
Make Mental Health Count – Election 2017

Sample advocacy resources for organisational members

Overview

As we enter the final weeks of the election campaign, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) is asking its members to support mental health advocacy with the objective of securing specific, relevant mental health election commitments in line with the sector's priorities.

Recent announcements focus on acute and sub-acute services with little attention to community mental health supports, housing, care pathways or person centred innovation.

In coming weeks, **we are seeking your urgent action to reinforce the message that beds are not the answer, calling instead for co-produced community supports and homes.**

We've included specific resources to assist you to do this, including suggested actions, 'how to' tools, example letters, hints and tips, protocols, key messages, and WAAMH's Core Election Asks.

Your advocacy might include:

1. Use social media

Like and share WAAMH's election social media activity. See the example social media posts for some ideas on page 2, or make your own using your own images and the Key Messages from this pack.



<https://www.facebook.com/WA-Association-for-Mental-Health-938774459490827/>



<https://twitter.com/TheWAAMH>

2. Seek media coverage in your local newspaper/s

Local newspapers are an important 'temperature gauge' for local MPs and candidates.

Letters to the Editor are an effective way to bring the issue to light and are seen to reflect community concerns, while sending a **Media Release** to your local paper is also another effective strategy. Discover media coverage tips on page 3.

3. Support core election asks by writing to the Minister or Shadow Minister

Amplifying the advocacy activity of other organisations is a helpful strategy. To do this write to party mental health representatives outlining whose agenda you support and why. An example letter is included in this pack on page 6 for you to adapt and personalise. WAAMH's core asks and key messages are included as attachments to this document, but other organisations also have relevant activity including Carers WA and the WA Peaks e.g. <https://www.carerswa.asn.au/get-involved/wa-election-2017/> and <https://dropin.org.au/display/WSE2/WA+State+Election+2017+Home>

4. Write to your local MP and local candidates

Writing to your local MP and candidates prior to the election will also stand you in good stead for ongoing advocacy with a new government. An example letter, with commentary to support you to adapt it, is included on page 7 of this pack.

Social Media

Example 1 - If you want to tweet larger messages on **Twitter** (due to the 140 character limit), try adding a picture box with a good quote or statistic in it or use a fact box like the one below.



Always include the following **hashtags** in your election tweets so users can find similar topic threads:

#StateElection2017 and **#MakeMentalHealthCount**

If you use the words **#mentalhealth** in your message, hashtag them too so it will show up when people search any related mental health content.

You may also like to use **#wapol** which stands for 'WA politics' which is relevant during a State election period.

Example 2 (Below left) – In this **Facebook** post example, we have used brief explanatory text, added a visually engaging and informative infographic and included the relevant hashtags #.

Suggestions:

- Use this free, creative infographics software, Canva - <https://www.canva.com/>
- Look at the suitability of using other hashtags outlined WAAMH's Key Asks document, where relevant to your message i.e. #HomelsWhereTheHealthIs #BackthePlan
- Use images on social media that personalise; contextualise; capture sentiment; are relatable.

Example 3 (Below right) – Share an effective post on Facebook from another user. Add your own brief phrase or quote, then add the hashtags relevant to our election campaign.



Media Coverage

To write a Letter to the Editor:

- i. Check the letter specifications of the newspaper. These will appear on the letters page and will detail preferred length and identification requirements. Make a quick assessment of the types of letters that are published if they are pitched to the readership of the newspaper.
- ii. If responding to an article, refer to the relevant article and the date it appeared. Be quick to respond- electronic communication allows a quick turn around and letters will often appear the day after a news item has appeared.
- iii. Be concise and base your writing on facts. Support facts with researched information.
- iv. Make one or two key points and state these in the first two to three sentences of the piece. Proof read everything!
- v. Liaise and collaborate with others who have a vested interest - ask them to write letters also.
- vi. Write to a range of different publications.
- vii. Do not lose hope if your letter is not published- always keep writing.

Local Media Release

Sending a media release to your local paper is an effective strategy. Populate the media release template with our Example Key Messages, information about your organisation, the people you support – and most importantly for local papers - why this matters in your community. Tell them what you are doing to make Mental Health Count this election and what you are asking of your MP and candidates.

Lived experience stories are often welcomed, but manage this sensitively, and provide support to the participant. To achieve our objectives, it's important to link between the lived experience, broader values of citizenship and human potential, and what real actions make a difference.

MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

[HEADLINE – Make is short, sharp, to the point and catchy]

[DATE]

[OPENING PARAGRAPH]

Introduce briefly the purpose of your media release. Hit the key points – What is it for? Why is it important? What impact will it have? Who will benefit? Articulate what is unique / interesting - 'hook them in'. Use descriptive and engaging language that is still simple to follow and easy to understand.

[KEY INFORMATION]

Try and be as clear as possible about the key points you are trying to make. Pick up on the key point/s you raised in our introduction and expand on them in more detail. Provide any relevant background information or supporting evidence. Try using bullet points if it helps you unpack the messages more effectively.

[QUOTES]

Insert some direct quotes from your organisation's spokesperson (usually the CEO). E.g. "The system has typically focused on acute care, however more investment in early intervention and community support will prevent people reaching crisis levels," Mental Health Service chief executive officer Joe Bloggs said.

[ABOUT YOUR ORGANISATION]

Include a brief description about your organisation at the end of your media release and a link to your website address.

[CONTACT]

Include the name and contact details (phone and email) of the relevant person within your organisation to contact for follow up details or an interview. This could be your media and public relations officer and/or your CEO.

[THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP! - Approaching the media with your statement]

Find the contact number and email address for your local radio / TV station, or online news service / newspaper, by searching online or looking at the contact next to an article. Email your media statement across and put in a phone call to producer / reporter / editor to follow up. Include your full signature and contact details in your email. Don't be disheartened if they don't want to run your story, ask for feedback and always remember to preserve the relationship - be courteous, positive, and polite.

Influencing Members of Parliament and Election Candidates

One of the most effective ways you can make a difference this election is through advocating directly to your local candidates and local Member of Parliament (MP).

Politicians have the power to make decisions and laws on our behalf.

Building a relationship with your MP is crucial if you want your issue to get attention. MPs representation of community views on issues is important in shaping policy. Their representation on personal matters often gets priority attention from government departments.

To Make Mental Health Count this state election, request a meeting, write a letter or make a phone call. When you do meet, ask if you can take a photo and then post it on social media, or better still send it with a press release to your local paper.

Follow some or all of these straightforward steps:

1. Know who to contact!

WA electoral boundaries have changed. Find your current electorate: [Electoral Boundaries WA](#)

Find your local MP: <http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/memblast.nsf/wallmembers>

Find other candidates for your electorate: <https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/>

2. Know what your MP can do for you

By understanding what an MP can and can't do, you can tailor your 'ask' accordingly.

MPs can:

- Ask questions or raise issues in Parliament and other decision making forums.
- Help you to get information from government.
- Advise about government funding.
- Take your issue to the media.
- Talk to other MPs about your issue, including in the party room or in party policy forums.
- Sponsor your submission to a parliamentary committee.
- Take your issue to the Minister (by letter, or in person).
- Help build ties with other community or parliamentary groups.

Read more on what you can ask your MP to do at this helpful [Oxfam resource](#).

3. We all get so much email these days - decide how to make your approach

Not all communications have the same impact. A face-to-face meeting can be most effective, followed by hard copy letter, then a phone call. MPs receive so many emails, it can find be hard to manage them all. Sending an email is still better than nothing. Take a formal approach as you would with a letter. Sending it to your target politician is more effective than cc'ing half a dozen.

A delegation or group of representatives requesting a meeting with an MP about a local community issue of concern can be very powerful. Be aware that phone calls may be taken by staff members; rather than the MP. This can be effective, especially if receiving multiple calls about similar issues.

MPs and candidates are usually dedicated to serving the interests of their electorates. Despite a busy schedule, they should meet or communicate with you but you may need to be persistent!

4. Get their attention – plan your key points

Spend time defining who you are (e.g. do you live/work in their electorate?), why mental health is important to you (are you a consumer / family member / mental health worker?), briefly explain the problem and what solution you want your candidates/representatives to commit to. Outline how the issues affects people in the community within their electorate.

5. Be specific: offer a solution and a call to action

To be effective, you must not only articulate the problem but offer a solution (or 'ask').

- Do you want to see community-based recovery services for young people?
- Do you want better access to homes, with mental health supports, to enable people to leave or avoid hospital?
- Maybe you want better access to the NDIS or more supports for carers?

