Writing to your State or Territory MP

Tips & pointers on an effective letter or email

Introduce yourself and your issue

- Who are you? Why are you writing?
- Remember this is a personal letter. It's fine to acknowledge that you are part of a wider group, but also indicate your own concerns. Tell them why the issue matters to you – perhaps based on your professional experience, family and community life and/or personal convictions.

Keep it brief

- MPs receive a lot of correspondence, so try to keep your letter clear and succinct. Some advice states: "be short, be simple, be human."
- Typed and handwritten letters are more effective than email.
- If you wish to provide more information, include an attachment or refer to a website.
- Keep to one issue – multiple topics can reduce your impact and complicate responses.

Consider their perspective

- Consider whether your MP is a member of the Government, Opposition, from a minor party or an independent. This may affect how you word your letter.
- Decide if you are going to write to your State or Federal member. This will generally depend on whether the issue is mainly a State or Federal government responsibility.
- Indicate that you're writing to them as the Member for (your electorate), or as a government Minister – if the latter, address it to their parliamentary, not electoral, office.
- A State/Territory/Federal MP represents an electorate; a Senator a State/Territory; a Minister, their government portfolio. Consider how the issue is relevant to their constituency or portfolio.

Use your own words

- Make your letter stand out by using your own words. If your letter is unique, well-crafted, and passionate it will have more of an impact. ***See over page for an example.***
- Politicians and their staff recognise (and disregard) form letters – rewrite these in your own words
- It's important that your letter is from you as a citizen and a voter.

Be polite and fair

- A respectful letter is far more likely to get a response.
- Acknowledge any achievement or progress their government/party has made on the issue
- Try not to be too critical and calmly explain your position

Tell them what you want them to do

- Ask for action.
- What do you want your MP to do? Move or support legislation/amendment? Speak in parliament? Raise the issue in their government or party or with the relevant Minister? Take local action?
- Asking your MP to take some form of action allows you to follow up at a later date to see what happened. Or, ask them in your letter to let you know what action they take.
- Don't "play politics". Stress the issue, not political advantage. Don't "take sides" between parties.

Finally, don't think too much. An imperfect letter that is sent beats an unsent perfect letter every time.

Sample letter/email

Below is a sample of a letter or email you can send to your MP. This draft is on housing, but you could adapt its style and structure to reflect your issue, personal experience and concerns. If sending an email, write a subject line that reflects your main concern - for example 'Please support urgent measures to reduce homelessness'.

Dear (name),

I'm writing to express my deep concern over insufficient social and affordable housing in *[electorate],* especially during the COVID19 crisis.

Secure and affordable housing is essential for people to thrive in their lives. Inadequate and unaffordable housing acts as a barrier which prevents people from building opportunities in employment and education, forming connections and contributing positively to their community and family life.

This is an issue that affects people in *[electorate]* across the social spectrum:

- Homeless people struggle to break the cycle of poverty because they lack a stable base from which to start.
- Lower-income families struggle to find accommodation they can afford, or end up going short of other essentials just to get by. The waiting list for public and social housing is long and there is not enough to meet the need.
- Everyday families are increasingly locked out of buying their own home and are forced to live further from jobs in order to find something they can afford.
- There seems to be an increasing division between the circumstances of those who are able to buy their own home and those who have no choice but to rent.

My own experience of this issue in this electorate includes *[e.g.]* seeing my own children have to move far away from my home to establish careers, making future involvement in grandparenting very difficult; and knowing local friends who have had difficulty finding childcare places because childcare workers cannot afford to live in the electorate.

I recognise that many factors contribute to housing affordability and that not all are subject to the control or influence of state/territory governments. I also acknowledge and appreciate the work your *[government/party]* has done on this issue. *[e.g.?]*

But I urge you to support within (your government/your party) these reforms that would help housing affordability and security, especially at this difficult time:

1. A strengthened and extended moratorium on evictions – including from boarding houses and other dwellings; and a permanent end to unfair "no grounds" evictions, replacing these with an agreed set of reasonable grounds (only to be accessed after the end of the COVID crisis).
2. Commitment to significantly increased provision of social housing.
3. Strengthened and extended inclusionary zoning prioviding that at least 15% of all new housing developments on private land, and at least 30% on government land, are set aside as lower-income-affordable rental.

I believe everyone needs stable and affordable housing as a base from which they can flourish and contribute. In such a wealthy state as ours this should be possible, if only we're willing to do what's necessary to make it happen. I urge your support in asking your government to take the steps I've outlined. Could you please inform me what action you take in regard to the concerns I've raised?

Yours sincerely,

(your name, email/phone contact and address – showing you're a constituent, living in the electorate/jurisdiction)

Find your local member of parliament in NSW

If you don't know the name of your electorate or your local State member, visit the NSW Electoral Commission website. Enter your locality (suburb) and postcode to determine your electorate and state member: http://streetlist.elections.nsw.gov.au/

Once you know your electorate and State member visit the NSW Parliament website to obtain their contact details: http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/members.nsf/V3Home

Find your local member of parliament in the ACT:

If you don't know you electorate, visit the ACT Electoral Commission website for a list of suburbs and corresponding electorates. http://www.elections.act.gov.au/electoral_boundaries/which_electorate_am_i_in

To find your local member in the ACT and their contact details, visit the ACT Parliament website: http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/current