

# ADVOCACY 101

## Youth Advocacy Toolkit



SCHIZOPHRENIA  
SOCIETY OF ONTARIO  
A REASON TO HOPE

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# Some facts about youth and mental health

*“There’s still a huge stigma speaking about mental health. It just isn’t everyday conversation” –  
16 year old*

- Mental health issues and illnesses impact all youth. An estimated 1.2 million Canadian children and youth experience mental health issues themselves, and many have a friend or a family member who lives with a mental illness.
- About 70 per cent of mental health challenges start in childhood or youth.
- Children and youth who experience a mental health issues are at a much higher risk of experiencing a mental illness as adults.
- The transition from childhood to adulthood can be complex, stressful and have an impact on mental health.
- Mental illness can affect all parts of a young person’s life, including personal and social relationships, education, and employment.
- Early identification and connection to appropriate treatments and supports greatly increase chances of a successful recovery. Yet stigma, lack of support and availability of youth-friendly services, and general lack of awareness about signs and symptoms prevent youth from seeking and receiving help.
- At the same time, youth have been traditionally disengaged from the mental health arena and youth voice has not been heard in any system or service developments.
- Young people play a pivotal role in managing and empowering their own mental health and as future leaders of tomorrow will shape how mental illnesses are perceived and responded for generations to come.
- **You** have the power to make a difference!

*“The small steps that have been taken are wonderful. We need more steps away from stigma and fear” – 21 year old*

# So You Think You Can Advocate?

Advocacy is about taking **action** in your community to create **positive change**. When we notice that something is **not fair** in our communities, or in society, we need to **speak up!** When we advocate for something, we are pointing out a problem, suggesting a solution for making it better, and asking decision makers to take notice, and make changes.

You can advocate in your school, your community, your city, the province, the country, or the world! For example, you may notice that there is a lot of stigma against mental health issues in your school and you feel like something needs to be done about it. Advocacy could mean talking to school administrators about creating awareness campaigns, or focusing your class projects on this issue. Or you may learn about a law or social program that treats people unfairly and you want to let your government know why it does not work, and how it could be better. One way to advocate is by writing letters to the government. Advocacy can also be as simple as clicking “like” on a social media campaign about your issue, or signing a petition.

Advocacy helps us get from **imagining how things can be better for people**, to **taking action to make things better**. There are many different strategies for making change and you can advocate either individually, or as part of a group. Some of these tactics are included in this kit, to give you the tools to advocate for the change you want.

A major first step in advocacy is **learning about the issue that you are passionate about**. Find out as much as you can about the problem that you are trying to fix. This will make it easier for you to talk with others about the issue. Some ideas for resources to check out include:

- ✓ Websites for organizations about your issue
- ✓ Blogs which talk about the issue
- ✓ Youtube channels focused on the issue
- ✓ Public radio podcasts
- ✓ Newspaper and magazine articles
- ✓ Government department websites, with information on what the government is doing about your issue
- ✓ Community events and forums that address your issue

## ***Don't just read this! Get started...***

- ✓ *Mind Your Mind*
- ✓ *More Than a Label*
- ✓ *The Jack Project*
- ✓ *Mental Health Commission of Canada*
- ✓ *Ministry of Children and Youth Services*

# Power in Numbers

There is **power in numbers**. Working with others who share the same interests and goals as you is an effective way to advocate for your issue. It is also a good strategy for getting **key decision makers** to listen to your message – **more voices mean a louder message!** You can start by finding out what youth mental health advocacy groups already exist in your school or community and joining their campaigns.



There are lots of ways to find out what organizations already exist in your school, or community:

- **Ask around.** Speak to other students, faculty, members of your local community centre or members of your congregation to see what they may be involved in. This can help you learn about what is going on in your community, and connect you with people who have similar interests and goals.
- **Check with your Student Council or Students' Union**, which may post information about campus groups online. Reach out to groups to find out about their next meeting or event, learn more about their work, or become involved in their advocacy efforts.
- **Join a group** in your high school, your campus or in your community, or join an interest group on-line.

## Start your own group

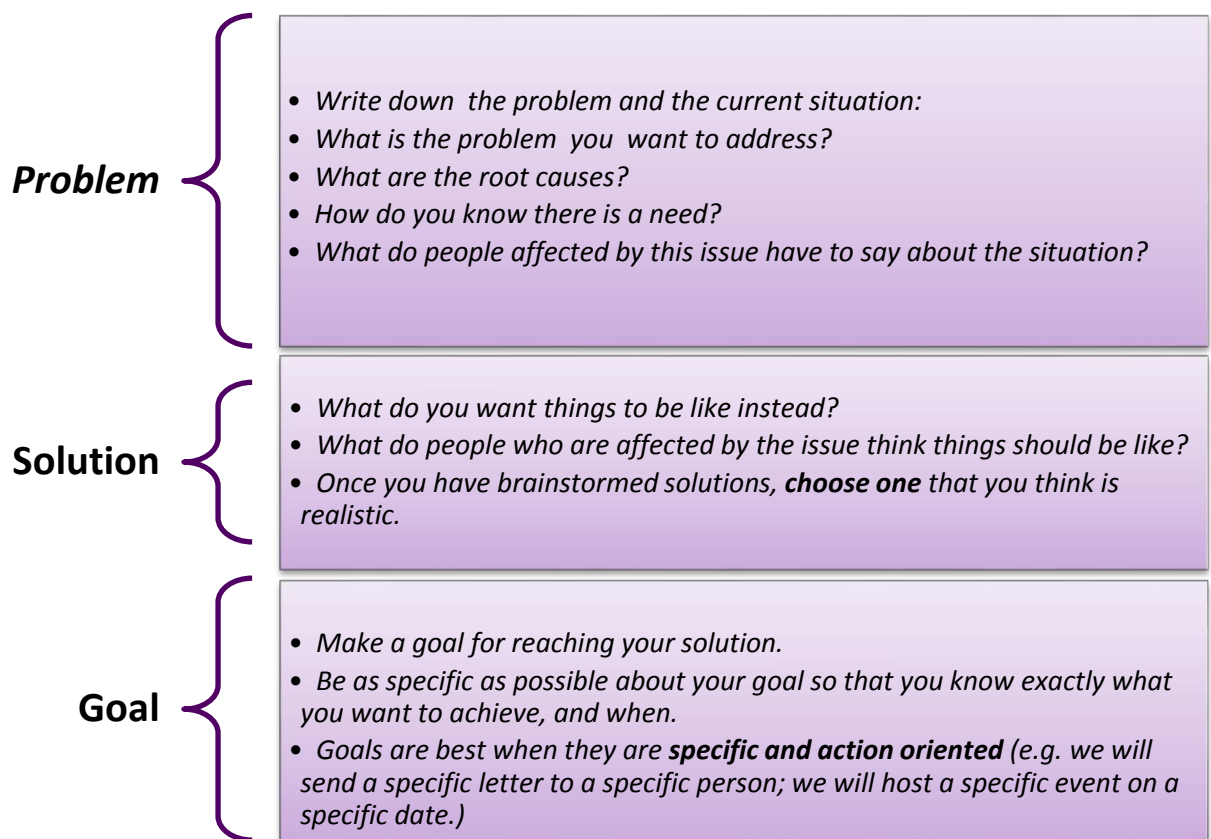
You may find that a group focused on the issue that you are passionate about does not exist in your school or community. Or maybe you want to start your own advocacy group. Starting your own group takes hard work and dedication, but it is also very rewarding! Finding supporters who share your concern or interest is an important first step:

