

Media release



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Tax Ombudsman criticises the ATO over service to tax agents

A Tax Ombudsman review into the Australian Taxation Office's (ATO) service to agents has found increasing agent dissatisfaction with poor service and evidence of a strained relationship with the ATO.

"I have been overwhelmed by the strong feedback from tax agents in this review. Agents are reporting an increasingly poor experience with the ATO's agent phone line over the last 2 years, citing inconsistent advice and a lack of suitably skilled staff. This is contributing to a general feeling of not being valued by the ATO," Tax Ombudsman Ruth Owen said.

Ms Owen said agents play a vital role in the Australian tax system, representing 62% of individual taxpayers and 96% of other taxpayers.

"It's time for the ATO to recognise that, publicly. Evidence from prior reviews suggests that agents' engagement with their clients drives up tax compliance and contributes to the ATO's goals of increasing voluntary compliance and closing the tax gap," Ms Owen said.

"Our review found a mismatch of expectations between what agents expect of the ATO's phone line and the service the ATO can offer agents, leading to increasing frustration for both parties."

Ms Owen highlighted the fact that there was no dedicated team servicing the registered agent phone line, whereas agents think they are speaking with a specialist team.

"The ATO provides a faster service to agents but they expect a more specialised service designed to meet their needs. Most agents' calls are directed to contracted call centre officers, with around half having less than 12 months experience with the ATO. They have very little tax technical training and cannot be expected to answer complex or overly technical calls."

"The call centre service works for general calls from taxpayers, but agents are more likely to have more technical or complex questions to resolve."

The Tax Ombudsman said the phone line was only part of the picture when it came to ATO support for the agent community.

"The agent phone line cannot be looked at in isolation. Agents usually call the ATO because they cannot do what they need to do online. As most agents said to me, 'I don't want to spend my time calling the ATO. If I could do it online, I would,'" Ms Owen said.

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The ATO agreed to all but one of the Ombudsman's 14 recommendations, rejecting the idea of routing agents' calls to more experienced or skilled staff. In its formal response, the ATO said:

"...we consider that within our operating environment, rather than creating a dedicated team to support agent calls, our focus should remain on investment in our digital channels for registered agents, training and escalation pathways, and creating more dedicated and skilled teams for those more complex areas – such as our current work underway on taxpayer relief including interest remissions."

"I am disappointed the ATO has not accepted that the service it provides to tax agents by phone is not meeting agents' needs and must change. However, I am pleased to see the ATO's commitment to improving its digital services for agents, to working more collaboratively with agents and to measuring agent satisfaction," Ms Owen said.

"Maybe by understanding agents' needs better, the ATO may identify how its service can improve and implement further solutions. And we will continue to work alongside the ATO to look at further opportunities for improvement, including undertaking a more in-depth review of the ATO's online service for agents in the new year."

The Tax Ombudsman said, despite this review just being completed, these were not new issues with the Australian National Audit Office highlighting the same issues in 2022 and an Australian Public Service Commission Capability Review of the ATO in 2025 noting feedback that the ATO's relationship with tax intermediaries had eroded in recent years.

"It's time for the ATO to listen to the tax community and work with them. This isn't about asking for better services for agents – it's about recognising that tax professionals require a different kind of service, one that's tailored to meet their distinct needs, and recognising the important role they play in serving taxpayers and the whole community."

To access the review report, recommendations and the ATO's response, visit [our website](#).

***Webinar: the Tax Ombudsman will present review findings at a webinar on 23 October.**

Register to attend at: [Registered Agent Phone Line Review webinar](#).

What aspects of the tax system do you want us to investigate next? We're refreshing our reviews workplan for 2026 and encourage your feedback by 31 October. For more information, visit:

[Work plan refresh 2026 - Tax Ombudsman](#)

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