



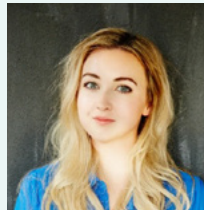
## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

If you're looking to make a difference in the lives of women by advocating directly to parliamentarians, then this kit is for you. The advice and information you'll find here is drawn from the wisdom and experiences of parliamentarians and advocates. This is a collection of practical tips and policy building advice that will help you shape policy for the better.

This toolkit was prepared by Joanna Richards, a PhD student at the University of Canberra. Joanna Richards prepared the kit while seconded to the office of Andrew Leigh MP. Many people assisted with the Gender Equity Advocacy Project. A full list of acknowledgements may be found at the end of the toolkit.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joanna Richards is a PhD candidate at the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation, located at the University of Canberra's Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis. She has previously studied at the Australian National University and the University of Nizwa, and Harvard University. Her research interests focus on women in political leadership and parliament, and her work on female party leadership and senate discourse has been published in notable journals. Most recently her work on gendered interruption in the Australian Senate has been published in the Australian Journal of Political Science. She is an active advocate for women's rights and empowerment.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere gratitude and thanks to the parliamentarians, advocates, and academics that provided their insight during the creation of this toolkit. Your contributions were invaluable and greatly appreciated.

Members of the Australian Labor Party  
Status of Women Committee.

Marie Coleman AO PSM

Emeritus Professor Marian Sawer

Cathy McGowan MP

Helen Daley-Fisher

Dr Merrindahl Andrew

Cr Alwyn Fridersdorff

Melanie Poole

Anna Phillips

Melanie Fernandez

Lauren Power

Nick Terrell

Jacob White

# 1 ADVOCACY BASICS

Lobbying is a type of advocacy that aims to influence the decisions made by Parliament through direct appeals to politicians. If you feel an issue should be brought to the attention of the Australian Parliament, you can lobby as an individual or as part of an organisation. Don't let the size or complexity of the parliamentary system discourage you, politicians can't act on behalf of your interests if they don't know what they are.



## GENDER & PARLIAMENT

### ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN

Advocates have an important role to play in directing the attention of politicians to inequalities based on gender. Many of these inequalities will relate to the work of a range of different Ministers, Shadow Ministers, committees and individual representatives, so it's important to find out which members of parliament have responsibility for the issue you want to address. This should shape the way you define what the successful outcome of your campaign looks like and how to get there.

### THE ALLIANCE MODEL

Parliament has a mechanism in place to ensure a direct line of communication between politicians and the women's sector. Six alliances – Economic Security4Women, the Equality Rights Alliance, the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, the National Rural Women's Coalition, the Australian Migrant and Refugee Women's Alliance, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance – represent hundreds of women's organisations.

These alliances regularly meet with the offices of the Minister and Shadow Minister for Women. You may find it valuable to touch base with an alliance that you think corresponds with your cause for advice and information that will help you with your advocacy. More information on the alliances is available on the [Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet website](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/grants-andfunding/national-womens-alliances)<sup>1</sup>.

The wealth of experience in the international women's movement is one of its greatest



strengths. Collaboration between political connections and women's organisations should be used to your advantage wherever possible.

### IDENTIFYING WOMEN'S ISSUES

It's worth bearing in mind that many gender inequalities are embedded in the status quo. They are entrenched patterns that first need to be redefined as problems before they can be fixed.

Parliament has a track record of working with activists to tackle issues affecting women and it's important to consolidate that relationship. Some of the issues faced by women are extremely complex and it's impossible to arrive at a solution in a single engagement or campaign. Pace yourself. Be persistent. Be patient.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/grants-andfunding/national-womens-alliances>



## WHAT POLITICIANS DO

Politicians mainly deal with two areas: constituents and policy. When you lobby your local representative, you will likely fall under both of these categories. A politician may be able to help you in some of the following ways:

### RAISING AWARENESS

Your local MP can use their public platforms to increase your profile in the community and in the Parliament.

Politicians can demonstrate support over social media, by attending your events, or by more formalised methods such as writing letters and signing their name in support of your cause. They can also help you find resources and network with other organizations.