You can see some examples of key 'asks' in WAAMH's [Core Election Asks Summary](#), and longer problem statements with policy or funding solutions in our [Policy Platform](#). You also need to specifically say what you want them to do about it. This could include any number of actions from voting for or against something in parliament to attending a local event. But, the most important thing you should ask for is a reply to your letter. Make sure your 'ask' is something they can do (refer to point 1). For election advocacy, focus your communications on state-based issues.

6. Make it personal!

You can copy any of these [key asks](#), but do personalise your message. (Bring your preferred message to life by describing what it means to people with lived experience you support, or to you as an organisation. When writing to local politicians and candidates ensure you include information or a story about the issues in their local community.

7. Be clear and concise

Candidates and MPs will be pressed for time and will appreciate brief, but effective, written communications, meetings or phone calls.

8. Ask for a response and follow up – but be patient!

Ask for a response to your letter/other contact, ensuring you provide contact details. Follow up after your meeting or phone call by politely thanking them for their time and outlining what you heard them tell you. This can be done by email if you wish.

MPs receive hundreds of letters and only have a few staff to assist them in responding. This means you could experience a lengthy delay in receiving a response. If you haven't received a response after a month you can follow up by telephone to remind them about your letter and check when you are likely to receive a response. Try again after a fortnight, until you succeed. Persistent, but polite, constituents are more likely to get what they want! Remember, your MP has a responsibility to represent you and to communicate with you. That is why they were elected and why they are paid. **Don't forget to thank your MP for any action they have taken.**

9. Make it public!

Tweet or post on social media – but be polite! You can use our election hashtags. Tag WAAMH, other organisation/s you support or follow, and the name of the person you approached. Upload a photo of your meeting with them and if you can, say something positive about what is important to them – and you – about mental health. If you are pleased with the meeting, make this public too.

Send a photo and a three-sentence synopsis of the meeting to your mental health representative organisations to let them know what you have done and ask if they would like to include on their social media pages.

10. Get it covered

What happens in their electorate is very important to MPs – most of them want to be re-elected! Getting coverage in the local rag can be a very effective strategy. You can also try for more mainstream media coverage.

11. Don't forget other local candidates!

Don't forget to approach your candidates as well as your MP – especially if you live in a marginal electorate. This means that there will be a tight race for that seat.

LETTER TEMPLATE: Party Leaders, Ministers, Shadow Ministers

Honourable Colin Barnett MEd MLA
Leader, Liberal Party of Western Australia; Premier
1 Parliament Place
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Date

Dear Premier,

Re: Make Mental Health Count – Election 2017

I write to ask you to Make Mental Health Count this state election by making specific election commitments that will enable Western Australians with mental health issues and their families to access community based mental health supports.

[Insert a paragraph or two here about your organisation, how many people you support and what your priorities are.]

Your government has demonstrated leadership in delivering substantial and long awaited mental health reforms over the past eight years. The significant increase in mental health services and the enactment of contemporary mental health legislation are just some of the many achievements.

[Organisation] especially welcomes the focus of the Ten Year Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan on rebalancing investment towards prevention, promotion and community support. We are delighted that your party continues its commitment to the Plan.

However, we are also concerned that the Plan's vision is at risk; recent election announcements focus on acute and subacute services rather than prioritising investment in prevention, promotion and community based services, alongside whole of system reform efforts including cross sector collaboration. Without immediate and substantial refocusing of investment, your government's vision for mental health will not be realised.

Just like building a house, good mental health is built from different materials and expertise - we need the foundations of prevention for children and young people, a range of earlier and community based recovery supports, and safe homes with associated supports. We all agree that we need more intensive services for those that need them, but more beds and sub-acute beds are not, on their own, the answer.

[Organisation] supports WAAMH's Policy Platform and urges you to do the same. The five priority areas identified reflect the concerns of consumers, carers and families that we support. They are:

1. Resource and implement the Ten Year Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Plan, focusing on prevention, promotion, earlier intervention and community-based services
2. Reform the system, placing consumers, carers and family members at its centre, breaking down silos and promoting recovery
3. Increase access to secure homes with recovery supports
4. Change how the justice system deals with people with mental health problems
5. Improve access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme for people with psychosocial disability.

WAAMH's Policy Platform demonstrates how smart investment in mental health can achieve significant cost savings across government whilst boosting the wellbeing and productivity of all Western Australians.

I look forward to receiving WA Liberals' written mental health policy addressing these priority areas, in the lead-up to the election.