- Talk with students, faculty, members of your community, or congregation to learn what others think about the issue.
- Talk to individuals who are directly impacted by the issue you are passionate about.
- Connect with people on social media, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Vine.

- Continue to recruit supporters as your advocacy work grows. Make flyers for events you put on, and canvass in your community; set up a table a community or school event with information on your advocacy work; check out the social media section of this kit for how to use social media for your advocacy work.

# Campaign Time

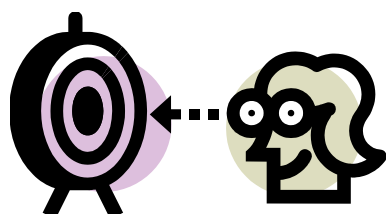
Once you did some digging to learn more about your issue, and connected with some like-minded people, it is time to think about how to **transform your passion into action!** There are many strategies for campaigning for change in your school, or community. An important first step is to think about what you want to see changed, and setting a goal for your advocacy work. Since you already did the prep work of learning about your issue, it will be easier for you to figure out your goal, and develop a plan for reaching it. Here are some ideas for creating a plan of action, or an advocacy campaign, either on your own, or with others:



The next sections of this kit will help you think about **WHO** can help make change happen, and **WHAT** strategies you can use for your advocacy campaign.

# Who Can Make Change Happen?

Once we know *what* we want to see changed, we need to figure out *who* can make change happen! It is important to know **who the key decision makers are**, and to consider **who influences the decision makers**. Gaining the support of groups that influence key decision makers makes your advocacy effort stronger.



This section gives you information on key decision makers in your school, community, and politically.

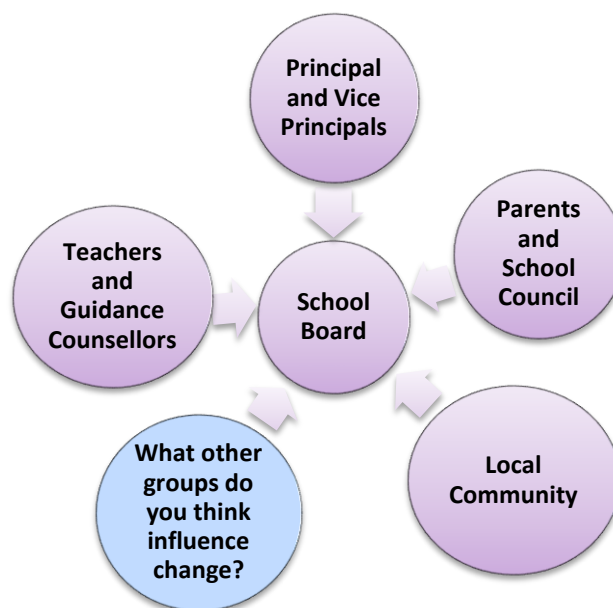
## HIGH SCHOOL

### Teachers and Guidance Counsellors

Teachers and guidance counsellors are a good starting point for gaining support to make change in your class, grade, or whole school. If you let a teacher or guidance counsellor know about your issue, they may be able to give you opportunities to talk about your concerns to other students in class or sponsor a school group you want to start. They can help you figure out what other decision makers you need to talk to about your issue.

### Vice Principal and Principal

Principals are responsible for managing the school. They may have one or more vice-principals working with them. A principal's main job includes overseeing teaching and curriculum; making decisions about large-scale changes in the school, such as starting a new school-wide club program; and managing the school's budget. Some issues impact a large number of students, or even the whole school, and may need the support of the principal. You can request a meeting with the vice principal or principal to discuss your issue.

