

Engaging your Member of Parliament

July 2019

MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPS)

These tips are designed to help you engage with your local Member of Parliament (MP).

One of the most effective ways to reach politicians is to meet them in their constituencies and talk to them about the issues facing the people they represent. By engaging with your local MPs you can help ensure politicians recognise the vital role nurses play in the health system.

TALK TO YOUR MP'S STAFF

Don't be disappointed if an advisor is sent in the place of your MP. The advisor may become a very useful ally if you build a relationship with them.

TIPS FOR ENGAGING AND INFLUENCING MPS

It is vital that politicians know that health care and the role nurses play is an important issue for voters.

IDENTIFYING AND CONNECTING WITH YOUR MEMBER/SENATOR

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

To locate your Federal Lower/Upper House Member, navigate to the [Australian Parliament House webpage](#)

Enter your postcode (ensuring you have selected 'Postcode' as the search category) and press 'Find'. Click the Electorate corresponding to your Locality/Suburb to display the name of the Member/Senator and their contact details.

You can connect with your MP in a variety of ways - aside from seeking a face-to-face meeting, you can also communicate with them by sending them an email, a letter or calling their office directly.

STATE/TERRITORY

To locate your State/Territory Lower/Upper House Members, visit the webpage that corresponds to your State/Territory:

- [New South Wales](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Western Australia](#)

- [Victoria](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)
- [Australian Capital Territory](#)
- [Tasmania](#)

PREPARING FOR YOUR MEETING:

- Once you've secured a meeting date and time, start to plan ahead for the meeting. To be well prepared, begin with some background research on your MP.
- Make sure you know how to pronounce their name, which party they belong to, how long they have been in Parliament and any parliamentary committees they belong to.
- You should read the MP's First Speech which should be linked to their profile on the Parliament website – this is essential background to understand their priorities. You can use the [Hansard](#) or use a search engine like Google to find out if your MP has spoken previously on relevant issues. Many MPs have their own websites in addition to their official parliamentary – these provide further insights into the MP's views and priorities.
- Get to know the issue inside and out, and be clear about what you would like the MP to do. This will need to be tailored according to whether they are a member of the government (or opposition or minor party), whether they are a state or federal Member of Parliament, if they hold a ministerial portfolio, or are a member of a relevant committee or other group.
- It is a good idea to provide a maximum of one to two page summary of the issues and your 'asks' that you can provide to your MP and any staff present. The Australian College of Nursing has resources and recommendations on health issues.
- Research your issue and know your key messages.
- Know your key messages and research common counter arguments so that you can respond to these.
- Go into your meeting armed with a few powerful evidence based statistics. A well-chosen statistic can enhance your position.
- If appropriate, you could consider bringing someone to the meeting with personal experience of the issue who may be able to share their story.

MEETING WITH YOUR MP:

APPROACH IT AS A RELATIONSHIP

Rather than thinking of your meeting simply as about extracting a promise from your MP, think of it as having two primary aims – one is to convince/inform your MP to take action, and the other is to build a relationship with them on a human level.

It is likely that you will only have a short amount of time to discuss your issue, so it is important to be clear and concise in what you are asking for. (As a guide 30 minutes is a common appointment length – but this should always be clarified so that best use is made of whatever available time you have).

Important to arrive on time. If you are meeting in Parliament House arrive 15 minute early to allow time to get through security.

Start by introducing yourself and thanking your MP for taking the time to meet with you. Remember to speak clearly, politely and audibly and maintain good eye contact.

- Listen to how your MP responds to what you are saying and tailor your message accordingly. Your MP might be completely new to the issue you are raising, so ensure that you can explain the basic background. But if they have a good understanding of the issue, you can skip over the basics.
 - In addition to how much they understand about the issue, you also need to know what your MP thinks about it. This will help you to respond to any questions or misconceptions they may have.
 - Be brief and to the point in requesting what you would like your MP to do; try to demonstrate why taking such action would benefit their constituents and their electorate.
 - Experienced politicians are able to change the subject – especially when they are on the defensive. A good response is: “I know your time is very valuable, we came here to discuss how you can help us or work together on this issue. If you have more time, we can discuss the bigger picture.”
 - Demonstrating that there is electoral support for your cause is an important step. The more support you can show, the more likely they’ll think of the issue as a vote-changing issue. Think of other benefits that you may be able to point to, e.g. the chance of local media coverage.
 - Once you have outlined what you are asking for, you may seek a commitment from your MP and ask them what they will do as a result of your visit and when.
 - Your MP may try to refer your concern to another MP who has greater responsibility in the area. This may be entirely appropriate or it could be a means to avoid taking responsibility for the issue. If this occurs, gently remind your MP that, as a member of their electorate, you would like their continuing involvement and support. Even if your MP does not support your position, being asked to explain their differing view is a valuable and fundamental part of the democratic process.
- You should also ask your MP for advice on who else you should contact about the issue and what they consider would be helpful in achieving your objectives. Most MPs do actually want to be helpful to their constituents. This is especially the case in relation to health and to issues that may be raised by medical practitioners advocating on behalf of their patients.

