

Advocacy Toolkit



Message from the CEO

Thank you for joining the mission to create positive social and economic change in our society. This advocacy toolkit is a resource to enable and empower anyone to be an advocate for change. With advocacy at our core, WACOSS has a long history of standing up for those experiencing disadvantage and hardship throughout Western Australia. This experience is reflected in this toolkit which will help you in the fight to create an inclusive, just and equitable society.

WACOSS acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Western Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past, present, and future.

Louise Giolitto

Chief Executive Officer
Western Australian Council of Social Service

Advocacy

Advocacy is a way of helping policy and decision-makers find the best solutions to persistent problems.

This is achieved by expressing concerns and ideas to decision makers, stakeholders and relevant audiences to support and implement actions that contribute to positive changes, such as social justice or equality.

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.”

– Angela Davis

Advocates can face a number of challenges and there is no single methodology or model that can be applied universally. This toolkit provides a guideline to the advocacy process to assist you in achieving the best possible outcome.

A number of other methods, such as running public campaigns, mobilising grassroots support or engaging in direct action are not covered in this toolkit.



Contacting Members of Parliament

Who is the appropriate decision-maker in relation to the cause you are advocating for? Your local members of parliament can be useful allies in advocating for your issue. In the Australian political system there are three tiers of Government – local, state and federal. Identify which level of Government you need to address your advocacy to. You may even need to advocate in more than one tier of government depending on the issue you are advocating for.

Local Government contacts:	www.walga.asn.au
WA Members of Parliament:	www.parliament.wa.gov.au Go to the members section
WA Government Ministry:	www.premier.wa.gov.au
Federal Members of Parliament from WA:	www.aph.gov.au Go to Senators and Members and select WA
Federal Government Ministry:	www.aph.gov.au Parliamentary Library > Parliamentary Handbook > Ministry List

Meeting with a Member of Parliament

Arrange a meeting by writing or calling with a specific request to meet on a particular issue. Make it clear that you have experience or expertise on this issue that will help the Member, either to understand the issue, develop a solution, or advocate on your behalf.

If you are given an appointment, you already know the Member shares some interest in the topic and what you have to say. Prepare for the meeting by organising your talking points in a logical order, outlining the problem, relating your relevant personal experience or expertise and proposing actions to address the issue. Rehearse your presentation before the meeting and edit out all but the essential elements. Keep your initial presentation at the meeting brief. You will get opportunities to expand on points as the Member asks questions or engages in conversation. Plan for inclusion of follow-up points, relevant anecdotes and counter-arguments for challenges that may be raised.

Letter to a Member of Parliament

[Your Logo/Letterhead]

Salutation & Recipient Name

(e.g. Hon. John Doe MLA)

Recipient Position (e.g. Member for [Electorate])

Recipient Address

Date

Dear *[Recipient]*

[Introduction paragraph]

[Body]

[Conclusion]

Include your return address in the letter.

The first paragraph:

- **Include the topic of your letter.** For example, “I am writing to propose an approach to dealing with (provide details). . .”
- If you are writing to your own Member of Parliament, state that you reside in their electorate early in the letter.
- Choose no more than three important points to focus on.
- **Flesh out the most persuasive points** likely to gain support for your position.
- Address a new point in each paragraph.
- Writing three **short letters** to individual people is more effective than writing one long letter.
- Ensure your facts are accurate and credible.

