

A step-by-step guide for remote health workers



Getting remote and isolated health on the agenda in your electorate

Some people say that a small group of committed people can change the world.
In reality that's all that ever does.

- Margaret Mead



CRANplus acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional custodians of Australia, many of whom live in remote areas, and we pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.

Why bother?

Arranging meetings and writing letters to politicians is a great way to express your concern about an issue and show your support for action. It is your way of playing a key role in getting remote health on the agenda with elected parliamentary representatives and candidates running for seats in Federal and State/Territory elections. Engaging with your representative and/or candidates helps them understand that action on

improving remote primary healthcare is important to the voters in their electorate (or potential electorate in the case of candidates). Politicians, and those aspiring to be, are well aware that their future is decided by you and your vote.

If you haven't ever met with or written to a politician before it can seem a daunting task. CRANAPlus has prepared this advocacy tool kit as a guide to help you.



Who is my elected representative?

If you are unsure who the sitting MP or Senator is for your electorate it is easy to find out. Visit [Parliament of Australia](#) for federal politicians and [Our Community](#) for links to state and territory politicians.

You can search using your postcode or the electorate you live or work in. If you don't know

the name of your electorate then you can find out at [Australian Electoral Commission](#).

If you want to know a bit more about your elected politician, such as how they voted on key issues or keep tabs on their activities in parliament, visit [They Vote For You](#) or [Open Australia](#).



A meeting or a letter?

Meeting with a politician will always be more effective than writing a letter. It is much easier to convey a heartfelt, passionate message that politicians will remember when you are face-to-face with them.

The tyranny of distance associated with remote health often means that you live and work a long way from the electoral office of your elected representative. If it is not possible to meet in person then consider arranging a tele or video conference.

Politicians from vast electorates are used to meeting with their constituents in this way.

If it is not practical to arrange a meeting of any type then writing a letter is a good alternative.

There are some key things to consider when writing to politicians. See the *Writing Letters* section of this toolkit for some tips and examples.

| Voter meetings

As a voter you have a right to request meetings with your elected parliamentarians about issues that concern you and the work that you do. All elected officials have time set aside in their diaries to meet with constituents (residents of their electorate). It is a key part of what they do when Parliament is not sitting. Listening to you is part of their job!



When to meet?

The lead up to an election is a good time to meet because representatives and candidates are solely focussed on their constituents (voters). However, this is not the only opportunity and meetings right throughout the election cycle can be beneficial. For example, meeting your representative within the first year of a term provides an opportunity to ask how they are progressing the commitments made prior to being elected.

So in general, as soon as you can arrange a meeting is usually the best time to have it! Like the rest of us, politicians are pretty busy so sometimes the lead time between requesting the meeting and having it can be lengthy. Be persistent in your attempt to secure a meeting. So long as you remain polite and professional it is ok to make repeated attempts if there is a delay in them responding to your initial request.



The meeting

Arranging the meeting

Remember it may take some time to arrange the meeting so don't delay in getting the process started. You have two options for initiating the process; making a phone call to the office of the politician or sending an email. You will find the phone number and email address on the politician's website.

If you call these are the key things you need to say:

- Introduce yourself and briefly describe where you work
- Explain you are calling because you would like to arrange a time to meet/teleconference with the politician so you can tell them about some issues of concern related to healthcare in their electorate.
(Remember, as a voter you have a right to do this.)
- At some point ask to speak with the politician's diary manager. The diary manager may ask you to follow up with an email, if so you can use the template provided at the end of this document. If the diary manager is not available when you call then ask for their email address so you can contact them that way.

You might not receive a response to your call or email right away. This is common. If you haven't heard back after a week make another call or send another email. Remember, it is ok to be persistent and make multiple requests so long as you remain professional and polite.



The meeting

Before the meeting

Planning ahead of the meeting is important. It is unlikely to be a long meeting, probably no more than 30 minutes, so working out exactly what you want to say beforehand really helps. Here's a checklist to help with this:

- Who will attend the meeting? Are there other people in your health service that want to be involved? If you have a community leader that understands the issues you plan to discuss invite them along as well. Work out who will be the spokesperson and who will take notes.
- What do you want to say? Sometimes it is hard to decide which issues you want to focus on when the challenges you face in your day-to-day work are many. However, it is very important to identify just one or two priority issues to discuss at any one meeting. Your aim in the meeting will be to help the politician understand this problem/s. Just as important will be to explain what needs to be done to fix them, i.e. the solution.
- How will you say it? Plan this in four parts:
 1. Brief explanation who you are and what you do. Do this for each person attending the meeting.
 2. Describe the priority issue/s. Use examples and stories to help illustrate how these issues impact you and/or your patients.
 3. Share what you believe needs to be done to fix it. Be really clear here – this is the thing you are asking for. You need to request a specific action and why you believe it will make a difference.
 4. Ask the politician what they can do to help. If it is a candidate running for election then say 'If I/we vote for you in the election, what will you do to address these issues?'
- One week prior to the meeting send an email confirming the date and time of the meeting and who will be attending. See example at the end of this document.
- What can you leave behind after the meeting? Prepare a simple summary of 2 and 3 (above) that you can leave behind as a record of the issues you raised. See the example at the end of this document.



