



## Tips for Meeting with Members of Parliament (MPs)

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

### *Identifying and connecting with your MP:*

- To identify your MP, you can locate them through the Parliament of Australia website - [www.aph.gov.au/Senators and Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members) or state or territory parliamentary websites.
- 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.

### *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 (available here [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/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 RACP has many resources and recommendations on child health issues, including a fact sheet on inequities in child health that sets the issues, and the key recommendations for government to address.
- 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:*

- 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).

- 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.
- 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've signalled 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.