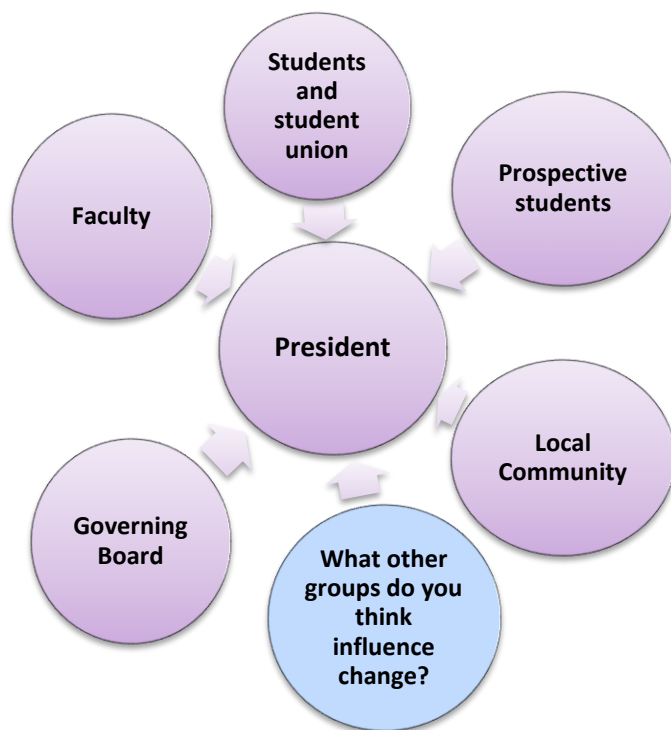




## School Board – Trustees and Superintendents

School boards are made up of trustees who are elected to the board during local elections to represent the interests of students and parents in specific geographic areas. School superintendents are school board members responsible for specific groups of schools in each school board. Among other responsibilities, school boards decide how to spend money they get from the government and develop local education policy and specialized programs for all the schools in their area. If your issue has impact beyond your individual school, your campaign may need to target your superintendent or school board. You can find a complete list of the school boards in Ontario [here](#).

Once you find your board, you can find a list of all the trustees, and find the trustee representing your area, or school. You can also find their contact information to contact them by phone or email. Many school board websites also have a staff directory listing the contact names and information for superintendents. You can also call the general phone number of a board and ask them to direct your call.



## POST-SECONDARY SCHOOL

### Student Union

Most post-secondary schools have at least one student union or council who represent the interests of students when it comes to school policy and campus issues. Student unions can be a good resource both to connect with other students and to get support on an issue that impacts the whole school. They may be able to offer advice, or direct you to the best place for

addressing your issue. You can find your student union by checking out your school homepage.

## **Faculty**

Faculty members can be a good resource for support, information, and they can also connect you with groups or organizations doing work on your issue. Faculty support can help you make changes within your particular school program, or across campus.

## **President**

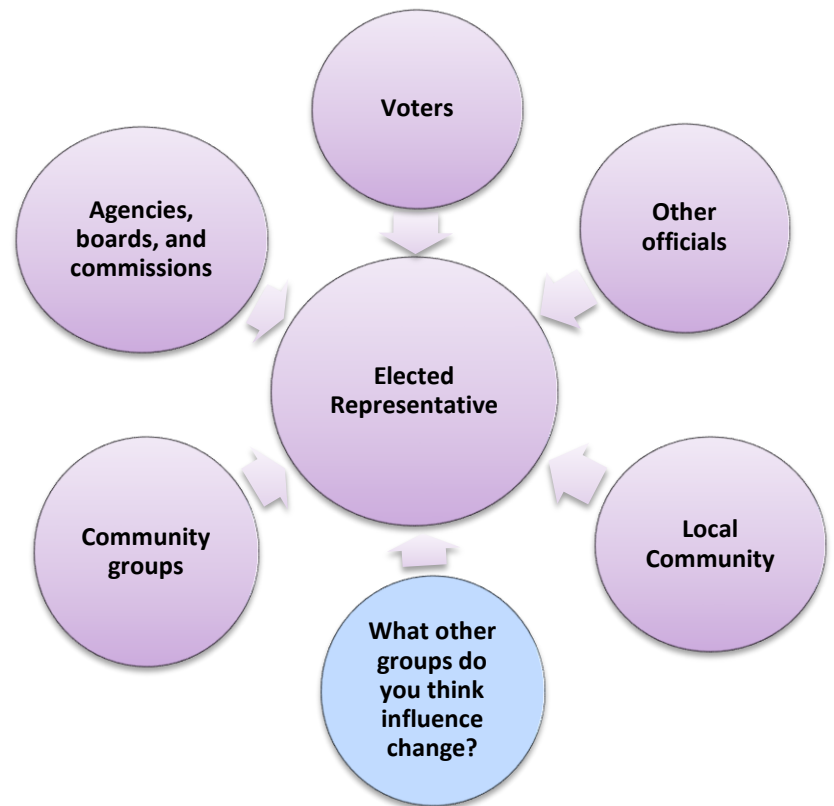
Your school president is responsible for managing the operations of the college or university, as set out by the school's Board of Governors. The president oversees college/university policies, and provides leadership for internal and external issues affecting the school, including faculty and the student body. You can find the name and contact information for your school president by searching your college/university's website.

## **Board**

The Board of Governors or Board of Trustees are elected from administration, faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students, and alumni of the college/university. They are in charge of the administrative functioning of the school. For example, they are responsible for developing the general school policies, and making decisions about budgets. You can find the names of the members of your college/university's governing board by searching your college/university's main website.

## THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL - GOVERNMENT

Sometimes our issue impacts the larger community and to make change, we need to reach out to the people who set policies and make laws. In Canada there are three different levels of government: local governments, provincial and territorial governments, and the federal government.



Why contact an elected representative?

- ✓ to ask about how they plan to vote on a current issue
- ✓ to encourage them to vote for or against a particular issue
- ✓ to provide them with insight into your issue
- ✓ to invite them to an advocacy event

**LOCAL GOVERNMENTS** are responsible for policies directly related to your county, town, or city. They are led by Members of Municipal or Regional Councils, or Band Councils in First Nations communities. A local government can create laws to help govern their area — these are called “by-laws.” The key decision makers at this level of government are:

### Councillors

Councillors are elected to represent residents within specific geographical areas. In order for a “by-law” to be enacted, it must receive support from the majority of councillors. You can find

your Councillor's name and contact information by looking up your city or town's home webpage. As well, a list of local Ontario governments can be found [here](#).

### **Mayor, warden, chair, or reeve**

Depending on your municipality, the head of council may be called a mayor, warden, chair, or reeve. The role of the head of council includes leading the council and representing the municipality at official functions. The head of council does not have more power than any other member of council to make decisions for the municipality; these decisions are made by the council as a whole. To find your head of council, search your local government's website.

