



# MSOT Advocacy Toolkit

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This Advocacy Toolkit has been created by the Manitoba Society of Occupational Therapists (MSOT) to assist our members in their advocacy activities that promote occupational therapy and its issues. This toolkit is largely based on the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists' (OSOT) Advocacy Resource Guide (2013). MSOT would like to thank OSOT for generously sharing its resources with our members.

## **Purpose of the Advocacy Toolkit**

To facilitate building relationships and establishing communication with target audiences. The primary target audience is a member's Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA); however the contents of the toolkit may be used to communicate with other persons or organizations of influence, such as hospital administrators, program directors, local health advocacy organizations, municipal politicians, etc.

We encourage members to use this guide to prepare for meetings with MLAs and decision-makers. The toolkit includes strategies and resources designed to enable successful meetings and productive outcomes. MSOT is always available to further assist members with specific advocacy efforts. Please contact us for support!

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We wish you well in your advocacy activities and we thank you for your efforts!

# What is Advocacy and Why is it Important?

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Advocacy is a process where a person or group of persons attempt to influence thinking and decision making related to a specific cause.

MSOT is an advocacy resource for all members. The primary purpose of MSOT's advocacy efforts is to promote the issues and positions of the occupational therapy profession. A secondary, but nonetheless important purpose of advocacy activity is to build strong working relationships with local decision-makers. Therefore, when issues arise concerning health care or affecting occupational therapy, these established relationships will facilitate opportunities for input. We feel our members can have a significant impact on decision-making by building these relationships within their communities.

***Please note:*** "Lobbying" is another term often used for this type of activity. Lobbying has come to be associated with more aggressive negotiation of influence, often undertaken by paid lobbyists. Since April 2012, lobbyists in Manitoba are required to register with the province's lobbyist registrar and disclose whom they are lobbying and details about their lobby efforts. MSOT is not asking members to be lobbyists. We are supporting members who desire to participate in professional advocacy.

## Advocating your Position to your Local Politicians

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As decision-makers for the public, all politicians can and should be targets of professional advocacy. Their job is to represent the constituents in their riding while being accessible and accountable to their constituents. This requires meeting their constituents and to acquainting themselves with all sides of an issue brought to their attention. These processes enable the development of laws and public policy that meet the needs of the public.


Often, decision-makers do not have direct access to information on how a particular proposal might affect stakeholders. It is the job of advocates and industry experts to educate the decision-makers to make certain that they have the necessary information to make the best decisions possible for the affected public.

With respect to health care policy and service delivery, the most influential politicians are likely MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba)


because health care delivery is a provincial jurisdiction. Nevertheless, advocating your issues to your local mayor or council members may be valuable, if the issues affect municipal or regional affairs (e.g. transportation services for persons with disabilities). Although not elected, Executive Directors of Local Health Integration Networks, hospital administrators, etc. may also be valuable targets to influence and educate with respect to your positions. The contents of this toolkit can be used to advocate to these decision-makers as well.

You do not have to be an expert to advocate to an MLA or other politician. You just need to focus on the issue and provide as much pertinent information to them as possible. Know that you are an important member of their constituency and can provide a unique perspective about the impacts of potential policies. You can do this by meeting with your MLA or writing them a letter.

The goal of a meeting or letter writing campaign is to ensure that your MLA is aware of your issues and your views. By engaging in this process you will create a relationship with your MLA and this relationship will enable you to keep connected about issues affecting you and your profession.



*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."  
-Margaret Mead*



# How to Set Up an Effective Advocacy Meeting

Once you are ready to share your thoughts, concerns, suggestions, etc. about a specific issue with your MLA, take the following actions to ensure that your meeting is effective and productive:

- A. Arrange a Meeting Time
- B. Prepare for the Meeting
- C. Engage in the Meeting
- D. Follow-up
- E. Communicate with MSOT

## **A. Arrange a Meeting Time**

The first step is finding out who your MLA is. For a complete listing of Manitoba MLAs and contact information [CLICK HERE](#).

Setting up a meeting with your MLA may be the most difficult step in the entire advocacy effort. MLAs can be extremely busy individuals and/or they may schedule constituency meetings only on certain days. However, successful MLAs want to interact with and understand their constituents; this makes them better representatives.

Try to arrange a meeting when the Legislature is not in session. You can access the Sessional Calendar of the Manitoba Legislature by [CLICKING HERE](#).

When the legislature is not in session most MLAs will be in their constituencies.

### **How to Arrange a Meeting:**

#### 1) Write a letter to your MLA

- Write a letter to your MLA to help establish the first contact with them. The most effective letter is a personal one-page letter, not a form letter. This letter should be sent by mail directly to the MLA's constituency office. An email request is also acceptable, but use written letter etiquette and formality.
- See Appendix I (p. 9) for sample letter.

- This initial letter/email should not give a detailed account of the issue. Simply describe the issue and request that a meeting be arranged to give you an opportunity to provide more detail. Indicate that you will make a phone call to follow-up with their office to arrange a convenient time that respects their busy schedule.

**Tip:** Fax the letter to your MLA prior to mailing it. This will ensure that the letter will be read at least twice by the MLA's staff and will receive proper attention.

## 2) Telephone your MLA

- Telephone the MLA's constituency office and ask to speak to the individual who schedules meetings within 2-3 days of sending the letter of request.
- Indicate to the assistant who you are, that you had sent a letter requesting a meeting, and the reasons why you would like a meeting.
- Indicate how much time you will need with your MLA and how many people will be joining you, if any. Try to limit the number of people attending with you to only one or two people.
- Indicate that you will provide additional information regarding your issue at the meeting; however, if the MLA requires information beforehand, you would be glad to send it to them.
- Offer several dates and times for the meeting and be flexible.