| The meeting

Attending the meeting

Parliamentarians tend to have a lot of meetings packed into their schedule so plan to arrive 20 minutes early (or call/dial in 5 minutes early if a teleconference/Skype etc.) Don't do all the talking. Leave as much time as possible for them to do the talking.

After the meeting

Send a follow up email thanking them for the meeting and providing any additional information they may have requested. See the example at the end of this document. It may be appropriate to suggest a second, follow-up meeting in this email.



Writing letters

If you are writing a letter it is good to send both an email and a hard copy of the letter by post, this generally increases your chances of receiving a response. The following tips will help to make your letter more effective:

- Include your name and address – politicians are much more likely to pay attention to those people who live in their electorate.
- Use the correct title to address the politician – check [here](#) if you are unsure.
- Keep it brief – try for no longer than a single page, maximum two pages.
- Stick to three key points or less – don't let your key message get lost.
- Check any facts you mention – make sure they are accurate and from a good source.
- Use your own words – even if your writing skills are not the best, a letter written in your own words will carry much more weight than using someone else's.
- Personalise it – link your issue to a real person (with their permission) or event in your community.
- Request a specific action and why you think it will make a difference.
- Politely request a response to your letter.



Some useful websites

[wikiHow](#) How to write a letter to a politician

[Parliament of Australia](#) Guidelines for contacting Senators and Members

A final word

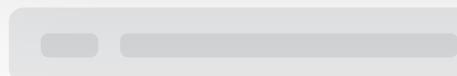
Don't be disheartened if your meeting or letter doesn't lead to an immediate resolution to your problem. Time and persistence is usually required...it's the long game you are playing. Celebrate the fact that you have raised awareness and demonstrated your commitment to solving the problem. Encourage other health professionals and services (especially those in the same electorate as you) to do the same. Many meetings and letters about remote health add up!

If you would like any assistance in your efforts to raise issues with elected representatives please feel free to contact CRANAPplus Professional Services team, professionalservices@crana.org.au



Useful templates

Email requesting a meeting



Dear _____ (check [here](#) for the correct way to address the politician)

My name is [insert name], I am a [insert profession, e.g. Remote Area Nurse] at [insert location and/or health service]. As a constituent of your electorate I would like to meet with you as my [insert Member of Parliament or Senator].

My colleagues and I are becoming increasingly concerned about [briefly state the one or two issues you would like to discuss]. We know how to fix this problem but require your support to do so.

I/we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue with you at your earliest convenience. We are available to meet at your electorate office [or arrange a teleconference/Google hang-out/Skype] all weekdays except [insert any days you are not available; try to be as flexible as possible].

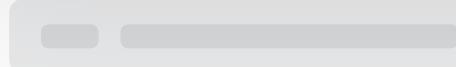
I/we look forward to an opportunity to discuss this important matter with you.

Yours faithfully,

[insert name and contact info]



Email confirming the meeting (send one week prior to the meeting)



Dear _____ [insert contact person name]

Thank you for your assistance in arranging the meeting with [insert politician's name]. We look forward to the discussion with him/her on [insert date] at [insert time]. There will be [insert number] members in our group.

[Insert very brief – 2 sentences each – introduction for each person]

Yours faithfully,

[insert name and contact info]



Summary to leave behind following the meeting (take a few copies with you)

Meeting with [insert name of politician]

[Insert Date, time and place of meeting]

[Insert the names of members of your group in attendance]

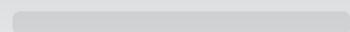
Our concern/s is/are [list them, dot points can be useful]:

We believe the solution to this problem/s is/are [list them, dot points can be useful]:

We need you to help us.

For further information or correspondence contact [insert primary person name and contact details]

Follow up/thank you email



Dear [insert name of politician]

Thank you for taking the time to meet with [me, my colleagues, whoever went to the meeting] on [insert date] to discuss [insert problem/issues raised].

We look forward to seeing [insert any actions they said they would take in the meeting].

Again, thank you for your willingness to understand this issue from our perspective. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve primary healthcare in your electorate.

Yours faithfully

[insert names and details for primary contact]



Start where you are; use what you have; do what you can.

- Arthur Ashe