### ASK A QUESTION

Asking a politician to scrutinise the consequences of a proposed bill or amendment in the House of Representatives or the Senate can be a useful way to challenge policy and to make the government acknowledge the concerns of dissenting voices. They can put questions to the responsible Minister in the House, or they can question actions in the Senate or in Senate Committee hearings.

### SPEECHES & MOTIONS

Members of Parliament can give speeches to the House of Representatives or the Senate on behalf of your cause. This not only increases the recognition of your cause, but it puts your issues on the record in the Hansard. Speeches range in length from 90 seconds to 30 minutes. It's helpful to provide politicians with talking points if they agree to speak on behalf of your cause.

A Private Member's motion is similar to a speech, but framed in such a way that (if agreed to) it expresses the will or judgment of the House. These motions are typically intended to spark debate.

### PARLIAMENTARY VOTES

If you can take time to arrange a direct meeting with Ministers or Shadow Ministers, so if you have a strict timeline for your advocacy, make sure you contact those parties early. Your first meeting may be with your local Member or Senator. If you have already met with your local representatives, and now wish to secure a meeting with the relevant minister or shadow minister, then the local representative may be able to help you secure that meeting.

If your advocacy relates to an issue that will go to a parliamentary vote, make sure you look at the makeup of the crossbench in the House and Senate. Particularly with issues that split the major parties, the positions of crossbenchers can determine the success or failure of a policy – in some instances, your cause may hang on the case you make to one or two undecided representatives.

### SUBMISSIONS

You can also influence law reform and policy creation yourself by participating in inquiries and writing submissions for Parliamentary Committees.

If you are unsure how your politicians can be of most assistance to your cause, ask them.



## PARLIAMENTARY SCHEDULES

### SITTING WEEK CONSIDERATIONS

It is best to meet with your local representatives in their electorates. However, if you need to meet with a range of parliamentarians from different states, travelling to Canberra during sitting weeks can be effective; just bear in mind that your meeting is likely to be interrupted by unavoidable and unpredictable activity in the chamber. The parliamentary sittings calendar is available at on the Parliament House website ([aph.gov.au](http://aph.gov.au)).

Monday and Tuesday of sitting weeks are the days parties hold most of their policy committee and party room meetings. Parliamentary committees meet at different times throughout the sittings week.

All parliamentarians are also required to

attend question time from 2.00 pm to 3.10 pm every day during sitting weeks.

The House of Representatives and the Senate usually operate between 9.30 am and 8.00 pm.

If a bill or a motion requires a decision, members or senators will need to attend the chamber to vote. This may interrupt your meeting.

There are particular periods of time where parliamentarians will be under more pressure,

or will have less capacity to engage with new campaigns. For instance, Budget week is not the best time to approach any parliamentarian who is involved in a financial portfolio. Also, the weeks prior to a long break are not ideal simply because it will be difficult for politicians to gain any momentum on your issue before parliament goes into recess. And if you are looking to influence a party's policy platform, engaging politicians during an election campaign is too late.

## 2 PRACTICAL MATTERS



### WHO TO SPEAK TO

#### MPs & SENATORS

It's a good idea to interact with your local representatives first. These politicians have made a commitment to represent the local community and can advocate on your behalf. Engaging senators is useful when you are looking to gain access to committees or when you are looking to enact (or block) a bill. Blanket approaches may help to flag your campaign with a wide range of representatives, but if you're looking for a champion or collaborator, consider who is in the best position to help you.

#### MINISTERS AND SHADOW MINISTERS

Meeting a Minister is best for advocates seeking policy or legislative change at a Federal level. However, Ministers and Shadow Ministers have responsibilities beyond their electorate, so there are extra demands on their schedules. When meeting with a Minister or Shadow, it is essential that you are well prepared, well-rehearsed and have a strong advocacy case. Consult the Parliament House website for the current [Ministry list](#)<sup>2</sup> and [Shadow Ministry list](#)<sup>3</sup>.

#### ADVISERS

Meeting with an adviser should not be underestimated. Advisers see Ministers on a daily basis and hold their trust. If you can persuade an adviser to back your cause, they may convince the Minister.

Advisers prepare briefs on bills going through parliament and help their employer engage with stakeholders to ensure their office is making decisions in full knowledge of the different perspectives on any issue. Advisers also play a role in researching policy solutions and developing legislation to enact those solutions. Advisers play a critical role informing the decision making of parliamentarians.