**Tip:** No matter how well you know your MLA, **always** make an appointment. Do not show up at their office when you know they will be there. Also, do not try to discuss the issue in detail with the MLA should you see them on the street or socially. It is important that the MLA is prepared to receive your information and is able to focus on the information you are sharing at a specific time.

### **B. Prepare for the Meeting**

Once you have scheduled a meeting you can start planning your presentation. Be mindful of how much time you will have. If more than one person is attending, assign each person a role, such as keeping track of time, taking notes, ensuring that everyone follows the agenda, etc.

Consider doing some research about your MLA prior to your meeting, for example what Party they belong to, what additional roles or responsibilities they have (i.e. are they a Cabinet Minister, Opposition Critic), what involvement they

have or have had and any additional background information that may be relevant to your issue, etc. You can find more information about your MLA at the following websites (Ctrl + Click to follow):

[New Democratic Party of Manitoba](#)

[Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party](#)

[Manitoba Liberal Party](#)

Prepare your information ahead of time and bring any handouts or materials supporting your position that you would like to share with your MLA. Too much information may be overwhelming. Consider a concise briefing note, accompanied with additional supporting information to leave with your MLA. Contact MSOT for assistance or to enquire if there are association documents that may be of assistance.

***Tip:*** *If you have not previously met with a MLA or are nervous, rehearse your presentation. Ensure that you are presenting your facts in an orderly, concise and positive manner. Try to refer to notes rather than read your remarks. Contact MSOT for assistance or if you would like to arrange a "mock" meeting.*

### **C. The Meeting**

- When it is time to meet with your MLA arrive at their office a little early. Dress in "business" attire, as it is a formal meeting.
- It is not uncommon for an MLA to be late for meetings, so be prepared to wait.
- Accept that the MLA may meet you alone or with support staff present.
- After a round of introductions, be prepared to make your presentation. Some politicians will sit and listen; others will interrupt to ask questions. Be prepared for either approach and accommodate various styles of interaction. Encourage questions.
- Be polite, focused and professional. Avoid being confrontational or argumentative. Concentrate on the issue avoid being partisan (i.e. do not mention who you voted for in the past election or if you have a political party affiliation).

- MLAs want to represent the best interest of their constituency. Demonstrate the connection between what you are presenting and the interests of the member's constituents.
- If you are asked a question that you do not know how to answer, be honest and do not guess at an answer. Suggest that you will have to look into it and offer to get back to them with the correct response.
- As the meeting begins to wrap up, make sure someone takes advantage of the remaining time to quickly and concisely summarize or reiterate your most important points. You may wish to offer to be a future resource on issues related to occupational therapy or health care in general.

**Tip:** *Provide any written information or briefing packages to the MLA at the end of a meeting. If material is provided at the beginning, the MLA may read through the notes during your presentation rather than pay attention to your presentation.*

#### **D. Follow-Up**

- Immediately after your meeting with your MLA, send a letter of thanks. Recap the purpose of your meeting and highlight the main points that were covered. Answer any outstanding questions and provide any additional information that was requested.
- Indicate that you are looking forward to working with them on this issue and on other health related issues in the future.
- In addition to mailing the letter, fax a copy to the MLA's office.
- See Appendix II (p. 10) for a sample follow-up letter.

**Tip:** *Consider keeping in regular touch with your MLA to help build your relationship and credibility. If you have a newsletter or brochure, add your MLA to the mailing list.*

**E. Communicate Your Process, Progress and Outcome with MSOT**

Please keep MSOT informed. We want to hear from you! Let us know how we can help you with your advocacy activities, such as providing additional resources, acting as a sounding board, connecting you with like-minded MSOT members, and helping you connect with the right people. Please keep us informed of your outcomes as well so we can assist other members with their advocacy efforts and learn from these processes.

We will also want to take the opportunity to extend a sincere "Thank-You!" for your time and efforts in promoting issues and concerns related to the profession of Occupational Therapy.

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## APPENDIX I

### Sample Letter of Meeting Request

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Mr./Ms MLA's Full Name, MLA  
Riding  
Address  
City, MB Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms. MLA's last name,

**Re: Meeting Request**

Over the past year there has been a great deal of media coverage concerning the Government's Health Care Transformation Agenda. Important priorities have been identified as critical to address – reducing wait lists for cancer care, diagnostic testing, joint replacement surgeries, cardiac care and controlling hospital deficits. These priorities are important, but the focus of attention on these priorities has resulted in hospitals withdrawing other important services from their service delivery menu – service cuts that leave members of our community without a means to achieve their full health or recovery potential.

Out-patient services are vanishing from our community. No longer seen as a priority to fund, *Hospital x* has closed its services for persons who are discharged post hand surgery. I am concerned about the lack of services available to these patients for whom there is no community based funding source.

As a practising occupational therapist and one of your constituents, I would like to meet with you at your earliest possible convenience to discuss the impact of current health policy on our community and its residents' health care needs.

I will follow up with your office to arrange a meeting at a time convenient to your busy schedule.

Sincerely,

Occupational Therapist

## APPENDIX II

### Sample Follow-Up Letter to MLA

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Mr./Mrs. MLA's Full Name, MLA  
Riding  
Address  
City, MB Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms. MLA's last name,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me/us on [date of meeting] to discuss my/our concerns about the lack of out-patient rehabilitation services for members of our community.

I/We hope that you found the meeting to be as productive and informative as we/I found it to be.

As we/I mentioned at our meeting,...

Again, thank you for meeting with us. If you require any additional information or have any questions concerning out-patient services, or any other issue relating to health care, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Occupational Therapist