

# TIPS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR LOCAL MP

As suggested by the old adage, 'it's not what you know, but who you know', there is no doubt that personal relationships make a difference. Indeed, there is evidence that personal relationships with food and nutrition policy makers is very necessary for achieving favourable outcomes for public health nutrition<sup>1, 2</sup>. Consequently, the FANSIG Executive has prepared a guide for meeting with your local MP\* and would like to encourage you to contact them to advocate for change in food and nutrition policy (e.g., comprehensive regulation to protect Australian children from unhealthy food marketing, a 20% health levy on manufacturers of sugary drinks).

## 1. Arranging a meeting

- Send an email/letter or phone the office of your local MP to request a meeting.
- Identify yourself as a constituent, and include information regarding who you are, the topic/nature of your visit, and whether there will be anyone else in attendance (e.g. a colleague, friend or partner).
- If you do not receive a response, follow up with a phone call.
- As the meeting approaches, send an email or phone to confirm the appointment.

## 2. Preparing for a meeting

- Research the interests and affiliations of your MP and any committees they may be a member of. This background knowledge can strengthen your case by helping you tailor your message, and it may also be useful for building rapport.
- Take time to carefully consider the issue you want to raise and how best to pitch it to your MP. Identify a maximum of three key points you want to discuss. Consider what you want or need from the MP and ways that you consult other.
- Aim to present your pitch clearly and succinctly, ideally within three minutes, to ensure your message is impactful and easy to follow. Practice your pitch. Make it short and sharp. Make your passion clear and avoid jargon.
- Identify potential solutions to the issue that are specific, feasible, and supported by evidence (and by the public if you have that data). PHAA policy position statements can be a good place to start.
- Where possible include an example or case study that highlights how the issue affects the MP's constituents.
- Prepare a fact sheet, info graphic or similar to support your position, or carry a prop to remind the MP of you and your work. It is a good idea to email this resource in advance as it outlines the issue would like to discuss and may enable it to be entered into Government management systems.
- Consider what counter arguments or alternative opinions to yours may arise. Be open to them and prepared to respond with courtesy and respect.

### 3. During the meeting

- Arrive a few minutes early.
- Be flexible and prepared for all eventualities. For example, if the MP is unavailable and you're asked to meet with a staff member instead, don't be discouraged. Staff members can significantly shape the opinion and position of the MP.
- Remember that the MP and their staff are usually generalists, not specialists, so it is best to present the pitch as you would to a member of the public.
- Focus on your key points – avoid overloading or overstating the case. MPs are very busy and will want to grasp the key points of the issue quickly.
- Speak calmly and with conviction. Avoid being argumentative, threatening or confrontational, which may make the MP defensive.
- Ask the MP their perspective on the issue. Listen attentively and effectively. Aim to keep your responses concise. Be mindful of how much you are talking. You want the MP to ask questions and engage, so you want to be sure to give them that space to do so.
- Should the MP or staff member give long-winded replies or go off topic, don't be afraid to bring them back to the core issue to maintain focus. Always return to your main points and/or the recommended action you want to see
- Avoid playing politics; stick to your expertise and the evidence-base for your pitch.
- Be honest. Don't make promises you can't fulfill or be afraid to take a principled stand on the issue.
- Offer yourself as a resource - your time, knowledge and support can be invaluable to the MP. Leave them with a hard copy of the fact sheet, info graphic or other resource you prepared to support your position.
- If you're asked something you don't know, it's okay to say so. Offer to find out and follow-up with a response. Don't ask for too much too early (e.g. don't ask for funding on a first visit) If it seems appropriate, ask for a photo and permission to share on social media.
- Always thank the MP or staff member for their time.

### 4. After the meeting

- Be sure to email or phone to thank the MP/Policy Advisor for their time and consideration of the issue you presented. Send a summary of points discussed and next steps. Also provide any follow-up material or response to a question you promised.
- Regularly share updates on the issue with the MP or their team.
- Follow them on social media and stay connected.

\* *Federal MPs can be found [here](#) and Senators [here](#). State and Territory parliamentary details are available by clicking on the relevant link [here](#). If meeting with a State/Territory MP, it is worth connecting with your PHAA State/Territory Branch President for support and advice.*

1. Cullerton K, Donnet T, Lee A, Gallegos D. Playing the Policy Game: A Review of the Barriers to and Enablers of Nutrition Policy Change. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2016;19(14):2643-53.
2. Cullerton K, Donnet T, Lee A, Gallegos D. Effective advocacy strategies for influencing government nutrition policy: a conceptual model. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2018;15(1):83.