### **Local Agencies, Commissions and Boards**

Local governments are influenced by the opinions and interests of local or regional public agencies, which are in charge of specific areas of municipal politics. For example, school boards oversee primary and secondary school administration and police service boards oversee local police services. You can find more information on local agencies, boards, and commissions by searching your local government's website.

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**PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS** take care of the day-to-day running of the province/territory. Some of the major roles and responsibilities of the Ontario government include education, health care, and civil rights. There are different ministries which oversee this work, such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Key decision makers within the Ontario government include:

### **Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP)**

MPPs are our representatives in the Ontario government and each MPP represents a riding, or voting district. They can be part of a political party, like the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party (NDP), or the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party or may sit as an Independent member. After an election, the party with the highest number of elected members forms the government. MPPs present ideas and changes and vote on many of the laws that people in our province are affected by. If your issue is impacted by laws or policies that are made at the provincial or territorial government level, reach out to your MPP using strategies in this kit. You can find your local MPP [here](#). Make sure that you contact their Constituency Office address – that's the office in your local community.

## Cabinet Ministers

Cabinet ministers are MPPs from the party which forms the government who are chosen by the Premier (the leader of the provincial/territorial government) to provide leadership and manage the work of different ministries, like the Ministry of Health, or the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. To learn more about the different government ministries in Ontario, including the names and contact information for different cabinet ministers, check out [this website](#).

## Premier

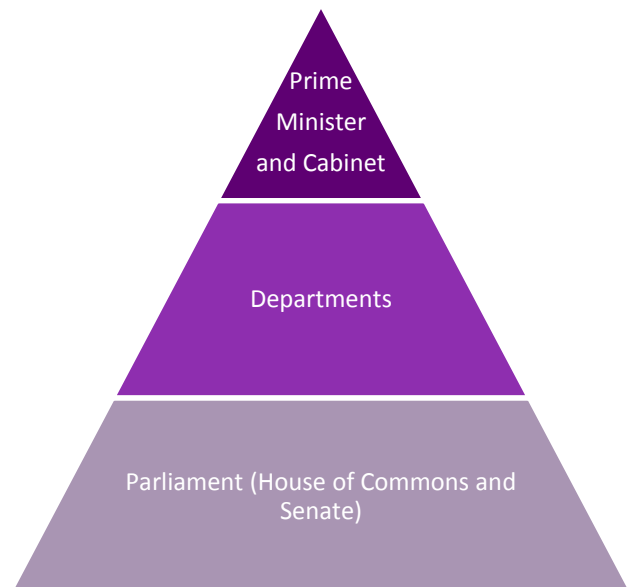
The Premier is the leader of the party that wins an election. The premier leads the work of the cabinet ministers and MPPs, and provides direction and leadership for the province. You can find out more about your Ontario premier, including contact information, [here](#).

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The **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT** deals with issues affecting the whole country, like national security, citizenship and immigration, and criminal law. The federal government determines priorities and policies that are important to all Canadians. Key decision makers include:

## Members of Parliament (MPs)

MPs are our representatives in the federal government and, like MPPs, each MP represents a riding, or voting district, and belong to a political party. Together, MPs form the **House of Commons**, and vote on many of the laws and policies that impact Canadians, and on how to spend Canadian tax dollars. Find your MP by using your postal code [here](#), under “Essentials”. Make sure that you contact their Constituency Office address.



## Cabinet Ministers

Similar to the process for provincial cabinet ministers, federal cabinet ministers are selected by

the Prime Minister to provide leadership and provide oversight for different ministries. To find the names and contact information for the cabinet click [here](#).

## **Senators**

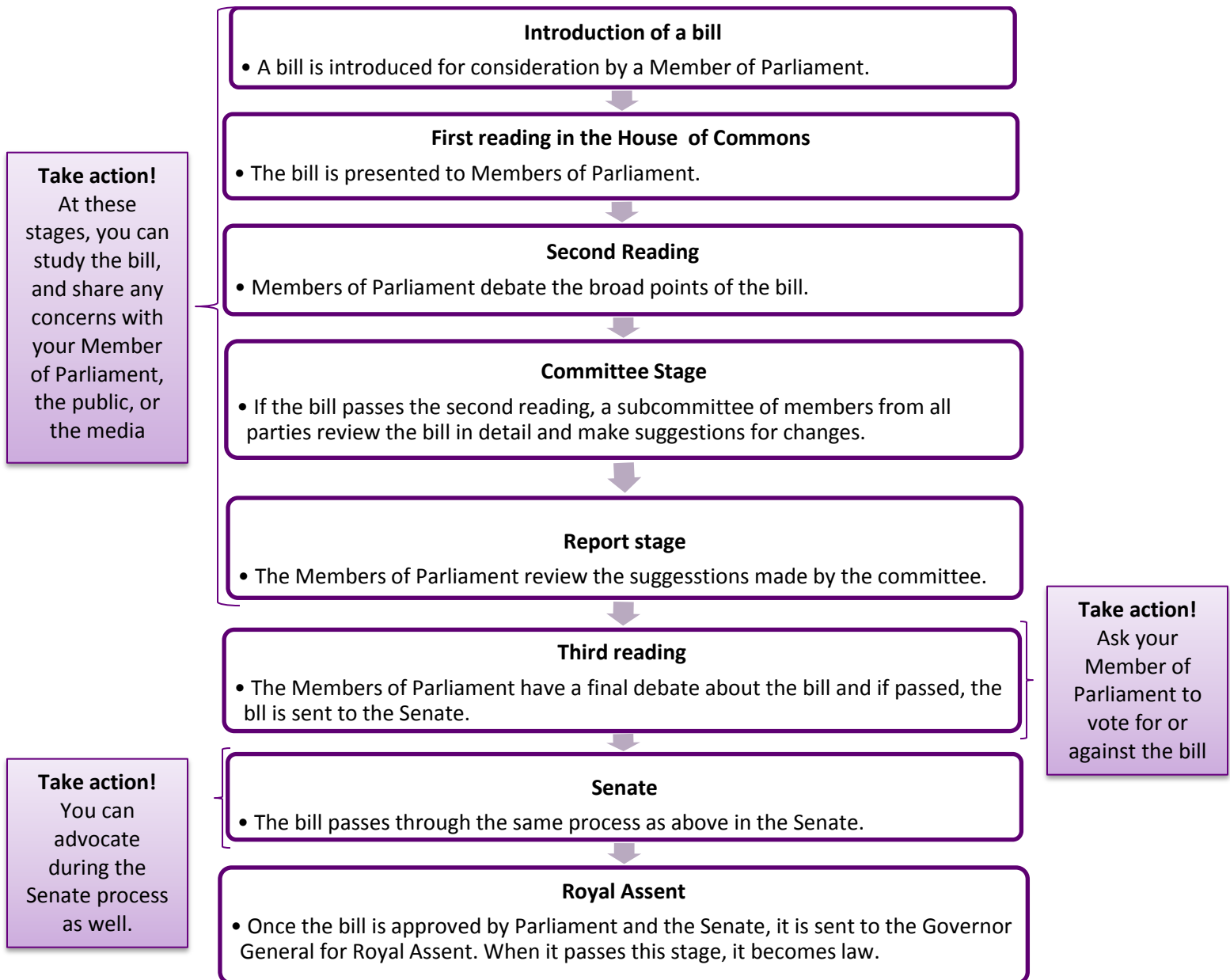
Senators make up the Senate, which exists to review laws that are being considered by the House of Commons. Their role is to provide additional oversight to law-making in Canada. No proposed law (or 'bill') can become law in Canada without Senate approval. Senators are selected by the Prime Minister and are made up of individuals across different sectors and backgrounds. To find a current list of Senators and their contact information, click [here](#).