AFTER THE MEETING:

- Take the time to thank your MP for meeting with you – provide your business card or contact details and ask for the business cards of any advisers present at the meeting, and indicate that you would be happy to meet with them again in future.
- Make a note of any key points to keep in mind going forward with your advocacy on this issue. Go over your notes of the meeting and pay attention to any commitments that were made by the MP, or any commitment that you may have made to provide further information.
- Send a follow up letter or email to the MP. Thank them for meeting with you, outline your understanding of any actions they committed to take and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them. Include any information you promised to send to the politician.
- If you don’t hear back within a month, follow up - call or write to ask them whether they have taken any actions they committed to. Once again, polite persistence is key.

IF YOU ARE HAVING TROUBLE SECURING A MEETING WITH YOUR MP:

- Once you have requested a meeting, if you have not received a response within ten days call the MP’s office and ask to speak to their personal assistant or diary manager. Let them know that you have written requesting an appointment and would like to discuss when might be suitable for a meeting. Be prepared to explain where you are from, why you want to meet the MP and who else would be attending the meeting.
- They may not book the appointment straight away, and may tell you they’ll get back to you - be patient. MPs are often busy and can take some time to respond, but staying in contact and following up will show the MP how important you feel it is to meet with them.
- If your request for a meeting not successful at first, don’t give up. Persistence is key – as long as you remain friendly, polite and respectful you will stand a greater chance of eventually securing a meeting time.



BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR MP AND CANDIDATES

It can be helpful to build a relationship with your local MP and candidates. Signing up to your

MP and candidates newsletters and following them on social media can be a great way to keep up to date with their work and see how they're engaging in your community. If you see an event that your MP or candidates are attending, or hosting, and you are able to go too, having an informal chat can help build a relationship. You can also invite your MP and candidates to events that you are attending or hosting. MPs and candidates are also often at local markets or fairs, providing another opportunity for you to talk to them and start to engage with them on the issues your most concerned about.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE A PHONE CALL

A politician's staff are more likely to remember information when sent from multiple sources. Phoning the office and relaying your concerns is another way to keep an issue at the forefront of their minds.

It will also help you to develop a rapport with the staff. Be persistent in raising issues and requesting meetings, but avoid being a nuisance by raising the same issue by phone more than once.

As with all contact, the message should be kept short and sweet. Introduce yourself by name, your profession and the issue you are concerned about.

INVITE YOUR MP TO AN EVENT

MPs generally welcome opportunities to meet groups out in the community. This would give you the opportunity to:

- Strengthen your relationship with your MP
- Raise the profile of your event by having a local dignitary
- Get photos and media coverage
- Have your MP publicly demonstrate their support for the issue.

INVITE LOCAL MEDIA AND ISSUE A PRE-EVENT MEDIA RELEASE

MPs welcome publicity, especially in their own constituency, but check if MP is happy to have the media attend.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media allows you to connect with your politicians in a short, informal way. It is quick, timely and alerts an MP to issues immediately.

Find your MP or Senator on Facebook or Twitter- keep an eye on them to see if they are already engaged on issues of interest to you.

Use social media to call on your MP to take action on an issue- remember that it is a short form of communication so ensure you keep to your point.

Maintain your impartiality: everything online must reflect our/your values.

Encourage others to Tweet or Facebook the MP on the same issue.

MEDIA STORIES

Send your MP any relevant media stories (particularly from local media) or reports on the issue, especially if the situation changes

KNOW WHEN TO LOBBY

At key decision-making points

It is easier to influence the government before they make a policy decision rather than after it.

At publicity peaks

Politicians are more interested in issues when media coverage is at its greatest and when people are most engaged. If you act on issues before or during these periods you are more likely to get their attention.

Before an election

MPs are very receptive to the ballot box. As well as federal elections, there are also state, local and by-elections. MPs will be more receptive to any issues that secure them votes.

JOINING A PARTY

By joining a political party, you are much more likely to receive an audience from the sitting member of that party. Whatever your political views, consider becoming a member of a party that aligns with your convictions. This will place you in a position of greater influence.

If someone you know is already a member of your local politician's party, make the most of it. Have them arrange meetings and issue invitations to events, emphasising their membership and commitment to the issue.

UNDERSTANDING PARLIAMENT

There are many [resources](#) available to inform you on the work of Parliament. There are also [information sheets](#) that contain detailed information about the workings of the House of Representatives.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Information on how to address [Members and Senators](#).
- Information on how to contact [Members and Senators](#).

POLITICAL PARTIES

The four main political parties have websites with information about their policies, representatives and contact details.

[Liberal Party of Australia](#)

[Australian Labor Party](#)

[The National Party of Australia](#)

[The Australian Greens](#)