

Member Guide – local advocacy

Policy change will only occur through sustained and united pressure from GPs and patients.

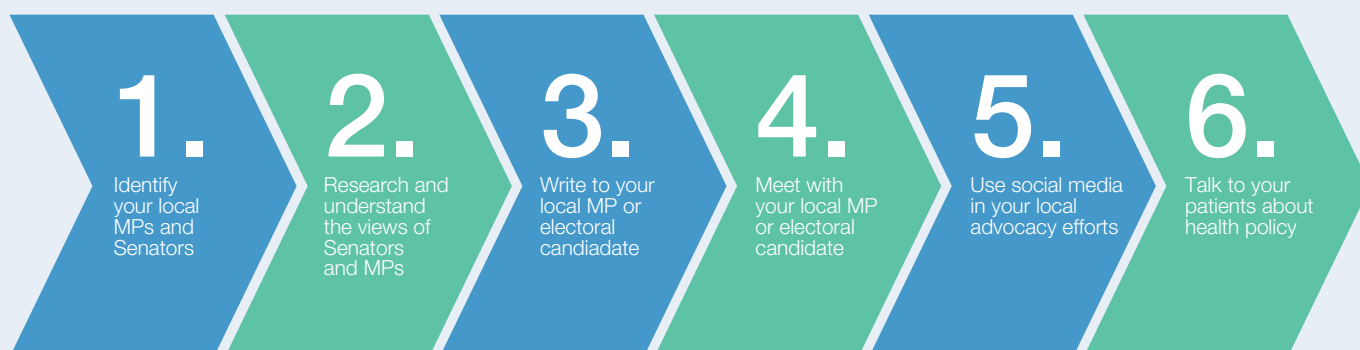
We encourage all RACGP members to participate in political advocacy at a local level and help raise awareness about key issues faced by GPs and patients among your patient population and local political decision makers.

Your involvement will increase the likelihood of government understanding the issues facing GPs and patients and commit to fixing them.

This document provides broad guidance to support members in conducting local advocacy.

This guide provides information and advice on how to:

1. identify your local MPs and Senators
2. research and understand the views of Senators and MPs
3. write to your local MP or electoral candidate
4. meet with your local MP or electoral candidate
5. use social media in your local advocacy efforts
6. talk to your patients about health policy.



1. Identify your local politicians

Your local politicians are interested in the health and wellbeing of the people in their constituencies. As such, they will be interested to hear the perspective of GPs who look after the local populations.

Federal Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected for a three-year term to represent a geographic area of Australia (an electorate).

Federal Senators are State or Territory representatives in Federal parliament. There are 76 Senators and the Senate – 12 from each State, and two from each Territory.

In addition to these politicians, each state and territory has its own Parliament made up of locally-elected members.

Useful Links

Find your Federal electorate

You can use the [Australian Electoral Commission](#) website to find your Federal electorate.

Find your Federal representatives

Details of your current representatives can be found by searching your postcode on the [Parliament of Australia](#) website.

State and Territory Parliaments and members

The details relating to each state or territory's Parliament and members (including contact information) are listed via the [State parliament and members' contacts](#) page of the Australian Government website.

2. Research and understand the views of Senators and MPs

It is helpful to understand a politician's position (and history of voting) on the topic of interest before making contact. This will allow you to tailor the content, language, and tone of your correspondence.

Party websites provide information on the stances of political parties.

A politician's 'first speech' usually provides an overview of the individual's political interests. The 'first speech' is listed under 'Speeches' under each MP or Senator's profile on the [Parliament of Australia Website](#).

You can find transcripts of speeches for members of state and territory parliaments by navigating from the [State parliament and members' contacts](#) page of the Australian Government website. Each state or territory's website has a listing of members, and links to speeches are included within their profiles.

3. Write to your local politicians

The most common way to make formal first contact is in writing. You can write to your local political representatives at any time regarding matters that concern you.

Address your correspondence correctly

- When writing to an electoral candidate, ensure:
 - to use the politician’s correct titles and honorifics
 - [The Parliament of Australia website](#) provides details on addressing politicians (including examples)
 - Check states’ websites on how to address state-based politicians: e.g. MP, MLA, MHA, MLC, etc.
 - the correspondence is addressed correctly. Not all government addresses follow the same format.

Personalise your correspondence

Personalising letters, by adding a small amount of personal content/experience, can give a letter more weight and may increase the likelihood of your correspondence being acknowledged.

Simple techniques to personalise your correspondence include:

- directing correspondence to a named individual rather than a political party or organisation
- including your name and address to identify yourself as living in their electorate.

What to consider when personalising a template letter or writing a letter from scratch

- Include a clear call to action.
- Invite politicians to discuss matters further in person.
- Justify your arguments with evidence and/or include real life examples from your practice.
- Consider identifying your support for the politician.
 - Have you contributed to their campaigns?
 - Are you familiar with them through previous work/business?
 - Do you support any of their policies?
- Consider opportunities to co-sign letters with other GPs experiencing similar issues.
- Refer to related submissions that have been made by yourself, the [RACGP](#) or colleagues.

Transparency and permissions

- If providing confidential information, or if you want to remain anonymous, you should make it known in the letter.
- Provide the source or reference for any data or facts you use.
- Ensure you have permission to give detail of other people’s experiences (e.g. case studies attributed to a particular GP). Alternatively, de-identify examples.

