



the voice of public healthcare®

Health Sector Advocacy Handbook





Our vision

A healthy Australia, supported by the best possible healthcare system.

Our mission

To conduct research, educate and influence the healthcare system to achieve better health outcomes, improved patient and provider experience, greater equity and sustainability.

Our guiding principles

Healthcare in Australia should be:

- Effective
- Accessible
- Equitable
- Sustainable
- Outcomes focused

Our goals

In partnership with our members, we aim:

- To enhance the health and wellbeing of Australians through improved standards in primary, acute, community and aged care
- To improve health service provision and health outcomes by developing, providing, disseminating and promoting research and education
- To support the delivery of high quality healthcare by promoting evidence-informed practice and advocating for funding models that support primary, acute, community and aged care services
- To support the health sector through the provision of business, education, advisory and consultancy services by connecting the diverse contributions of health practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and consumers
- To promote and support universally accessible healthcare in Australia for the benefit of the whole community
- To focus on innovation that enhances integration of care, including development of new models of care, and funding models that support health reform that responds to emerging issues.



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Introduction

Elected representatives at federal, state and territory level want to be kept informed on issues in their electorate, and your local Member of Parliament (MP) and state/territory Senators want reliable and expert sources of information on healthcare.

Ongoing communication from a reliable expert will help your local MP and Senators understand the health issues affecting their constituents as well as the issues facing health service providers located within their electorates.

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) is the national peak body for public and not-for-profit hospitals, community and primary healthcare services. We advocate for universal, high quality and affordable healthcare to benefit the whole community.

AHHA encourages its members to advocate at the grassroots. Along with our members across the country, you play an important role in transforming Australia's public healthcare system for the better.

As a member of AHHA, you are one of many AHHA voices when speaking with elected representatives one-on-one. Use this handbook as a convenient reference to fully inform and equip yourself as you advocate for universal, high quality and affordable healthcare to benefit the whole community.

AHHA assists its members by maintaining a suite of publicly available policy position statements on a wide range of topics as well as advocacy and engagement plans. Staff at the Secretariat Office are available to provide support.

AHHA encourages members to contact the Secretariat Office to discuss ideas for national advocacy campaigns or to seek support for local advocacy activities.

For assistance, please contact AHHA's Secretariat Office at **02 6162 0780** or **admin@ahha.asn.au**.



Making a difference through grassroots advocacy

Elected representatives know they are in Parliament to represent their constituents. If you want voices in Parliament advocating for universal, high quality and affordable healthcare to benefit the whole community then you must let your MP and Senators know where AHHA and its members stand on health policy issues.


Elected representatives want to respond to the needs of their constituents. MPs and Senators make time to meet with constituents on a regular basis.

Elected representatives want to hear from their constituents. MPs and Senators will tell you that their priority is the people of their electorate, and surveys of elected representatives find political offices rate personal communication from constituents as having the most clout.

Personal contact is the most effective form of communication. The best way to get the attention of an MP, Senator or their staff and to guarantee a meeting, is for you to contact their office personally.

Health professionals have a powerful and respected voice. While many health professionals are focused on service delivery through clinical, academic or administrative work, taking the time to work with AHHA to advocate for Australia's public healthcare system will help maintain and improve Australia's universal, high quality and affordable healthcare system to benefit the whole community. This is why AHHA wants to work with its members to reach out to Australia's elected representatives.

Remember, elected representatives are always concerned about issues affecting their constituents and issues related to healthcare within their electorate.



Five steps to health sector grassroots advocacy

1. Contact AHHA's Advocacy Director by phone or email and sign up to AHHA's twice weekly e-newsletter *Healthcare in Brief*
2. Learn more about your local MP and Senators possibly by signing up to their mailing lists
3. Build a relationship and maintain contact with your local MP, Senators and their offices
4. Advise your local elected representatives on healthcare issues as a trusted expert
5. Keep AHHA informed of your grassroots advocacy

Top tips when speaking with your elected representative

1. Know your audience: what is their background, interests and Parliamentary responsibilities
2. What's the hook? You're telling a story; use local, personal experiences affecting constituents
3. Be objective and reliable: information must be accurate, sound and dependable
4. Be collaborative and helpful: it's easy to be a critic; you'll be welcomed back if you're working with them offering information or ideas that are useful
5. Be short and concise: MPs and Senators are extremely busy and meet with many people daily; practice your elevator pitch in advance of meeting and make every word count
6. Be authentic



Communicating with elected representatives

If you want your elected representatives to support universal, high quality and affordable healthcare to benefit the whole community then you must let them know your views and those of the AHHA.

It is important to build a relationship with not only your MP and Senators but also their staff. MPs and Senators rely heavily on their staff, and in most instances you will deal directly with their staff on specific issues or concerns.