#### COMMITTEES

**Parliamentary Committees** periodically conduct inquiries into issues where consensus or compromise has not yet been reached. Inquiries are initiated by politicians referring a matter to the relevant Committee. Parliamentary Committees can also decide to conduct an inquiry into an issue that the members see as relevant. It's also possible for advocates to write to the Chair of a Committee to encourage them to undertake an inquiry into a particular issue. Before doing this, it is a good idea to speak to the Committee Secretary for advice on how to frame such a suggestion. Consult the Parliament House website for the

2 [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Parliamentary\\_Handbook/Current\\_Ministry\\_List](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Current_Ministry_List)

3 [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Parliamentary\\_Handbook/Shadow](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Shadow)

current list of [parliamentary committees](#)<sup>4</sup>.

**Policy committees** are internal party committees. These groups often discuss specific policy areas to provide advice to Caucus.

**The key women's policy committees are:**

- Liberal Federal Women's Committee
- ALP Status of Women Caucus Committee
- National Women's Federal Council
- Green's State Women Committees

Finally, **Parliamentary Friendship Groups** can offer a useful platform for cross-party conversations on topical matters. Although they do not hold any formal political power, they influence politicians by sharing information and raising awareness. Events held by Parliamentary Friendship Groups can be an efficient and enjoyable way to reach a range of different politicians at the same time.



## RESEARCHING PARLIAMENTARIANS

### FIRST SPEECHES

Politicians use their first speech to indicate the issues that closely affect them and are of significance to their constituency. This is a great starting point when researching your politician and can help you frame your issue for maximum relevance to their electorate. Parliamentarians' first speeches may be found on their profile page on the [Parliament House website](#)<sup>5</sup>.

### VOTING HISTORY

The majority of votes on legislation will reflect the collective position of the party to which a member belongs. So considering a politician's voting history can give a fairly reliable indication of their party's platform. In the case of the crossbench, voting histories can be helpful in directing you to which members you should work with or work on. These data are available at the [TheyVoteForYou](#)<sup>6</sup> and [OpenAustralia](#)<sup>7</sup> websites.

## OTHER MATERIALS

The Hansard provides an online written record of parliamentary proceedings. You can use this to get a sense of what a politician has been willing to speak about in the past. Media reports and social media profiles can also provide up-to-date information on their interests and activity. Being able to discuss what your politician is passionate about shows that you have invested some effort in finding out what they stand for.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Your politician will be a member of various policy committees. Knowing what committees he or she is on will help you understand their interests and networks. This information is readily available on parliamentarians' profile pages on the [Parliament House website](#)<sup>8</sup>.

## PARTY PLATFORMS

Unless you are approaching an independent, your target for advocacy will have made a commitment to support their party's policies and platform, so shape your ask accordingly. Even if a politician can't publicly advocate for your position, they may be able to give an insight into the kinds of conditions under which their party would consider changing their position.



## HOW TO MAKE CONTACT

When working with politicians, it's ideal to meet with them face-to-face.

## WRITING LETTERS

The best first step in parliamentary advocacy is to write to your politician. Depending on their position, you may need to send a letter anywhere from two weeks (local MP) to two months (Minister) in advance of a meeting. A short letter or email requesting a meeting and a brief outline of why you would like to meet with them is sufficient. If you plan on asking for something (such as signing a pledge or petition), include this in the letter. Recent media briefs that mention you or your cause are also appropriate to send through. Once you confirm a meeting, make sure you include your contact information and a short bio in a follow up email.

4 [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees)

5 [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members)

6 [www.theyvoteforyou.com.au](http://www.theyvoteforyou.com.au)

7 [www.openaustralia.org.au](http://www.openaustralia.org.au)

8 [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members)

## CALLING THE OFFICE

You may wish to follow up written communication by calling their office to remind them of your previous communication and request a brief meeting. Don't hesitate to call again if you don't get a response.



## ADVOCATING EFFECTIVELY

### WHO SHOULD I TAKE?

It is always good to bring someone with you to a meeting. Limit your group to three if possible and assign roles and delegate tasks to each member for clarity. Also ensure that all members are clear on the issue, its framing and your request. Make sure you introduce every member of your group at the beginning of your meeting. If you are using personal stories to illustrate your case, it can be useful to bring the subject of those stories and let them talk about their experiences.

