

Media release - The Indigenous birth registration report

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Ombudsman presents The Indigenous birth registration report

The Queensland Ombudsman's report, The Indigenous birth registration report: An investigation into the under-registration of Indigenous births in Queensland, was today tabled by the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP, Speaker of the Queensland Parliament.

"I have decided to present this report to the Queensland Parliament because I consider it in the public interest, based on the significant restrictions to participating in society when a person's birth has not been registered", Ombudsman Phil Clarke said.

Birth registration establishes a person's legal identity and is a precursor to obtaining a birth certificate which is a key identity document that supports an individual to fully participate in modern society.

Without a birth certificate a person can face difficulties enrolling in school, getting a driver licence, joining sporting clubs, gaining employment, opening a bank account, accessing government benefits and applying for private and public housing.

In 2014 Queensland Health released an analysis of Queensland birth related data which found that approximately 15-18% of births to Indigenous mothers were not registered compared with 1.8% for births to non-Indigenous mothers.

While this disparity appears to decrease over the first five years after birth, community organisations working with Indigenous Queenslanders advised this Office that it was common for their clients to lack birth registration or a birth certificate and suffer disadvantage as a result.

This investigation found the processes used by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM), in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG), may be contributing to lower registration rates of Indigenous births in Queensland.

“While there have been some efforts to engage with Indigenous communities, I found BDM had taken inefficient action to remedy the disparity between registration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous births and I consider this both unreasonable and improperly discriminatory” said Mr Clarke.

The investigation also found the current level of coordination between Queensland Government agencies was inadequate, particularly given the potential for a range of agencies to encourage and support birth registration and certification.

“I have recommended a cross-agency strategy be developed to increase the Indigenous birth registration rate to the same rate as non-Indigenous births”.

Since commencing this investigation, DJAG has commenced a review of the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 2003 including birth registration

and certification practices.

About the Ombudsman

The Queensland Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Parliament.

The Ombudsman ensures public agencies make fair and balanced decisions for Queenslanders by investigating complaints and conducting own-initiative investigations that tackle broader, systemic concerns.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about state government departments, local councils and publicly-funded universities.

The Ombudsman can make recommendations to rectify unfair or unjust decisions and improve administrative practice.

The report

View the full report: *The Indigenous birth registration report: An investigation into the under-registration of Indigenous births in Queensland*

<https://www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au/improve-public-administration/reports-and-case-studies/investigative-reports/the-indigenous-birth-registration-report>

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