## **Prime Minister**

The Prime Minister is the head of the government of Canada and is responsible for providing leadership and direction to the government, with support of the Cabinet. The Prime Minister also has the authority to appoint other key decision makers, such as senators, and Supreme Court justices.

# How LAWS are Made in Canada

Before a law is passed in Canada, it needs to be discussed and debated by Members of Parliament. During this process, the proposed law is referred to as a **BILL**. A **bill** does not become a **law** until it is passed by the legislature. In order for a bill to become law, it must pass through the following stages. You can advocate throughout this process.



# Advocacy Strategies

So now you know what you want to see changed and whose support you need. An important next step is to decide what your strategy will be to reach out to key decision makers and supporters to make your message heard! There are plenty of different tactics that you can use for an advocacy campaign strategy. The tactics you use will depend on what your message is, who your target is, and whether you have a lot of support, or you are doing something on your own. A few things to keep in mind with any campaign strategy:

- ✓ **Be consistent** – make sure that decision makers receive the same messages from everyone working on your campaign.
- ✓ **Use your youth as leverage** – you literally are the future, and your voice and votes count! Although it may sometimes be intimidating to work in an adult-run space like politics, remember that your thoughts are valuable and that you have a right to advocate for what you want to see for your future.
- ✓ **Remember that change does not happen overnight** – be persistent and stay connected, even when you feel like there is a long road ahead. Making change can be a long process. Recognize and celebrate your work and progress along the way!
- ✓ **Evaluate** – think about what will let you know that your strategy is working, including how much support you get, or how your target responded to your efforts. Think about what worked and what you can learn from your experiences.



## PETITIONS

A petition is a collection of signatures from people who support change for an issue. It can be an effective tactic if your issue has a lot of support, and is really straightforward. For example, it is helpful to use a petition to influence an elected representative in voting for or against a new law, or to influence a school board to implement a new policy or program. Petitions include a few short statements about your issue, a statement of what you are asking for, and a list of signatures supporting the petition.

### *Tips:*

- Use clear, concise language
- Describe your issue in short, strong, statements
- Include your petition statement on each page of the petition
- Make sure that you follow any instructions for petition submission; for example, provincial and federal governments have specific instructions specified on their websites

Here is an example of a petition to MPPs asking for the creation of a mental health and addictions strategy for Ontario schools. The format is taken from the ‘provincial’ link above.

To: The Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Whereas:

- Each year thousands of young people are impacted by mental illnesses.
- 1 in 5 Ontarians will experience a mental health issue during their youth, often between the ages of 16 to 24.
- A mental illness can affect every aspect of a young person’s life, including education and employment, as well as personal and social relationships.

We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to establish a mental health and addictions strategy for primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools in 2015. Such a strategy should include:

- Measurable targets and timelines
- Coordination within and across governments and within and across school boards
- Accountability metrics and indicators to monitor and evaluate progress

Name (printed)	Address	Postal Code	E-mail Address	Signature

## SOCIAL MEDIA

It is likely that everyone you know uses social media. You can use social media as a way to follow groups and individuals who advocate for your cause, to share information about your own advocacy work, and to get people to support your campaigns!

For example, social media sites like Facebook and Twitter let you:

- Reach a wide audience
- Connect to other like-minded online communities and networks
- Offer opportunities to supporters to be part of your campaign strategies (like petitions, lobbying, or demonstrations)

If you will be using social media to let people know about your advocacy work, you may want to choose **one central social media** platform as a hub for your advocacy work. You

can then decide what other social media platforms you want to use.