### WHAT SHOULD I TAKE?

Prepare a one to two page document in support of your case that you can leave behind. This should include the key points covered in the meeting, as well as more detailed evidentiary data. Make sure you include your contact details.

If you are referencing research it is a good idea to bring copies to offer to your politician. However, do not spend large sums of money producing information documents. You may wish to take a photo with your politician. In this case, feel free to take a prop as politicians are usually open to this (again, they will appreciate forewarning).

### HOW MUCH TIME WILL I HAVE?

Meetings can last anywhere from ten to thirty minutes. It's important to clarify the length of the meeting in order to prepare your material with a time frame in mind. Always leave time for questions. Don't linger on niceties; politicians will not be offended if you politely begin your advocacy after your initial introductions.

If you are scheduling meetings while parliament is sitting, be aware that there may be unavoidable delays (for example, caused by parliamentary votes). To avoid a cascade effect, it may be unwise to book meetings back-to-back.

## WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

Begin your meeting by briefly introducing yourselves. Explain who you are, who you represent, what work you do, and why you have asked to meet with them.

Make sure you use a mix of evidence (this will be discussed in more detail in section 3). It's important that you illustrate that your issue *exists* (by using data) and that it *matters* (by using case studies). Provide examples and stories, but make sure to stay on track. Don't let your passion drag you away from your main pitch.

## WHAT IF I GET A BAD RESPONSE?

Ask politicians for feedback if they seem unconvinced. Respect that their opinion is based on experience and beliefs. Remember to view your meeting as the beginning of a relationship. After the meeting, revisit any articulated obstacles and ensure that none are based on misunderstandings.

## WHEN SHOULD I FOLLOW UP?

Following your meeting, compile any notes taken and any information requested and send it through to the respective politician's office. Remember to thank them for their time and reaffirm any course of action that may have been agreed upon in the meeting. Do not send through unsolicited documents that may distract them from what is important.





## CREATING A LEAVE BEHIND

### WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Who you are and who you represent
- What the problem is
- Who the problem affects (electorate specific as well as broadly)
- What needs to be done to solve the problem or improve the situation
- Why it needs to be done (framing)
- Recommendations for change (ie the course of action you want and the people who need to take that action)

### STYLISTIC CONCERNS

- Keep the message short and simple
- Use clear language - aim to educate and inform
- Give your campaign a title - keep it short and have it reflect the purpose of your campaign
- Include data and name other organisations who share your position.



An example of a strong leave behind document is available in the final section of this toolkit.

## TIPS AND TRICKS



### DO

- Do thank them for taking time to meet with you
- Do thank them for considering your viewpoint
- Do be forthright and informative in your communications
- Do stick to an agenda
- Do keep it simple and brief
- Do provide an "Ask." Tell the politician or staff what action you're calling on them to take
- Do reference specific data and use personal anecdotes
- Do offer to provide additional background information on the subject you are discussing
- Do offer to assist their staff in any way possible
- Do expect them to be responsive to your views
- Do expect to be asked questions - try to foresee what these might be and prepare for them



### DON'T

- Don't be argumentative or confrontational
- Don't be overly technical. Simplify when necessary
- Don't lose track of time. Just like you, politicians are extremely busy. Be respectful of their time
- Don't expect them to be an expert in your policy area
- Don't underestimate the value of meeting with advisers. If you can convince advisers, they will often persuade parliamentarians for you.



# 3 HOW TO BUILD AN ADVOCACY CASE



## PROBLEMS, POLICY & POLITICS

### SOLUTIONS SEEKING PROBLEMS

A good way to think about the policy-making space is to imagine three separate but interacting streams: the problem stream, the politics stream and the policy stream. For a policy or legislative change to take place, all three streams need to align; there needs to be widespread awareness of a problem, a political environment that allows for policy change and appropriate solutions available and ready to implement.

Advocates should think of policy advocacy in terms of ‘solutions seeking problems’ rather than ‘problems seeking solutions.’

Proposing amendments to existing policy is a way to achieve more positive and immediate results as opposed to advocating for a new (ideal) policy. Be prepared to compromise.

### WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY

A window of opportunity opens when the public perceive a problem, the political circumstances are favourable to solving that problem and there are workable solutions for the problem at hand.