- Acknowledge opposing arguments and evidence.
- **Personalise the issue:** Explain how the issue affects you, your family or your community.
- A **personalised letter** may be more persuasive and have more impact.
- Indicate if you have ever voted for them, met them, supported their election campaign, etc.
- The letter may be more effective if the politician feels closer to you.
- **Include any reports, surveys, and results gauging national and state-by-state support.** Be cautious in relation to their views: If unsure of the views of the politician or political party on the issue, research it, ask them or explain why they should support your views.
- **Be positive**, a letter offering solutions will be better than one merely raising problems.
- Avoid making assumptions about their views and comments which could be construed as critical towards them or their party.
- **Be courteous:** Do not offend needlessly. We all respond better to courtesy, friendliness and a pleasant approach than to abuse.
- **Call for action:** Ask them to act on the issue, for example, “increase funding in the budget for. . .” or, “support this position in their party room” or, “publicly commit to. . .”.
- **Ask for a reply:** End the letter with a statement encouraging a reply, for example, “I look forward to your response on this matter”.
- Write back if you do not receive a suitable response within a reasonable timeframe.

Phone call to a Member of Parliament

Calling your Member of Parliament is a great way to inform them of your concerns.

It is unlikely you will get to speak to the Member of Parliament yourself initially, but you will likely speak to one of their staff members. You should advise them that you are a voter in their electorate (local, state or federal), and you would like your message passed on to the Member of Parliament.

Keep your phone call to one issue, and ask for the Member to respond in writing, with their position on the issue you are raising. Phoning your Member of Parliament's office can be a good option if you are unable to write or email them. A phone call is a good communication method if you are making many such calls to demonstrate that the issue or the proposed action has a lot of support. It can also be useful if your proposed solution is innovative and potentially popular.

Media Release

If you identify that your advocacy strategy requires media coverage to achieve the overall objective, a media release is a useful tool to communicate your messages, in a way that journalists understand.

Make sure you study the media, and understand the journalists you want to target, and it's important that you don't send it to those for whom it's not relevant. **News stories need a newsworthy angle, so when writing think about:**

- Should your media release include a notable personality, celebrity or politician?
- Is it being sent at the appropriate time – does it relate to a current issue or, for example, a Bill that is being introduced to Parliament?
- Does it have a local angle relevant to the community – small community, state or country?
- Can the media 'put a face to the story'? For example, is there someone deeply affected who could personalise the issue?
- Is there public interest in the information – will people find it useful to know?
- Is it an achievement – has an individual or organisation done something outstanding?



Timing your story

Thinking about the timing is important when pitching a story to the media. Is there a significant event or day coming up that you could tie your media release to?

For example, if you're releasing a media release about domestic violence statistics or calling on the Government to change legislation, you may want to time your media release to fit with national advocacy such as the 16 Days Campaign.

Think about the likelihood of when you receive coverage – the week, day, time – and schedule the release of your story around this. Journalists are often on a deadline, so it's wise to find this out in advance so that you're not pitching minutes before their program goes to air or publication to print.

Media Release Tips

- Use the key messages in the media release to reiterate your goals and objectives of the campaign.
- If you are writing a release about something particularly technical, or where you need to communicate graphs, or statistics, it should be included as a **Backgrounder or Fact Sheet**, additional to the media release.
- **Keep the release to one page in length**, including the media contact information.
- **Include contact details** for the media to get in touch if they want to ask more questions or interview your spokesperson.
- **Where you have images or pictures available**, it is always a good idea to include them with your media release.

Example layout:

- Keep the title to one line in length.
- Include the most important information first, in the opening paragraph, the who, what, where, when. Don't forget the why and how.
- The middle 2-3 paragraphs give context, or explain more about the overall objective of the organisation, event, promotional week.
- Include 2-3 quotes from your spokesperson – short, preferably dramatic, quotes which highlight the issue.
- Finish a media release with the word 'Ends'. This denotes the rest of the information is not for printing, and can be followed by the contact details for a media contact or spokesperson.

Media Release Example

Media Release 28 August 2018

Early Years Network calls for extension of children crossing supervision hours

The Belmont Early Years Network (BEYN) is calling for improved safety around school crossings, and an extension of staffing hours on all school crossings in the City of Belmont. The issue comes following reports of more than 10 near misses, where children have almost been hit by passing traffic at school crossings in the area.