Promotion

- Consider promoting your advocacy to alert others of your involvement and encourage further participation.
 - Members can promote their advocacy by creating discussions in relevant medical forums and commenting on medical media (e.g. [newsGP](#)).
 - Let your colleagues know about your concerns and how they can get involved with the RACGP election campaign.
 - Social media can also be used – refer to section 5.

4. Things to consider when meeting with your political representatives

A face-to-face meeting is an effective method of advocacy as you can provide and receive instant feedback.

Preparing for your meeting

- Consider a pre-discussion with the relevant politician's office, who will usually provide a brief for the politician, which will facilitate a more productive meeting.
- Confirm all relevant information, including:
 - names and positions of the people you are meeting with, including any staff who will attend
 - meeting time and duration (expect to be allocated 15 to 20 minutes).
 - the location of the meeting.
 - If meeting at your practice, consider facilitating a brief tour and ensure all parties have the correct address.
 - If you are meeting external to your practice, ensure you have:
 - the location details (including the best entrance, room number, level and building)
 - the Identification required (check whether a security pass is necessary)
 - the contact details for your contact person on the day.
- Read over any relevant resources you have available to you. You will also need to add any personal points such as:
 - who you are
 - your personal background / interest
 - any personal examples that back up your argument
 - any local media interest you are aware of.
- Prepare for questions that may be asked in opposition to your arguments.
- Pitch arguments toward patient and local community benefits.

Attending the meeting

- Consider inviting another GP or an appropriate colleague to attend the meeting – try not to bring more than two additional people.
- Bring along relevant resources or consider developing a short one pager with key points to leave behind.

Note:

Don't be deterred if politicians are unable to attend meetings at the last minute. It is often possible for a member of their staff to attend in their place. These staff members have influence in their office, including a role in decision-making.

5. Use social media in your local advocacy efforts

Follow RACGP on social media and get involved with the existing advocacy campaign via:

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)

Why use social media for advocacy?

- Social media is a great way to communicate with your political representatives
- It is wide-reaching, free and an easy tool for advocacy.
- As well as gaining the attention of your local political representatives, you can also engage with other GPs who are actively advocating on similar issues

Social Media Tips

General Tips

- Keep your message short and to the point.
- Follow relevant politicians and health influencers – keeping an eye on what others post means you can provide timely content and responses.
- Where appropriate, tag relevant politicians in your message, e.g. to thank them for meeting with you.
- Add photos and videos of your advocacy.

Will your message reach its intended audience?

- First determine your intended audience and appropriate platform.
- Twitter is popular for political advocacy as most politicians and agencies are users. You can reach out to politicians through social media, both privately and publically. Publically doing so promotes your message to a wider audience.
- There are a range of options to reach a person or group. You can follow someone on Twitter, or tag them (e.g. @RACGP). On Facebook, you can join groups, post onto pages or direct message individuals.
- Hashtags allow your message to be easily searchable and links/categorises your content with similar messages. Useful hashtags include #auspol (Australian politics).

Does your message have a call to action?

- A call to action will prompt the reader to act.
- Consider what you want your audience to do as a result of your message. Point your audience in the direction of action by including a link to more information.
- If you have a limited word count for your post, use the following website to shorten a URL <https://goo.gl/>

Is your post visually appealing?

Social media posts with images or videos get more attention, but first consider:

- is it the correct size (videos especially)?
- does it match the message?
- is it clear?
- does the content belong to you? If not, ensure you have permission to share it and acknowledge the source when you do.

6. Talk to your patients about health policy

You may consider discussing health policy your patients where appropriate.

- Patient understanding of how health policy decisions affect their healthcare is an important part of health literacy.
- Part of a GP's political power lies in the fact that almost 90% of Australians will walk through the doors of a general practice each year.
- Politicians listen to the people in their electorate. Ultimately, more support for general practice will bring benefits for patients. Therefore, it may be possible to raise patient support.
- Your patients, as consumers of healthcare, have the right to make demands of their healthcare services and can be quite effective in doing so.
- You can provide ideas and avenues for your patients to make consumer demands. Patients involved in advocacy activities may feel greater engagement and empowerment in their healthcare by being part of the decision-making process.

We want to hear from you!

Share your feedback about your experience about undertaking local advocacy and how we could better support you, via healthreform@racgp.org.au

Disclaimer:
The Code of Conduct

[The Medical Board of Australia's Good medical practice: A code of conduct for doctors in Australia](#) highlights some issues to consider when advocating for general practice, including specific sections on using social media and communicating online.

It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with the code of conduct.

Contact your State Faculty who can assist you in organising a meeting with your local politicians

New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory

T: (02) 9886 4700 | E: nswact.faculty@racgp.org.au

Queensland

T: (07) 3456 8944 | E: qld@racgp.org.au

South Australia and Northern Territory

T: (08) 8267 8310 | E: sant.faculty@racgp.org.au

Tasmania

T: (03) 6212 5888 | E: racgptasmania@racgp.org.au

Victoria

T: (03) 8699 0488 | E: vic.faculty@racgp.org.au

Western Australia

T: (08) 9489 9555 | E: wa.faculty@racgp.org.au