Advocates who prepare policy, have developed strong relationships, and have framed problems and solutions with politics in mind will find themselves perfectly placed when a window of opportunity opens. Events and public pressure are key triggers for windows of opportunity. When you are targeting parliamentarians, having a community-focused approach which touches on the concerns of their constituents will help you elicit a strong response.



## TURNING YOUR ISSUE INTO A PROBLEM

### THE PROBLEM STREAM

There will always be competition for a place on the policy agenda. Events that generate public attention can quickly move an issue to the top of the priority list, and this kind of external pressure on the political system can be harnessed to generate focused engagement and action. Just remember that a politician is less likely to collaborate with you if they think you see them as part of the problem, rather than a way to solve it.

If your issue is not currently considered a problem by politicians, devote time to framing your issue to attract the attention it deserves. Don't rush your planning when you're first framing your issue - this step determines what does and does not get done.



Consider the following questions to help you turn your issue into a problem:

## FRAMING YOUR ISSUE

### Context

- Is there time for analysis?
- To what extent does the issue have political overtones?
- Have fixed positions been adopted on the issue?
- How central to the concerns of the government is the issue?

### Characteristics

- How much consensus is there about the issue and the solution?
- How complex is the issue?
- How much uncertainty is there about the issue/ possible outcomes?
- How value-laden is the issue?

### Repercussions

- What effects are involved?
- How many people will be affected?
- Who are the affected groups?
- How significantly is the group affected?
- Is the issue likely to have knock-on effects for other issues?
- Will acting upon the issue restrict the agency's future flexibility of action?

### Actions and Analysis

- How large are the costs of acting on the issue?
- Is there a cost increment or quantum jump?
- For how long will resources be committed?
- What will be the cost of analysis?



## COLLECTING STRONG EVIDENCE

### SUPPORTING DATA

Politicians indicated that the most useful evidence is that which is specifically relevant to the request.

Some women's issues, particularly economic ones, are easily measurable in quantitative terms. Make sure your data-based evidence is reliable, honest and straightforward. If you are using statistics, always check that the source is reputable and ensure that you take into account the constraints and variables of the study.

Other areas of women's policy are less straightforward when it comes to empirical measurements and objective evidence. There will be a limit, for instance, on the quantitative measures available to support gendered dimensions of poverty or general female empowerment. Gender-based violence is a particularly sensitive issue and poses additional obstacles to effective data collection.

### ETHICAL STORYTELLING

Stories from the community, including case studies and personal accounts, will help to humanise your issue. Your parliamentarian is a person before they are a politician. While quantitative, measurable data is indispensable, facts rarely change people's mind on their own. A good advocacy case will typically be built around stories and case studies.

You have a responsibility as an advocate to tell stories ethically. Many of the issues facing women, such as sexual assault and homelessness, are extremely sensitive and private. Before taking someone's story to a politician, it is essential that you have the explicit permission of that person, with the exception of de-identified information. It is also essential that the person has a comprehensive understanding of the consequences that follow the public sharing of their story. You must ensure that you tell the story accurately and that the subject has the opportunity to be involved in lobbying if they so wish. Be sure to support your subjects throughout the process.

If a politician signals a willingness to use a story in a speech, be ready to provide them with details.

### APPROPRIATE MATERIAL

If your issue involves matters that are graphic or may be disturbing, do not send or provide your parliamentarian with these images. It is safe to assume that your parliamentarian knows how to

investigate independently if they wish to. Surprising people with this type of material may reduce their willingness to support your cause, and may damage your long-term relationship with them.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If the evidence you provide is presented to the Parliament, or if it becomes the basis for any legislation, it will be closely scrutinised. Having strong evidence that's not easily distorted will help your case.

Framing evidence in a way that is relevant to your politician, whether it be through highlighting their electorate, their portfolio, or their relevant committee membership, is critical.

Giving a sense of how your issue relates to other issues in the electorate is also important in pitching the urgency of your campaign. Ask yourself: does your cause tie in to other problems? If so, how?

If you are suggesting a solution that has worked previously, provide evidence of its success. This might be in the form of international case studies, or case studies from pilots on a smaller level.

Remember that whatever evidence you present, your opponents will have an alternate way to frame it. Spend time thinking about how your opposition could counter your evidence. Make sure that you cover these arguments.