Although a **website** itself is not a form of social media, it can be a place to start to build your online presence. It can be most useful in your advocacy campaign if:

- You have the time and resources to create and maintain a website
- You have a lot of information about your issue and are engaged in a lot of advocacy work that you want to share with your supporters and the public
- You want to engage people who may not be on other forms of social media



***Get started on creating your website!***

***Check out these web building services\*:***

***Weebly***

***Squarespace***

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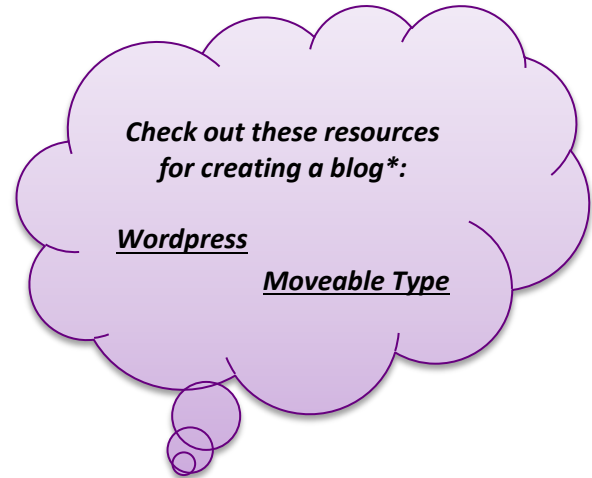
*\*They may have some free services, but there may be costs to using these resources*

To make your website dynamic and interactive make sure to:

- Post information about your cause and campaign - use as much multimedia as possible, like photos, videos, and articles
- Include links to other groups you support
- Link to any other social media resources you use, like Facebook, Twitter, or blog

A **BLOG** can be most useful in your advocacy campaign if:

- You have a personal, individualized perspective on the issue
- You stay up-to-date on your issue
- You want to reach a large number of people



You can use your blog to:

- Share information on your campaign's successes and challenges
- Create conversations with your readers about your issue
- Post links to other resources
- Share photos and videos of your campaign work

**TUMBLR** is a microblogging and social networking website that lets users post customized information, like text, photos, videos, and links, to a short-form blog and can be used to build support for your campaign. Consider using Tumblr if:

- You want to customize the themes of your messages
- You want a quick way to share advocacy messages, from your phone, desktop, or email
- You want to share photos and videos of an advocacy event, or keep followers posted on upcoming events
- You can get more information on Tumblr here and sign up for an account here.

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*\*They may have some free services, but there may be costs to using these resources*

**Facebook** is an easy way to connect with people. Use it in for advocacy as a way to:

- Share information about what advocacy work you are up to
- Keep supporters informed and connected about your issue
- Recruit more supporters, and build your network
- Organize supporters for advocacy actions, like petitions, lobbying, and demonstrations

Be creative with what you post – you can use pictures, essays, articles, or any other resources that you think will engage people with your issue.

**TIPS:**

- Learn how to set up a Facebook account [here](#)
- Build your following – ask your supporters and friends to “like” your page, and recommend your site to their contacts. Connect with the administrators of like-minded pages to see if they can share your page with their followers.
- For information on how to invite people to an event, like a group meeting, or demonstration, click [here](#)
- Keep your posts **short** and **to-the-point** – you want to be able to capture readers’ attention. Use links to connect people to more in depth information about an issue, or a call to action.
- Remember that your messages only go to those who “like” or befriend you

**Twitter** lets you send short messages (up to 140 characters) to your followers to keep them

updated on your campaign in real time, and is another great way to build support and to organize supporters for your campaign strategies. Twitter may be helpful if:



*Make your hashtags count! Make them unique, short, related, and memorable! Use them to increase awareness and build visibility for your campaign.*

- You want to keep followers updated on your advocacy event in real time
- You want to send immediate messages to your followers for advocacy actions that are time-sensitive
- You want to keep followers informed of events, or advocacy actions, that they could not be part of, as they happen

- You want to be able to respond to Tweets from other campaigns or from key decision makers or you want to re-tweet messages from others to keep your followers posted
- You want your messages to be accessible to anyone with a Twitter account who can find your messages by searching key words.

**Tips:**

- Learn how to set up a Twitter account [here](#)
- Build your following - ask your friends and supporters to follow you and to encourage their contacts to follow you. Thank your followers for their support and keep them informed of how to stay involved with your issue
- Use brief, direct posts to inform followers about your campaign work and invite them to campaign events, or to participate in campaign strategies
- Link to information about your cause
- Follow other like-minded groups or individuals
- Tag yourself under certain 'trends' so that people interested in your cause can follow you



**Photo sharing** apps like [Instagram](#) and [Snapchat](#)

are easy ways to share images of events/causes that you are part of. You can check out other users whose interests are the same as yours, and share your own images to:

- Let your followers see what you are up to by sharing photos and videos of your advocacy events, or demonstrations
- Share pictures or videos with messages that tell people about your issue

- Post flyers for events that you will be hosting or attending
- Remind people about important events
- Select a group of recipients that you want to receive certain information

Video sites like **YouTube** and apps like **Vine** are good places to find out what other

***Here are some campaigns that work!***

***The Jack Project Social Media Champion pledge***

***ALS Ice Bucket Challenge***

***Idle No More***

***It Gets Better Campaign***

people are saying about your issue, and to share what you are doing with others. You can make creative videos about your issue and advocacy work, and post them on these sites to share with your followers, and the public. This can help you raise awareness and build supporters.

**Pinterest** is a website that lets you “pin” things online, just like you would pin them on a real life bulletin board. Pinterest offers tons of info about youth mental health. It can be a fun way to

organize your online resources about your cause, while letting you share your personal pinboard of mental health resources with others. You can create a pinboard for ‘youth mental health advocacy’ or for specific topics, like ‘youth mental health stigma.’ You can also re-pin info that you get from other people’s pinboards, by choosing ‘re-pin’. To learn more and to get started, click [here](#).

Remember to be creative with how you connect with people about your issue and about your advocacy work. Messenger apps, like BBM and WhatsApp, and video chat apps like Facetime are an easy way to keep connected with supporters, by sharing messages and reminders about events to people in your network.