Yours faithfully

[name, title, organisation]

Enc. [a summary of WAAMH's Policy Platform should be enclosed] <https://waamh.org.au/assets/documents/systemic-advocacy/submissions-and-briefs/our-core-election-asks-long-version-v03-final.pdf>

Cc. Hon Andrea Mitchell MLA

Example letter to a MP or local candidate

Insert Date

Mr Ian Charles Blayney MLA
Member for Geraldton
Shop 2, 5 Chapman Road
Geraldton WA 6530

Dear Mr Blayney MP

RE: Make Mental Health Count this election

I ask you to approach the Minister for Mental Health to seek Liberal WA election commitments for a community housing program, with coupled mental health supports, in the Geraldton region.

I have been a Geraldton resident for more than twenty years. I am also the carer for my daughter Sally, aged 32, who experiences depression and anxiety.

When, as a community, we make sure that everyone can reach their potential and fully contribute to our communities, we all benefit. That is why I believe that the recent announcement to strengthen acute mental health services in our region doesn't hit the mark.

It is true that there is huge pressure on the acute system. But without earlier intervention, more beds won't resolve this pressure.

In our region, there simply aren't enough supports that enable people with mental health issues to live well in the community. Time and again Sally has been unable to get the supports that she needs, resulting in her becoming increasingly unwell and needing to be admitted to hospital.

When she is well enough to leave hospital, there are safe and secure homes available, with associated mental health supports – she is left with the choice of homelessness or returning to the family home.

I know Sally is not alone. One in five Australians experiences a mental health problem at any given time. The difference for regional, rural and remote communities is that less people can get the support they need. To support mental health recovery for Sally and the thousands of residents with mental health issues in your electorate, we need to build real care pathways that prevent people from becoming increasingly unwell and needing acute and hospital based services.

Just like building a house, good mental health is built from different materials and expertise - we need the foundations of prevention for children and young people, a range of community based recovery supports, safe homes with associated supports, as well as more intensive services for those that need them.

That is why, in the 10 Year Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Plan, your party committed to rebalance investment away from acute services and towards community supports, which has the highest rate of unmet demand. The Plan stated that increasing community support services in regional areas was a high priority.

Preventing mental health problems, intervening early with the growing rates of young people who are distressed, and providing supports in the community close to where people live and work is what builds good mental health and wellbeing.

This is what we must do to drive down suicides and improve mental health - enabling all Geraldton residents to reach their potential.

I would like to meet with you to discuss these matters in person. I will contact your staff in the coming days to follow up my request.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Your name

Your address, email and telephone number

Notes for how to write your letter

MPs are addressed as Mr/Ms/Mrs first name, last name, MLA/MLC e.g Mr Ian Charles Blayney MLA

For Members that are Ministers or Shadow Ministers also use 'The Hon.' E.g. The Hon. Stephen Dawson MLC

Include their title – e.g. if Hon Andrea Mitchell MLA, Minister for Mental Health

Dear (insert their Title) or if they don't have a title use dear Ms/Mr Surname

Use a catchy one line subject to say what the letter is about

Next, make your 'ask'. Leave the background until later – tell them immediately what you want them to do. This might be approach the Minister or simply meet with you.

Make sure you get the name of their party right! If they are an Independent ask them to approach the Minister/Shadow Minister

Tell them about you who are. Include your local connection if writing to a local MP/candidate.

Next, make a connection between mental health and widely-held values like human potential and thriving communities. This helps people connect their broader values with why they should care about this issue.

Briefly say why you care about this issue. If you are writing to your local MP or candidate, make sure to include your local connection to their electorate.

Provide brief background on what is wrong. A few paragraphs is enough.

It is important to personalise your message – what is the impact on you, your family, your organisation, consumers who access it, local families, the wider community?

Then start to outline your solution to the issue. Again, keep it brief.

International research shows using a construction metaphor can help people connect with the need for support services in a way that they will understand.

Link it to government or party policy if it is in keeping with what you are seeking. A key part of advocacy is reminding political representatives of their existing commitments!

If you are writing to a representative of a different party or an independent candidate, refer to the tri-partisan support for the 10 Year Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Plan.

Remind them of why this is important to local people.

Remind them of the broader value you chose at the beginning.

Ask for a meeting (if haven't already)

Explain you'll follow up and ask for a reply.

'Yours faithfully' is the standard close for letters to political representatives.

Don't forget to include your name and contact details!