## POLITICAL TIMING

When you propose change, you need to consider the current, and uncontrollable, political climate. Considering these realities early in your process can help you frame your cause in way that will make it achievable during a policy window. Addressing political realities such as timing, implementation, political will, resources, cost etcetera) will show that what you're proposing is realistic.

## IDENTIFY POLICIES

Auditing relevant portfolios and their policies is a good starting point when considering the political climate. Also consider the rhetoric surrounding your issue. Research relevant international obligations, laws, and standards to leverage your case.

## EXPLORE PATTERNS OF INFLUENCE

You should try to uncover where policy decisions are made and who has influence over them. Start by considering which portfolios are responsible for

the relevant policy. Are there other public bodies with relevant influence? Don't forget to consider the seemingly obvious issues: Who holds the balance of power? Who sits in a marginal seat? How will your campaign fit in with the electoral cycle?

## UNDERSTAND PROCESS

Politicians have the greatest flexibility to work with advocates for policy changes when the party is settling its platform, prior to an election campaign. Political parties start to develop their platforms almost the day after the last election is over. The importance of timing when it comes to lobbying cannot be stressed enough.

If your policy area involves both state and federal government, take time to understand who is responsible for what.

## CONSIDER OPTIONS

It is often helpful to conclude your meeting with an explicit ask. Consider carefully what is most important to you, and reasonably achievable. Would a change in policy alone be sufficient to achieve the advocacy goal? Or might the proposed policy change also require legal and / or regulatory change? What about the economic impact? Are there taxation or public spending implications that should be taken into account? Are there alternative approaches to be considered? Could the goals be achieved incrementally or do they require a fundamental change in policy? What policy options are most likely to attract support, or generate opposition? Consider all these options during the construction of your case for policy change.



# 4 ONGOING RELATIONSHIP



## SHORT TERM VERSUS LONG TERM THINKING

### INCREMENTAL CHANGE

Whether you ask for radical or incremental change will vary from case to case. Incrementalism is built into the parliamentary system, however, in some instances a radical correction is the only acceptable outcome.

It may be helpful to consider how your own goals could be achieved both in one action, and also through a number of steps. Involve your politician in deciding what pathways they think are best.

### MAINTAIN GOODWILL

Unless you have information that is new, useful, and actionable, you should limit your visits to once every six months to a year. In the interim, provide updates to the office of your parliamentarian and feel free to invite them to local events, and invite them to speak to those in attendance.

Social media is an effective way to keep your cause at the front of your parliamentarians mind. Tag your politician in things that may be of interest to them. Connect with your politician as a person, as well as someone who can help your cause.



## RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR PARLIAMENTARIAN

You can expect at least one meeting with the politician who represents your electorate. This cannot be assured with Members or Senators representing other electorates unless you can show them how it relates to their constituents specifically or if you have a specific reason to approach them in particular.

You can expect your politician to be honest with you about what is possible and to follow through with actions they agree to. However, it's unrealistic to expect your politician to agree with your point of view uncritically.

### THE IDEAL ADVOCATE

To be successful as a parliamentary advocate, you must be credible. If you provide false, exaggerated, or misleading information, you will damage your relationship. Spend the time gathering and verifying your evidence. The more open and transparent you are with your politician, the faster you will develop trust. Knowing they have your respect will make them more receptive to your cause. You will not make lasting gains by tricking your politician. Keep in mind that every relationship involves a little give and take. It's always a good idea, to ask your politician how you can help.



## REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

### LOBBYING IN CONTEXT

Although skilful lobbying is an important driver for legislative change, politicians also need to see that your advocacy is reflected in the concerns of the broader sector and that there is an appetite in the community for the change you're proposing. Politicians are professional policy-makers, but most will not be experts in your field. The answers for issues affecting women should be coming from the women's movement.

It's important to synchronise your advocacy with public pressure to gain momentum in your parliamentary advocacy. At the same time, without parliamentary advocacy, much of your public awareness raising activity will be wasted. Spreading the work across multiple groups is the most efficient way of ensuring the parliamentary and public advocacy campaigns for your cause are well co-ordinated.