## DEMONSTRATIONS

A demonstration is literally what it sounds like – a way to **demonstrate the size and power** of your campaign. A demonstration can be a good tactic if you want to gain widespread exposure to the issue and educate the public about it. Demonstrations help bring attention to your issue, and can show decision makers that a lot of people care about your issue. Examples of demonstrations include marches and rallies. A **march** moves the advocating group from one location to another. Marches are a good way to make your demonstration public, as many people will be able to see your demonstration as you walk through the streets. **Rallies** generally take place in one specific location, and can allow members of the public to stop and ask about your demonstration. No matter how you demonstrate the message is the same – you are rallying your supporters to give **public voice** to your cause.



### *Tips:*

- Choose a location that is accessible and easy to get to for supporters. Make sure it is a place where your presence will be felt – like outside of your legislature’s building, or in the centre of your campus.
- You may need a permit from local authorities in order to hold a demonstration. Check with local police and/or campus security as early on in your planning as possible. Make sure you have a copy of the permit and are aware of all of the regulations your demonstrators will need to follow and inform demonstrators of these regulations before the event.
- Advertise your event to interested organizations so that they can share with their networks and invite local decision makers who may be interested in attending.
- Use social media to raise awareness, to promote the event, and to organize transportation to the event.
- During the event distribute leaflets which explain your cause, and your group’s work.
- Designate someone to take pictures to post on social media. It is also a good idea to designate someone as a representative to talk to the media, should they want an interview!



## LOBBYING

Lobbying means writing letters or meeting with key decision makers about issues that are important to you. We can lobby government representatives, like councillors, MPPs, and MPs, as well as other key decision makers, such as school board superintendents. You can engage in lobbying on your own, or as part of a group.

This section includes **tips and templates** to help you with your lobbying advocacy efforts.

Specifically, it includes:

- ✓ **Messages and story worksheet** to help you prepare for the meeting with the key decision maker.
- ✓ **Lobbying letter template** for contacting the key decision maker in writing.
- ✓ **Lobby Tip-Sheet** with helpful suggestions on how to contact a key decision maker and set up a meeting.
- ✓ **Follow-up letter template** to be sent to the key decision maker after your meeting.

## Key Messages, Solutions, and Personal Stories

Effective advocacy has 3 important parts: strong key messages which describe the issue; 1-2 suggested solutions to fix the issue; and a personal story to show how people are affected by the issue. You can use this sheet to help you figure out your key messages, the solution you want; and how it affects your life.

### My Key Messages

We may have lots of problems that we want to speak about, but our key messages are the **most important things** said in the **simplest way**. This makes it easier for the key decision maker to understand why that point is important to you and how a change will affect your life. To help you come up with *your* key messages:

- Create a short summary of what is important to you
- Use the *Campaign Time* section of this toolkit to help you think about how to describe the problem
- Decide the most important points you want to make. The following messages are examples:
  - Youth in Ontario care about mental health and are new and future voters
  - Youth in Ontario/this community wait too long to access services
  - We want to be part of an Ontario where everyone has access to key mental health and addictions services
  - Stigma in school/on campus is preventing students from reaching out for help

Use the lines below to write your key messages:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## My Solutions

Effective advocacy is not just talking about problems. Effective advocacy is about solutions as well.

Your **solutions** are the 1-3 things that you want to see happen or changed. End your conversation/letter/presentation with your **solutions**.

### Tips:

- Be specific and clear
- Avoid being too broad or general (for example, “I need your support” is way too general)
- Link to your personal story, if possible
- Mention these again at the end of your conversation/letter/presentation
- Use the *Campaign Time* section of this toolkit to help you think about your suggested solutions

Use the lines below to write your solutions:

### *Here are some examples of ‘solutions’:*

- ***Include mental health education as a part of the curriculum of every highschool in Ontario.***
- ***Provide a mental health worker in every highschool in Ontario.***
- ***Create a public awareness campaign aimed at college/university students to inform them of mental health resources available on campus.***
- ***Have at least one school assembly each year which includes presenters to promote mental health and to reduce stigma.***

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## My Personal Story

Personal stories are real life example of the problems you are speaking about. Politicians hear facts and figures all the time – you need to provide them with **real life examples** of how these problems affect people directly. You can share your own personal story or you can speak about your experience as a friend or family member of someone who was directly impacted. If you don't have direct connection to the issue, find someone who has and ask them to share their story!

- Life stories are complex – the personal story you use for advocacy has to be a simple version
- Choose a story that is an examples of how the problems plays out in real life
- Show how this problem affected you/your family member or friend
- Choose whether to tell your story chronologically (in the order life events happened) or broken down into issues
- Repeat your key messages often!

Essential elements of a personal story include:

- Who you are (name, where you live)
- Time and facts around your story
- Challenges you faced
- How you were affected
- Don't get bogged down with small details
- Keep it clear and simple and you will make an impression!

Use this space to get started on writing your personal story:

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## Writing to the Key Decision Makers

Writing a letter or an email to a key decision maker is powerful – after all, taking the time to write shows that you *really* care about your issue. So write to them – and get your friends and family to do the same.

Speaking from your own experience can have a big effect. So write a letter that talks about your experience with the youth mental health system, or youth mental health program/service, or the experience of a friend or family member; for example:

- what is missing,
- how it failed to support you or your friend/family,
- how it denied you/them opportunities, or
- how it stopped you/them from reaching your/their full potential.

Also describe what you think a good system would look like – the programs, services, and resources that you think would help you and youth in your school/community live the life you want to live.

Keep your letter short – **two pages at the most** – because the key decision maker or their staff will be more likely to read it that way.

## Key Decision Maker Letter Template

DATE

Your Name

Your Address

**NAME OF KEY DECISION MAKER** (NOTE: if you are addressing Ministers, use the title, 'Honourable')

**Title** (e.g., MPP or Minister of...)

**Address**

Re: Meeting request from **YOUR NAME(S) / GROUP**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (*First Name, Last Name*),

*I am/We are members of/students of/residents of (insert your group name, school name, city, or province), with an interest in ensuring that youth in our school/community/province have access to the mental health programs and services that they need.*

We spoke to many young people in our *school/community* who struggle with accessing mental health programs and services and are negatively impacted by stigma associated with mental illness. Many young people deal with their mental health issue alone because they do not have the resources in their school, or community that are easily accessible to them.

