

Engaging Political Decision Makers



Which type of political decision maker should you engage with?

Depending on the problem you want to change or solve, you will need to think about the structures that you need to target in order to achieve the change. Australia is a representative democracy, with Government at three levels:

- Local Government (Councillors)
- State Government (Member of State Parliament -MP, or State Government Minister)
- Federal Government (Australian House of Representatives Member - MP or Federal Government Minister).

Local Government

- Local Governments are made up of councils representing different areas. **Councils** manage local area services and plan for the community's needs. Councils are made up of democratically elected members (**Councillors**). Their job is to represent the interests of the people that live and work in the council area.
- Local Government is responsible for very localised issues. Your local Councillor will be the best contact.
- Each State and Territory will have their own Guide to Local Government and ways to find out what your local government authority is and who the relevant Councillors are.

Parliamentary Committees



State/Territory and Federal governments create parliamentary committees to investigate certain issues and help the government make decisions. These committees are made of different ministers and members from different political parties. They often consult with the public to gather evidence and prepare reports. There are different types of committees with different structures, membership and time limits. Their investigations are called **Inquiries**.

Think about what you are asking them to do:

- Politicians like it when you come to them with a clear ask and plan of action for what you would like them to do. You will need to have an idea of what the solution to the problem is, the impact on you/the community, and how they can help you achieve the solution.
- You might want a politician to raise the profile of an issue. They could do this by raising the issue with Government Ministers, speaking in parliament or in a debate about the issue, or speaking to the media about it.
- In some cases you might want a politician to actively seek to change the law, to vote in a particular way when a Bill is introduced to parliament, to change their personal views or to change their political party's stance or approach.

State Government

- State and Territory Governments represent the whole State or Territory. It provides major services such as education, health, hospitals, transport, emergency services, etc.
- Members of the State/Territory Parliament are elected and responsible for an area they represent, called a **constituency**.
- People who live in an MP's constituency are called **constituents**.
- State and Territory Governments have different **departments and agencies** that manage different portfolios (ie. Health, Education or Justice).
- These departments and agencies are overseen by different **Ministers**. Ministers are the top decision-makers for their respective department.
- **Shadow Ministers** are the members of the opposition party that closely follows the activities of the government Minister in that portfolio.

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Federal Government

- The Federal Government represents all of Australia's States and Territories and all of Australia's population.
- The Australian House of Representatives is made up of elected officials to represent those living in the different federal electorate areas.
- Federal Ministers and MPs work in a similar way to their State/Territory counterparts (constituencies, constituents, departments, agencies, shadow ministers, etc.).
- The Australian Electoral Commission has an electorate search page for individuals to find out their federal electorate area and who represents them in Government.

Contacting your MP

STEP 1

Write a letter or an email to your MP (the MP that is responsible in the area where you live or work). Explain why you are concerned about the issue, what you would like to see them do and, if relevant, request a meeting to discuss the issue with them.

Include your address to show that you are their constituent - it is an MP's job to listen to and represent the concerns of their local constituents. Also mention your age; as a young person your voice is not only valid but has extra power.

STEP 2

MPs' offices receive lots of emails, calls and letters and are generally very busy. It might take a while to get a response. If after two weeks you have not heard back, call their constituency office to follow up.

STEP 3

Request a time to visit your MP. To prepare for the meeting, make sure you understand the issue you are aiming to change. Make a plan for how you want the conversation to go and make sure your plan includes a clear ask of what you would like them to do. You can leave them with some written information. Let them know if you are planning to come to the meeting with someone (family, safe person, another advocate).

Tips for Successfully Engaging a Politician



Be polite

The best way to ensure that your voice is heard, is to be prepared with evidence and information and remain calm, even if you disagree with a politician's approach or views.

Be clear and concise

Always be clear about what you want to achieve and what you expect a politician or the government to do to help you achieve the change you want to see.

Be prepared

Before contacting an MP or Minister, find out their and their political party's views on the issue you want to raise. Most will need to adhere to their official party positions. Find out if they are the right person to speak with and what their values are.

Politicians pay a lot of attention to the media

In some cases, media attention might be needed to engage with politicians. This option should be chosen carefully, but it can help, in some cases, to raise the profile of an issue.

Ministers are very busy

Contacting a Minister is very difficult as they are very busy people. You can engage with a Minister by contacting your MP and asking them to write to the Minister. You can also reach out to community organisations that might be able to support your efforts.