

## **Organizing a letter-writing, email or telephone campaign**

Letter-writing, email or telephone campaigns are effective advocacy tools that can help a group of constituents voice their opinion about a specific issue together. As voters, your elected officials pay close attention to what you say. Raising an issue, illustrating its importance and offering solutions can greatly impact a representative's action in the legislature.

The letter, email or phone call educates your target government audience about an issue and explains why you believe they should take action for or against the issue. When there are many letters, emails or phone calls related to the same issue from the community of constituents, it is more difficult for your representative to ignore or push aside.

### **How to get others involved**

It is easy for others to get involved in your letter-writing, email or telephone campaign. Email a package of supporting materials to your friends, family and community explaining the issue and ask them to support your efforts. Create a template they can use to compose their own letter, email or phone script and send them your letter or phone script as reference, as well. Remind them that their voice is very important in making a difference.

Publicizing your efforts through social networks, community bulletin boards, schools, and through organizations such as AAMAC, can help you recruit people to join your campaign. The more avenues you pursue to publicize your campaign, the more people will join your efforts and make the message stronger.

Motivate and encourage your community to take part in the campaign by setting up a letter-writing, email or telephone campaign event. Set up at a community centre, a long-term care facility, a local coffee shop, mall or library (with permission). Provide individuals passing by with the necessary materials to effectively write a letter, email or phone script without taking a lot of time. Set up a table and bring clip boards so people will have a place to write. Bring a take-away outline of the issue and contact information, should they wish to participate at home instead. Be sure volunteers are prepared to handle any questions, including possible challenges from passersby that oppose your position. These events not only serve to build on the number of letters, emails or telephone calls in your campaign, but they encourage awareness of the issues surrounding the disease.

In all cases, be sure to get permission from those involved to maintain a copy of their letter, email or phone script, or to be copied on their correspondence, so that you can evaluate it in your follow-up with your representative.

### **What to include in your letter, email or telephone script**

1. The first paragraph should contain your purpose for writing the letter, email or making the phone call. Be clear on your objectives and what you would like your

- representative to do. If your letter, email or phone call pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it according to its bill number so they will know exactly what you're talking about.
2. Include information that supports your position and how the proposed legislation or issue affects you personally. Offer your expertise if it is relevant. As a patient, your life experience can be useful to legislators.
  3. Your letter, email or phone script should reflect knowledge and historical position on the issue. Your targeted representative may not be in agreement, but you must acknowledge their opinion first and then offer your information. For example, "We are aware of your position, however, you may not be aware of how the matter affects our community..." Also include facts and supporting messaging from AAMAC.
  4. Use simple language. Do not assume your representative has an understanding of the terminology or the issues related to the disease.
  5. Always thank the representative for his or her interest and involvement. For example, thank him or her for their time, effort or support of legislation.
  6. Be succinct and try to keep the letter, email or phone script to one page.
  7. If appropriate, request a face-to-face meeting to discuss the issues further.
  8. In a letter or email, include your name and address so that you may receive a response.

### **Delivering the letters**

In today's age of technology, an email to your representative usually receives a quicker response than a traditional letter. Email can have the same, if not greater, effect than the traditional mail method. Note that if you send a letter by standard mail, there may be a delay in the time it takes to reach your representative and receive a response.

### **Follow-up**

Follow-up is an essential part of the letter-writing or email campaign. Shortly after sending the letters or emails, contact your representative to set up a face-to-face meeting to discuss the issues and establish an open dialogue. Be sure to always be courteous, even if you disagree with your representative or if they are failing to commit to the issue.

Other advocates may want to start their own letter-writing, email or telephone campaign in their communities. Let AAMAC know that your community has participated in a letter-writing, email or telephone campaign.

### **Timing of letter writing, email and telephone campaigns**

When making decisions about the timing of a letter-writing, email or telephone campaign, you should consider what relevant events, activities or announcements are taking place in your area. Being well informed about these activities will help reinforce the importance of your message.

For example, if there is an upcoming provincial election, a letter-writing, email or telephone campaign would help candidates become aware of the issues facing MDS patients.

Other events to consider:

- Local funding raising activities
- Common Drug Review / funding recommendation announcements
- Conseil du Médicaments coverage / funding announcements
- Provincial medication coverage / funding announcements