*I/We* believe that youth in our *school/community/province* deserve access to programs and services to help them meet their mental health needs. *I/We* support initiatives within our school/community that address stigma and increase education about mental health.

**INSERT YOUR 'KEY MESSAGES' HERE**

*I/We* would very much appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these issues and ways in which we can work collaboratively to ensure that youth with mental health needs get the right support. *I/We* will be in touch with you shortly to arrange a convenient meeting date.

Sincerely,

Your Name(s)

## Meeting With Your Local MPP/MP

Meeting with your local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) or Member of Parliament (MP) is a powerful and personal way to get your point across. You can use the suggestions below for pointers which can also be used for tips for meeting with other key decision makers.

- Find out who your MPP/MP is and get their contact information
- Send your letter expressing your concerns and asking for a meeting.
- Set up an appointment with your MPP/MP:
  - ✓ A week or two after sending your letter, call your MPP/MP's Constituency Office to make an appointment to meet. MPPs and MPs are usually available on Fridays in their offices. If the Legislature/Parliament isn't sitting, they are available most workdays.
  - ✓ Formally schedule an appointment through the MPP/MP's assistant or appointment coordinator, even if the MPP/MP or staff person already agreed to a meeting. Remember, lobbying starts with your first contact, so be nice to the receptionist and the administrative and executive assistants. They are the gatekeepers to your MPP/MP. The nicer and more respectful you are to them, the more likely they are to help you get a meeting with your MPP/MP.
  - ✓ Sometimes several phone calls are needed to get a meeting. Don't be shy about being persistent! Emphasize how many people are also affected by the problems you plan to talk about. You will have to prove that meeting with you is a good use of the MPP/MP's time.
- Figure out who will attend the meeting. It is a good idea to bring other people along; however, it's best not to invite more than 2-3 people. It's also best that all the people who attend the meeting live in the MPP/MP's Electoral District. You could invite a supportive friend or family member, or a staff member from your school, community center, or community program.



- **Preparing for the meeting:**
  - ✓ About 3-5 days before the meeting, call your MPP/MP's Constituency Office to confirm the date, time, and people who will attend the meeting. If the appointment needs to be rescheduled, be friendly and polite.
  - ✓ Let the office know who will attend with you and find out how long you will have to meet with your MPP/MP. Most appointments will be short – 15 to 30 minutes – so you need to be clear about exactly which problems you want to speak about.
  - ✓ Make sure you know the most current information about the issues you want to discuss.
  - ✓ Telling your MPP/MP about your experience can be hard, so you may want to make a few notes beforehand to help you remember what to say. You can ask the other people who are attending the meeting with you to do the same. Use the **Key Messages, Solutions, and Personal Story** sections in this kit to help you.
  - ✓ Have a plan of who will speak when and about what to make sure you cover all the points during the meeting time. This should stop people from missing important points.
  - ✓ Make sure to arrive a few minutes early for the meeting to give yourself time to get settled.
  
- **During the meeting:**
  - ✓ Be assertive rather than aggressive. Being assertive will win you more respect. Try not to get into arguments. Speak more about the solutions rather than problems.
  - ✓ Be friendly. Point out what you heard/seen about the MPP/MP's views or work that you can support. You want to show that you can work with them.
  - ✓ Don't spend all your time talking. Leave about 10 minutes for the MPP to ask questions. Decide who will answer the MPP's questions before the meeting.
  - ✓ Make sure the MPP understands what you are asking him/her to do and that you will be following up.
  
- **What to ask the MPP/MP to do specifically:**
  - ✓ If your MPP/MP is a government Minister, ask them to bring up your problems/demands in Cabinet meetings.



- ✓ If your MPP/MP is a member of the party in power, ask them to bring up the problems/demands at one of their caucus meetings.
- ✓ If they are a member of an opposition party, ask them to bring up the problems/demands during Question Period in the legislature/Parliament. Ask your MPP/MP to write a letter to the Minister that has oversight over your issue, expressing that they support your demands, and asking for an answer from this Minister.
- ✓ There are also many ways your MPP/MP can support your issue in the community:
  - Hold a community meeting in the riding
  - Mail out information in the riding
  - Ask for reports/research from his/her staff
  - Hold media conferences with partners (you) on problems and solutions
- Follow-up:
  - ✓ Send your MPP/MP a follow-up letter. Thank them for meeting with you, remind them what you spoke about and what the MPP/MP agreed to do. You can use our “After the Meeting MPP Letter Template.”
  - ✓ At a later date, call the MPP/MP’s office to see if the MPP/MP followed through on any promises they made.

## After the Meeting: MPP/MP Thank You Letter Template

*DATE*

*Your Name*

*Your Address*

(The Honourable) *NAME OF MPP OR MINISTER* (*NOTE: Honourable is only used to address Ministers*)

*Title (e.g., MPP or Minister of...)*

*Address*

Re: Meeting request from *YOUR NAME / ORGANIZATION*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (*MPP First Name, Last Name*),

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you on (*enter date of meeting*). *I/We* very much appreciate your interest in the issues identified by *YOUR NAME / ORGANIZATION* and your commitment to youth and mental health.

*I/We* commend your recognition that/of *INSERT ISSUES THAT WERE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING*.

Your commitment to *INSERT WHAT THE MPP PROMISED TO DO* is appreciated.

*I/We* look forward to working with you during your term. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

*Your Name(s)*

# Extra Resources

[Active Minds](#)

[Mobilizing Minds](#)

[Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#)

[Change.org](#)

[Dare to Dream](#)

[Ted Talks Mental Health](#)

[Teen Mental Health](#)

[The Global Youth Action Network \(GYAN\)](#)

## References

Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). (2013). *Making the case for investing in mental health in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/5020>

MHCC. (2013). *School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse: Project Summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/node/845>

Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). (n.d.). *Mental health services*. Retrieved from <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/index.aspx>