## STRIKING A BALANCE

Highlighting your issue within the context of a politician's electorate or portfolio is important, however, you must ensure that you do not allow your framing to be co-opted by whomever you are speaking with. Do not compromise your message in order to gain parliamentary support. The product of such a compromise may be completely different from what you originally intended to achieve. Remain faithful to the language of your community. Keep in mind that the language and framing used in a meeting might end up being used for distributed materials and publicity.

All social issues have a financial dimension and there is a possibility that you may be asked to answer questions about what your plan for action will cost (or save). Even if generating revenue or reducing spending isn't the primary goal of your advocacy, you should be able to show an awareness of these factors. Just be ready to put that in context of what it's worth, both to their community and Australia more broadly, to solve the problem you've identified.

Although skilful lobbying is an important driver for legislative change, politicians also need to see that your advocacy is reflected in the concerns of the broader sector and that there is an appetite in the community for the change you're proposing.

# 5 A TEN POINT GUIDE TO ADVOCACY

- 1 Identify a **clear problem** – and a solution.

---

- 2 Understand the **political context** – what are the interests, institutions, processes and individuals that matter. What’s the public mood on this issue? Are there windows of opportunity? Successful campaigns almost always require some kind of engagement with government.

---

- 3 Ensure that you **understand the policy creation process** and that you pinpoint the key policy makers relevant to your cause. It is unwise to approach a parliamentarian without doing your research.

---

- 4 **Cultivate** strong relationships with your local politicians and other pivotal actors within the parliaments. This includes ministers and advisors.

---

- 5 Stay engaged through the **whole policy process**. To truly have an impact, campaigns need to go beyond agenda setting and actually ensure that policies are developed and implemented.

---

- 6 Form **effective coalitions** that increase the legitimacy and political clout of a campaign. See if your issue can be diversified to include actors outside of the women’s movement. At the same time, be wary of any tension or confusion in your group. Ensure that there is consensus between all before reaching out to parliamentarians.

---

- 7 Generate **relevant and credible evidence**. Rigorous evidence is vital to campaigns as it helps to win the battle about what and how important a problem is.

---

- 8 **Communicate** effectively. It is crucial the target audience and strategy are clearly identified – whether directly engaging policymakers or putting pressure on them through the media. Often popular communications, such as media, rallies and powerful support, are key.

---

- 9 Be **persistent**. Most successful campaigns take a long time and require a continuous and persistent approach.

---

- 10 Be **polite**. Your politicians are doing their jobs. This may not be the only time you have dealings with them, so make sure you leave a good impression. Advocacy is about creating allies, not vanquishing enemies.

# CASE STUDY: RU486

The elements required for a strong advocacy case are set out in this example.

In 2006, female Senators from four different political parties successfully co-sponsored a bill to lift a ministerial veto on the import of RU486, the abortion pill, into Australia. The success of the Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial Responsibility for Approval of RU486) Bill 2005 was made possible by an incredibly strong advocacy campaign executed by the women's movement in coalition with medico-legal partners, supporting champions within the Parliament.

## TIMING

Despite previous attempts to repeal the ministerial veto on RU486, it was not until 2006 that any progress was made. This was due to political timing. The attempt in 2001 failed to gain momentum as it was launched during an election year when cross-party collaboration would have been almost unthinkable. This was not the case in 2006 – the election was a year away, and a window of opportunity had been opened by research in the medical field.

## PEOPLE

### Non-traditional actors

In 2005, Obstetrics and Gynaecology Professor Caroline de Costa published an article in the *Medical Journal of Australia* highlighting the plight of women in rural Australia unable to access terminations even when medically directed. On the day of publication, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANCOG) issued supporting



statements. These organisations continued to participate throughout the campaign in support of the RU486 Bill, as did the Rural Doctors Association (RDA). For parliamentarians who had reservations about the Bill, the credibility of medical professionals was compelling.

### Coalition of Women's Organisations

Three professional women's organisations - Reproductive Choice Australia (RCA), Children by Choice and the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) - led the parliamentary advocacy campaign in support of the Bill. At the same time, grassroots organisations increased awareness and support in the community, actively dispelling misleading information produced by those who opposed the Bill. The RCA, which represented over 20 feminist organisations, was resource rich despite their lack of funding. They were able to use key members of their organisation, such as experienced lobbyist Cait Calcutt and gifted writer Dr Leslie Cannold, to persuade both the parliament and the public. Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia also mobilised their connections with many feminist organisations in support of the bill.

