

For more information and to download these resources go to www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/fair



New social media platforms

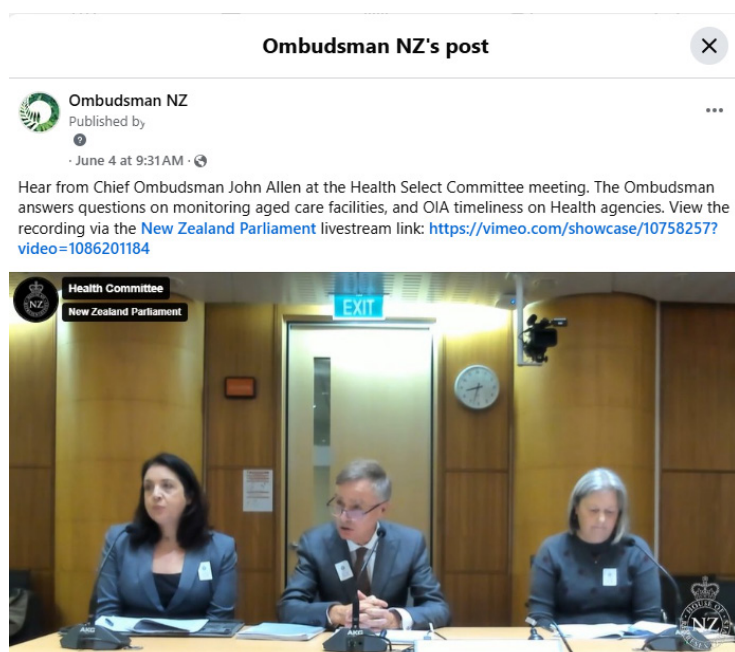
A new LinkedIn page for Chief Ombudsman John Allen, was launched recently. Follow the page to stay up to date with us.



We also recently launched our new [Instagram channel](#)



Having our presence on a range of social media channels allows us to reach a larger audience about the work we do. For example, the top performing content on our social media platforms was the video of John at the Health Select Committee.



You can also follow us on:

- [Facebook: @OmbudsmanNZ](#)
- [Instagram: @Ombudsman_NZ](#)
- [LinkedIn: OmbudsmanNZ](#)
- [LinkedIn: John Allen - Chief Ombudsman NZ](#)

Select Committee hearings

Feedback on the Health and Disability Commissioner Act and Code review

The previous Chief Ombudsman, Peter Boshier, submitted feedback on the Review of the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights and the Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994 being undertaken by the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). Peter was broadly supportive of the proposals in the consultation document. However, he suggested that:

- if the Act and Code are to reflect contemporary developments in key areas affecting people's rights, it's essential to incorporate Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti) and tikanga
- engagement with the disability sector on the definitions and language used throughout the Act and Code would better reflect the social model of disability, which is the understanding that people are disabled by their interactions with barriers in their environment
- a more explicit commitment to the importance of the availability of reasonable accommodations for those accessing HDC services and processes would be an important step in reducing many of the barriers that tāngata whaikaha/disabled people face in these situations.

Official Information Act – latest opinions and case notes

Refusal to provide information and interviews following a journalist's coverage of a decision

We received a complaint from a radio journalist who'd reported on a colleague's radio show that the Pharmaceutical Management Agency (Pharmac) would shortly announce their decision to fund the medicine, Trikafta. It turned out that Pharmac had sent information about this to certain journalists but it was under embargo until two days after the radio show aired. The complainant, the radio show host and their employer hadn't received this information from Pharmac and were not subject to the embargo. The evening of the radio show, Pharmac advised that it wouldn't be providing information or interviews to the complainant's media network. Three days later, they proposed a stand down period for the remainder of that week where standard information and media releases would be provided but media interviews wouldn't be held. The previous Chief Ombudsman formed the opinion that Pharmac's decision not to provide information or interviews to the complainant's media network during the period in question was unreasonable.

[Read the Final Opinion](#)

Council's decision to charge for supply of official information

A member of the public requested information from the Central Hawke's Bay District Council relating to Policy NFL-P5 of the Proposed District Plan; they wanted to ascertain the origins of the policy and questioned how it came to be in the Plan. The Council advised that as this information required a large search, they'd extend the timeframe to make a decision on the request and that it would cost the requester a maximum of \$836; this was their best estimate of the time required to search for and supply the information. They also required a 50% deposit before proceeding any further with the request. The previous Chief Ombudsman found the charge to be unreasonable and the Council accepted his recommendation to reconsider their decision and engage with the requester to consider ways to refine the request.