School crossings in the City of Belmont are staffed between 8:00-9:30am and 2:30-4:00pm on school days, however since the introduction of an after school sporting program, nearly three quarters of all children don't leave the school grounds until 4:30pm.

Be a Good Sport, an after school program to encourage primary school aged children to participate in organised sporting activities has seen more children leaving school after the crossing supervisor has left, forcing students to take risks when crossing roads alone.

The BEYN, which comprises local parents, primary school teachers, and early years health specialists, has seen an increase in the number of dangerous crossings since the program began.

"My son walks home from school after he finishes sport. He tells me how he and his friends find it difficult to cross the road without a school crossing supervisor. Cars don't stop unless the flags are out," said Jenny O'Brien, mother of Ben, and member of the BEYN.

Local child health nurse and member of the BEYN, Sarah Wilkes, works in the area, and has seen the growth in after-school programs.

"School crossings were introduced to reduce the risk of death and injury to children attending school near busy roads, but with the introduction of the *Be a Good Sport* program, there is a need to extend the staffed hours to adjust and accommodate to children's needs," Sarah said.

"I don't want it to take the tragic death of a child for action to be taken," said Jenny O'Brien.

Ends.

For further information about this media release, or to arrange an interview, please contact Sue Roberts, President BEYN, on 0400 000 000.



Writing Submissions to Government

From time to time Government conducts reviews or provides opportunities for public consultations regarding their policies and actions.

These can be powerful tools for advocacy because the format allows for more detailed submissions than you can expect to be considered following a letter or phone call. You can generally be confident that a well-argued, evidence-based submission to a review or consultation will get

a considered reading by professional public servants or external reviewers. If your submission is not included in the review recommendations there will usually be some commentary as to why not, so you know what you need to work on for the next time. Even if it makes it into the review recommendations, there is no guarantee it will be acted upon, but getting to that stage is essential if you want to influence government action.

Guidelines for submissions:

- Put your specific recommendations up front in a very brief executive summary or covering letter.
- Demonstrate your understanding of the issue.
- Outline what elements of the issue provide opportunities for strategic action.
- Demonstrate the 'program logic' underpinning your recommendation, for example the nature of the problem is X, so applying Y resources in this way, will allow

these actions, which will make this happen, and as a result these things will change and the overall outcome will be...

- Provide evidence about the problem, especially those aspects you want to tackle.
- Provide evidence about why the actions you propose are the right ones.

You can find a range of submissions that WACOSS has made in the 'Submissions' section of the WACOSS website: www.wacoss.org.au

Communicate your success

Experienced advocates know that advocacy projects can be very long term, so it is important to recognise and celebrate small (and bigger) wins along the way. Enjoy the wins, and share them with others to inspire ongoing commitment and enthusiasm to your issue.

Be sure to follow up any demonstrations of support with letters of thanks or acknowledgement. These will stand you in good stead next time you seek to exert some influence to make the world a better place.

If your advocacy has notable success, like a change in policy, allocation of funding, or development of new services, look for ways to celebrate that with your supporters. This could be by sharing a positive message online, or you may want to invite supporters to a celebratory event. If you do hold an event, be sure to invite the people who you lobbied, the local politicians, or relevant Minister. Even if they don't come, they will appreciate the positive feedback and recognition.

WACOSS would like to thank all those who have contributed, prepared and assisted in the development of the advocacy toolkit. If you engage with a politician, the media, or conduct any form of advocacy then WACOSS would be interested in knowing how it went. Please provide any feedback from your advocacy experience and using this toolkit.

If you are interested in learning more, WACOSS offer advocacy workshops and training, which can be tailored to your specific needs.

The policy team at WACOSS is also available to provide assistance in your advocacy, particularly

to WACOSS member organisations and Individual Members, so please contact info@wacoss.org.au or **(08) 9420 7222** if you have questions.

Regular updates, information and resources are available on the WACOSS website, and social media platforms.

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www.wacoss.org.au

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