A face to face meeting is the best way to present your views. Although it may be difficult to arrange a meeting, it is always worth the effort. Keep in mind your elected representatives are in Canberra when Parliament is sitting. Be sure to tell the scheduling assistant you are a constituent and explain the nature of your meeting.

Once you have arranged a meeting, then prepare to ensure it will be productive.

A productive meeting is:


- **Planned:** Prepare an agenda that includes your specific concerns and what you want your MP or Senator to do. Keep it to one page and use bullet points.
- **Focused:** Prepare up to three key messages or actions.

- **Relevant:** How does your issue relate to your MP or Senator, their electorate and their constituents?
- **Purposeful:** Have a clear and concise call to action or purpose, understand local and national perspectives, and be prepared to answer questions.

If you receive a non-committal response, do not be surprised. Often, an elected representative will not take a position on an issue until the last minute. A neutral position is an easy initial position. Your best strategy is to educate your MP or Senators on the implications of the issue at hand and how it will affect you/their constituents.

If you receive a negative response and disagree with your elected representative, you should:

1. Express thanks for their response
2. Express your disagreement, refute their arguments and make new points if needed
3. Ask one or two questions that requires you MP or Senator to think further on the issue and respond
4. Inform your MP or Senator you are following the issue



Follow-up the meeting in writing thanking your MP or Senator for their time and providing any additional information that will advance your argument. Offer to keep them/their office updated as the issue progresses.

Telephone calls are useful when you want to discuss healthcare issues. In the first instance, you will likely speak with an MP or Senator's adviser who represents them and is authorised to speak on their behalf on most issues. Remember it is important to also develop a relationship with the adviser as they are trusted by their MP or Senator and often act as gatekeepers.

Letters from constituents receive close attention. Taking the time to share your ideas and opinions on an issue in a thoughtful, well-written and concise letter will be both appreciated and noted by your elected representatives.

Letter writing top five tips:

1. Make it local
(elected representatives care about what happens in their local electorates)
2. Make it personal
(tell a compelling story)
3. Keep it concise
(single side, one-page)

4. Keep it on message
(educate, don't lecture and dilute your message)
5. Include your contact details

Send AHHA a copy of your correspondence. AHHA often makes representations on its members' behalf, and it is more powerful to have more than one voice advocate for a policy issue or concern. Depending on the issue and the specifics of the concern, AHHA may make representations on your behalf or may work with you to modify the specifics on which to advocate.

Building a relationship with your elected representatives is a long-term strategy. Build a personal relationship with your MP or Senators. If s/he is holding a meeting for constituents on healthcare offer to be a source of expert opinion. Attend events organised by your MP or Senators. The more involved you are, the more your elected representatives will begin to rely on you as a reliable source of expert advice and information. Welcome them when they are elected and congratulate them on any appointments (particularly in health) as they occur.



Parliamentary Friendship Groups

MPs and Senators from all parties join issue-specific Parliamentary Friendship Groups. These groups form at the start of a new Parliament and seek to raise awareness among Parliamentary colleagues of specific issues, for example: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, dementia, primary health care, rural and remote health, various types of cancers, etc. Check the Australian Parliament House website or its state or territory equivalent to see if:

- your issue of concern is a focus of a Parliamentary Friendship Group
- your MP or Senators are members of a Group dedicated to your issue
- your MP or Senators are members of a health-related Group

If your issue of concern is the focus of a pre-existing Parliamentary Friendship Group you have a captive audience willing to listen to your expertise and concerns. Consider reaching out to the Group members and offering your knowledge and assistance.

If your MP or Senators are members of a Group dedicated to your issue of concern you are likely to get an initial meeting to discuss your issue. If you are able to build a positive relationship with your MP or Senators you will be seen as a valued expert worth consulting.

If your MP or Senators are members of a health-related Group, but not one dedicated to your concern, this indicates that they have an interest in health and will likely be open to meeting with you to discuss your concern.



Useful websites

Australian Parliament House

aph.gov.au

Contacting Senators and Members

aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members

Australian Electoral Commission

www.aec.gov.au

Australian Greens

www.greens.org.au

Australian Labor Party

www.alp.org.au

Liberal Party of Australia

liberal.org.au

National Party of Australia

nationals.org.au

AHHA

ahha.asn.au

AHHA Policy and Advocacy Program

ahha.asn.au/policy_issues

AHHA Submissions

ahha.asn.au/publication/submissions

AHHA's Healthcare in Brief

ahha.asn.au/publication/ahha-e-healthcare-brief

Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research Evidence Briefs

ahha.asn.au/publication/evidence-briefs

Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research Issues Briefs

ahha.asn.au/publication/issue-briefs

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