[Read the Case Note](#)

Information generated under Labtests contract held by Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health received an OIA request for information about a positive community case of COVID-19. The information requested an email trail between Labtests staff about the case. Under section 18(g) of the OIA, the request was refused on the basis that the information wasn't held. The Ministry stated it didn't receive the email trail that was requested. The requester complained to the previous Chief Ombudsman who made a number of inquiries to clarify the role of the Ministry in relation to the Labtests contract. It was eventually confirmed that the testing was undertaken by Labtests under contract to the Ministry. This meant that the email trail was deemed to be 'held' by the Ministry under section 2(5) of the OIA:

"Any information held by an independent contractor engaged by any public service agency or Minister of the Crown or organisation in [their] capacity as such contractor shall, for the purposes of this Act, be deemed to be held by the public service agency or Minister of the Crown or organisation."

The Chief Ombudsman's final opinion was that the Ministry wasn't entitled to refuse the request under section 18(g) of the OIA and recommended the Ministry reconsider the decision and review its record-keeping practices around contracts. The Ministry accepted and implemented the recommendations.

[Read the Case Note](#)

Children in Care

The Ombudsman supports the oversight of children and young people in New Zealand's care system. This includes handling complaints about Oranga Tamariki and care or custody providers, and supporting systemic improvement.

The latest Children in Care Sector e-pānui highlights:

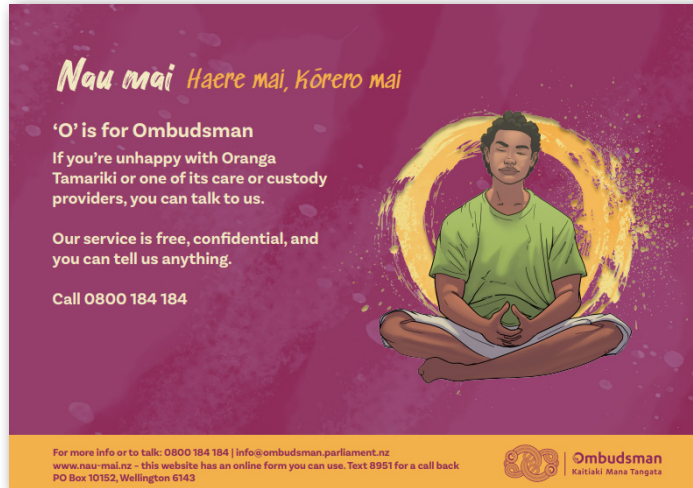
- new resources to help rangatahi and young people in youth residences understand how to contact the Ombudsman and make a complaint
- engagement with community groups, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations, and abuse in care survivor groups to raise awareness of the Ombudsman's role and the complaints process
- the Ombudsman's submissions to the Abuse in Care Legislation Bill, and the Ombudsman's final opinion on the Ministry of Social Development's historic abuse redress, which called out unfair and overly narrow redress processes and set clear expectations for the future

We are committed to ensuring there is good understanding about the Ombudsman so that children in care feel confident to come to us with a complaint if there is a need. We also want to support providers and agencies working with children in care to have the appropriate systems in place.

[Explore the e-pānui](#)

Children in Care - New posters for residences

Two posters have been designed for youth living in Oranga Tamariki residences across the country. These posters add to our suite of resources for children in care which explain how to contact the Ombudsman and how the complaints process works.



Contact the Ombudsman poster

Complaints process poster

- Download these posters from [our website](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or order physical copies to be sent to you by contacting info@ombudsman.parliament.nz
- View the full suite of resources on [The Office of the Ombudsman's website](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz)

International engagement

Delegation from the Royal Cambodian Government visits New Zealand

In February, Ombudsman staff presented to a visiting delegation from the Royal Cambodian Government. The delegation, made up of Members of Parliament and senior public servants, were in New Zealand for professional development as part of the Victoria University of Wellington Professional focused on improving governance systems course.

The presentations focused on the role of the Ombudsman and our contribution to transparency, accountability and a fairer New Zealand. The audience asked questions about monitoring, compliance and how we support democracy.

In the presentation, links to our [Resources for international integrity institutions](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources-for-international-integrity-institutions) were shared.

Virtual Roundtable discussion with the Timor-Leste Provedor of Human Rights and Justice

On 28 March 2025, the New Zealand Office of the Ombudsman and Timor-Leste Provedor of Human Rights and Justice held their second Virtual Roundtable discussion. These roundtables are communities of practice and focus on specific topics for discussion within the group of investigators participating. This Roundtable focused on managing Unreasonable Complainant Conduct, and strategies to approach uncooperative complainants in a fair and safe way.

This focus on sharing knowledge, expertise, and building capability supports the bilateral agreement between the Ombudsman New Zealand and the Office of the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice in Timor-Leste that was signed in 2022.



Ombudsman

Kaitiaki Mana Tangata



Te Kaitiaki Mana Tangata Aotearoa
The Ombudsman New Zealand

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