

# Prioritising Local Government Professionals' Wellbeing



Local Government  
**Professionals**  
AUSTRALIA WA

Local government plays a vital role in building and fostering thriving communities. Timely and quality services and support provided by local governments can be compromised in situations where the working environment for local government officers is unsafe and hostile; where unacceptable behaviours are tolerated; and inadequate legislation and regulations do not hold individuals accountable for their actions.

## Why is it a concern?

- UWA Research conducted in 2019 found that local government CEOs experienced stress levels that were three times the national average due to the following factors:
  - Inadequate legislative support to ensure a safe working environment for CEOs – elected members, who are the employer of the CEO, are not captured by the Work Health and Safety Act as the duty holder of the CEO's safety and wellbeing.
  - Government legislation and regulation requires the CEO to investigate and report misconduct allegations against elected members who are also their employers, placing them in potential conflict and contributing to the increased stress being placed on the CEO
  - Inappropriate behaviours and unrealistic expectations by elected members, ratepayers and citizen groups. Particularly in regional and remote local governments where the CEOs live and work in town – their families often also become the recipients of these behaviours where no one is held accountable.
  - Significant high job demands with very little resources available to address them.
- Other layers of leadership including directors and managers within local government are commonly affected similarly to CEOs.
- Mandated elected member training does not deal adequately with relational and behavioural issues, is not enforced, and no meaningful penalties are applied to breaches of the mandatory training requirement.



- The high levels of stress, responsibility and liability associated with the position of leadership makes this an unattractive career choice – impacting on the talent pipeline for local governments (which is already a concern for regional and remote locations). This ultimately will affect the delivery of quality services and support to WA communities.
- The introduction of the mandatory readvertising of the CEO position after 10 consecutive years, regardless of the CEO’s performance has caused further pressure for CEOs and discourages quality professionals from applying for these positions.



## What needs to be addressed?

- The CEO should be removed from any requirement to investigate complaints against elected members. All complaints should be investigated and prosecuted by the Inspectorate or other appropriate State agency.
- Relevant legislation and regulations should be reviewed to ensure that local government officers, including CEOs, are appropriately captured and protected from inappropriate behaviours by elected members and members of the community including bullying, harassment and intimidation, and that persons committing breaches of the law be subject to the full range of sanctions provided by those laws.
- Advancement of the Inspectorate and associated Monitor reforms as a priority for 2024/2025, conditional on these reforms establishing fair and transparent process that ensures CEOs are not caught up in political and behavioural conflicts between elected members.
- Repeal of the “Ten Year Rule” and replacement with an obligation for Council to consider its desire to reappoint or market test.
- Public Sector Commission or other appropriate State bodies to be engaged in monitoring, improving and/or coordinating the recruitment, performance review, and termination processes associated with the employment of local government CEOs.
- Promote the importance of rigorous training for elected members, particularly in the areas of Employer Responsibility, Conflict Management, Relationship Management and Difficult Conversations, in addition to the current mandatory elected members’ training requirements.
- Encourage DLGSC and LGIS to conduct direct briefings to local governments to emphasise the nature of the risk and liability created by their treatment of staff.