

## Meeting an MP: What to expect

MPs tell us that the most effective communication they receive is clear, heartfelt, succinct and personal. It can seem intimidating to call your MP, but they are simply members of your community. MPs come from every walk of life and may not actually be experts on the topic that concerns you. They should be treated with respect and courtesy, but there's no need for fear or nervousness. The difference between us and MPs is that they have been elected. That office they now occupy means they also have a responsibility to listen to their constituents.

A phone call to an MP's office, either to the Parliament Hill office or to a local constituency office, will be answered by a staff member who works for the MP. The staff will ask for your contact information and the reason you would like to meet or speak with the MP.

MPs spend much of their time between September and June in Ottawa, when the House of Commons is in session. Some will be able to be back in their riding offices on Fridays or on weekends. Every month there is at least one break week which the MPs will be able to spend in their ridings. Cabinet ministers have more commitments and may have less time to spend in their constituency offices.

MPs tend to have very busy schedules, and your MP may only have a short window of time available for a meeting. Many meetings may only be 20 or 30 minutes long. For a well-prepared visitor, that is plenty of time to share your concerns, make your case and request action.

MPs care about what their constituents think, even if they don't agree with you.

If you know others who share your concerns, several of you can arrange to meet with your MP at the same time.

## Meeting an MP: Tips for effectiveness

Make good use of your time. Exchange pleasantries and give a brief introduction of yourself, but then focus on the reason you asked for the meeting. Time passes quickly so spend a few minutes mentally (or on paper) mapping out your goals for your meeting.

Be prepared for the meeting.

- Identify **one** issue you would like to raise with your MP, the reasons it's important and the action you would like the MP to take.
- Bring some notes or background information to remind you of your points.
- It's also helpful to have one or two pages (at most) of information to leave with the MP about the issue or action you would like them to take.

Use a respectful and reasonable tone. Think about how your MP may understand your concern and how your requested action may fit within the MP's priorities. Treat your MP as you would like to be treated.

Thank your MP and their assistant for taking the time to meet with you. Consider sending a follow-up email or note to thank them for their time again and to remind them of the action you requested.

As a quick memory aid, consider the acronym T.E.A.M.

- **T**hanks for willingness to meet
- **E**xplain the issue and why you're concerned
- **A**sk for specific action
- **M**ake sure to follow up

## Other effective ways to communicate with an MP

You can confirm who your MP is and find their contact information at [www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/constituencies/FindMP](http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/constituencies/FindMP)

In general, the time and effort you put into making contact lets an MP know how important the issue is to you. Easy, less personal ways of communicating such as postcards or group petitions tend to have less impact on an individual MP but can be helpful in drawing attention to an issue.

Many Canadians may not realize they can interact with their Senators as well as their MPs. The Senate is often called a place of "sober second thought." After a bill has passed the House of Commons, Senators are still able to recommend changes when the bill is in the Senate. Senators are also able to introduce legislation as private member's bills. They are appointed and represent a province, rather than a particular constituency. You can search for Senators by province at [sencanada.ca/en/senators-list/](http://sencanada.ca/en/senators-list/)

**Petitions:** Sign a petition as an easy and quick way to voice your opinion, but complement it with your own letter, email or call. It's possible to create an electronic petition on the parliamentary website for people to sign online. There are guidelines for writing a petition in

order for it to be presented in the House of Commons for response from the government. Read more at [petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/Index](https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/Index).

**Form letters:** Sending a form letter is also a quick and easy way to let your MP or Senator know that you care about a policy issue. Consider engaging more effectively with either representative by using some of the language from a form letter to write your own letter, which will have more of an impact.

**Personal emails and mailed letters:** The content of a personal letter may be similar to an email, but a letter sent by post has a greater impact. It is a less common way to communicate and takes more effort, which shows that the issue is important to the letter writer. Because parliamentary offices are often flooded with email and other correspondence, it's a good idea to make a follow up call to confirm they've received your email or letter.

In your email or letter:

1. Mention that you live in the riding.
2. Recognize and thank your MP or Senator for their service to the constituency (even if you don't agree with all of their actions).
3. Explain the issue and your concerns.
4. Ask for specific action and for a reply. You can also ask your MP to raise this issue with other MPs in caucus.

Letters to MPs can be sent postage-free to:

[MP's name], MP  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Are you wondering about the proper greeting for an MP? It's the same as for any other person. In a letter or email to an MP, just write "Dear Mr. [Last name]" or "Dear Ms. [Last name]."

A letter to the Prime Minister is addressed to "The Right Honourable [name]" and the greeting is "Dear Prime Minister." A letter to a Cabinet Minister is addressed to "The Honourable [name]" and the greeting is "Dear Minister."

Letters to Senators can be sent postage-free to:

The Honourable [Senator's name], Senator  
The Senate of Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A4

The greeting to a Senator is "Dear Senator."

For more information on how to address elected officials in letters or in person, see:  
[www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/protocol-guidelines-special-event/styles-address.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/protocol-guidelines-special-event/styles-address.html)

When writing to the Prime Minister or a Cabinet Minister, it is often a good idea to copy the other party leaders or the critics from the other parties. Also, copy your local MP.

Here's a sample letter

[date]

[first name, last name], MP  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms./Mr.[MP's last name],

Thank you for your work on behalf of our community.

I live in your riding and I'm writing to you because I'm very concerned about violent and sexually degrading pornography on the Internet.

These images are now easily accessible, affordable and anonymous online. They are sexually violent and cruel to an extent unimagined in the past, and children are being exposed to them at younger and younger ages.

Youth exposed to violent and sexually degrading images are more likely to accept sexual harassment and violence and to engage in riskier sexual activity. The consequences are devastating.

I am asking you to take steps to address the harms of pornography. Canada urgently needs to study the public health impact of these images being so easily accessible online and viewed by children and teens. I believe this is becoming a public health crisis.

Please let me know what actions you plan to take and how you will raise this important issue in Parliament.

Sincerely,  
[your name]  
[your address]

**Phone calls:** While it may seem intimidating to call an MP's office, it is a very quick and effective way to communicate. It typically only takes a few minutes to call and let the staff know you have specific concerns or request action on an issue. Talk about one issue or topic in a call. Be specific about what action you'd like the MP to take.

Here is a sample phone conversation: *Hi, my name is [first name, last name]. I live in this riding and I'm really concerned about conscience protection for healthcare workers. Do you know our MP's position on this? I'd like our MP to support a bill to put in place conscience protection. Could you or the MP call me back to let me know what steps the MP will take on this? Thanks, I appreciate your time.*

**Meetings:** It's great if you can have a face-to-face meeting with your MP. This is probably the single most effective way to share information and concerns, and request action. (See the section above: Meeting an MP: Tips for Effectiveness.)

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