## CAMPAIGNING

### Representing the Community

At the time the online platform GetUp! had just emerged and the RCA was quick to enlist them to the campaign for RU486. The online petition hosted by GetUp! received significant media attention when presented to the Parliament. Over 15,000 signatures were collected, providing an alternative viewpoint to the hand written letters supplied by the politically active religious community. AHRA was able to support this by commissioning a public opinion poll which found that only 21% of the public were opposed to the drug being available in Australia.

### Online Activism

Online feminist networks gave active and visible support to parliamentarians who supported the Bill in an effort to counter the attacks coming from the opposition. Strategically, AHRA quickly purchased all the web domains relating to RU486 in order to prevent the newly formed coalition, Australians Against RU486, from doing the same.

### Strong Evidentiary Documents

ARHA was able to dedicate a staff member to assist the campaign through the development of a polished website and research material to support submissions and speeches. In partnership with the RCA, the ARHA produced a report called *RU486/Mifepristone: A Factual Guide to the Issues in the Australian Debate*. This report was distributed to parliamentarians and journalists. The document featured a pleasant photo of a mother and baby. This is important to note, as those opposed to RU486 distributed disturbing images of aborted fetuses as a part of their campaign. These images backfired causing a few parliamentarians to vote in favour of RU486 as a response to the offensive, ill-advised strategy of the opposition.

### Parliamentary Friends Committee

A critical component in the success of the RU486 campaign was the Parliamentary Group on Population and Development. The Parliamentary Group allowed for cross-party networking and the fostering of trust between parliamentarians. In the week following the publication of Professor de Costa's article, Senator Jan McLucas arranged for de Costa to speak at a meeting of the Group. Others present at the meeting all became key members of the RU486 campaign.

## FRAMING

### Maternal Health

At its core, the Therapeutic Goods Amendment Bill 2005 was a fight for female reproductive rights. However, if it were not for its framing as a medical maternal-health issue, somewhat disconnected from reproductive rights, it may not have had the success that it did. While advocates stayed true to their core message and to the women whom they represented, strategic choices were made in relation to what evidentiary support was used in the campaign.

### Rural Issue

Presenting the availability of RU486 as a rural issue was instrumental to opening a window of opportunity, as well as allowing for the involvement of non-traditional partners. Framing it in such a way also made it possible for unexpected Parliamentary champions to emerge.



Women's organisations worked in coalition with each other and with non-traditional partners in the medical and rural sectors to campaign for the availability of RU486 in Australia during a window of opportunity.

## TARGETS

As previously mentioned, the Bill was introduced by female senators from four different parties. Both Senator Fiona Nash and Dr Sharman Stone were able to support the Bill despite their party's opposition, due to the focus on the impact on rural women. This highlights how champions for your cause can be found anywhere. Some of the women supporting the Bill were members of EMILY's List, meaning that they had made a commitment to stand up for progressive feminist causes within the parliament. Finally, a number of supportive parliamentarians were soon to leave parliament, allowing them to act according to their conscience without having to consider consequences in the next election or in the party room, or prompting them to act in order to leave their mark.

## IN SUMMARY

Women's organisations worked in coalition with each other and with non-traditional partners in the medical and rural sectors to campaign for the availability of RU486 in Australia during a window of opportunity.

They drew on the strengths of individual organisations to launch a multifaceted campaign, targeting both the parliament and the public.

The issue was framed in such a way that it was both about reproductive rights, as well as the wellbeing of mothers and of rural women. The campaigners developed numerous champions within the government using a Parliamentary Friends Group as a point of entry. Throughout the campaign, they equipped their champions with high-quality evidence and support. They made sure to demonstrate the viewpoint of the larger community, and to continuously counter the opposition.

A final note. RU486 (Mifepristone) did not become widely available in Australia until some years later. In 2012, the Therapeutic Goods Administration included it on the Australia Register of Therapeutic Goods. In 2013, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee recommended that it be listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which occurred in June 2013.







**For more information, please contact:**

**Andrew Leigh**

**Federal Member for Fenner**

**Phone** (02) 6247 4396

**Address** 8/1 Torrens St, Braddon ACT 2612

**Email** [Andrew.Leigh.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Andrew.Leigh.MP@aph.gov.au)