

## Meeting Guide

### Tips for meeting with your MPs

Meeting with politicians, Members of Parliament (MPs), Members of Legislative Assembly or others is one of the best ways for the Alliance and its member organizations to raise awareness of the impact of arthritis in Canada and the need for federal leadership to ensure that public policies and programs address the needs of millions living with arthritis. Having a face-to-face meeting with politicians also allows you to develop a stronger relationship with them and will have a significant impact in generating greater awareness of the issue and help leverage AAC's efforts' nationally. We've developed the following guidelines to help you connect with your local MPs.

This guide has been prepared for those who are preparing to meet with politicians but who may not have much experience doing so. We've developed a few pointers to help make the experience as easy as possible:

### Requesting and Confirming Meetings

1. MPs value meeting and hearing about what matters to their constituents and community. However, meeting with a greater number of MPs and identifying potential champions has tremendous value. You may only have time and resources to meet with your MP or a neighbouring one, but if you have the interest and opportunity to meet with many, here are some suggestions on how to decide which MP(s) to contact.
  - **Location.** Which constituency is your office in? Do you carry out more of your activities in a particular constituency than in the others? Will you have to travel to meet with them?
  - **Existing relationships.** Do you, or any of your board members or volunteers, have an existing relationship with any of the MPs? It is often easier to get a meeting with an MP if you or someone working with your organization has previously met or spoken with them.
  - **Political affiliation.** Engaging with MPs across the political spectrum is important — both to remain non-partisan, but also because someone in opposition today could be sitting on the government side after next election. The more cross-party awareness of and support for our issues we can generate, the more likely we are to succeed.
2. **Choose your timing wisely.** MPs are likely to be in their constituencies when the House of Commons is not sitting. Please check this calendar to find out the House of Commons schedule for

2016: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/housechamberbusiness/chambercalendar.aspx?Key=2016&View=C&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=42&Ses=1>.

MPs are also often available in the constituency on Fridays and weekends. If you can't arrange to meet your MP locally, consider setting up a meeting with them the next time you are in Ottawa.

- 3. Schedule the meeting well in advance.** If you want to set up a meeting, the best way is usually to pick up the phone as a first step. It is best to do this at least a few weeks before you'd like to meet with your MP. You can find the contact information for your Member of Parliament here: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>.

You may be asked to follow up with an email request or additional materials. When asking for a meeting, be prepared to tell the MP's office why you want to meet. MPs are generally very open to meeting with constituents and community leaders. It's up to you how specific you want to be - you may just want to talk about 1) homecare (non-medical) support and/or 2) workplace accessibility and flexible work arrangements for people with chronic conditions to ensure their independent living, or you may have other issues that you want to raise; you may also want to introduce the MP to the work you do and the impact you have in the community.

- 4. Invite MPs to your events.** If you hosting an event - annual meetings or fundraising dinners, for example - consider inviting MPs. This will give you a prime opportunity to show them what you do and to raise awareness of the importance of the issues with them.
- 5. Attend local events hosted or attended by MPs.** Find out if local MPs are hosting or attending local events and use the occasion to meet them. Use the opportunity to deliver your message there and then ask for an in-person meeting to deliver key messages.

- 6. Prepare for your meeting.**

Review and be comfortable with the background information provided in this toolkit. This information will help you to explain why it is important for governments to ensure that employers do more to support people with a chronic illness, like arthritis, that limits their mobility to ensure that they can remain productive members of the workforce, and to ensure that governments support people with arthritis to live independently with new investments in homecare programs.

Be clear in your mind about what you want to discuss in order to make the best use of time. The purpose of the meeting is to develop a connection with your local politician and raise awareness about the work that is being done by the Arthritis Alliance of Canada.

7. **Respect the MPs' time.** Meetings will typically last 30 minutes. Make sure that you are familiar with the issue and have practiced your presentation to ensure you have enough time to deliver your points and have a conversation with your politician. Re-confirm the meeting, attendees (on both sides), time and location a couple of days ahead of time.
  
8. **Meeting.** Arrive on time as this is a sign of respect and will set the right tone for your meeting. It will also ensure that you have enough time for discussion.
  - Allow extra time in your schedule in case the meeting runs longer than expected.
  - Express your support for the campaign's objectives:
    - a) We are calling on provincial and territorial governments to make sure that employers do more to ensure that people with a chronic illness, like arthritis, that limits their mobility can continue to be productive and contribute to the Canadian economy.
    - b) We are calling on federal, provincial and territorial governments to ensure that both services that are considered medically necessary, as well as physical care and supports that help people to live independently are included in government-funded homecare programs.
  
  - Provide the PowerPoint slides that are included in your kit to the politician once the meeting has concluded. This is less distracting than providing it during the meeting.
  - Remember to ask your politician to support the work being done by the Arthritis Alliance of Canada with their colleagues and political party leader.
  - If there are any questions asked that you do not have the answer to, indicate to the politician that you will have a representative from the Arthritis Alliance of Canada call them back with an answer. Be sure to include this information on your Meeting Feedback Form.
  
9. **Be flexible.** Things can change very quickly for an MP. Travel arrangements may go awry, particularly in the winter. Unscheduled debates or votes may require them to return to Ottawa. There may be a crisis elsewhere in the constituency they need to attend to. And they're human — they may simply have a sick child they need to care for. If your meeting gets rescheduled, don't take it personally.

Do make sure that you follow up to re-schedule. Sometimes your MP may choose not to cancel your meeting but have you meet with one of their staffers instead. Keep the meeting. Staffers have more time to devote to specific issues and are able to help move your issue along. Building relationships with staffers is also an important part of the process.

**10. Always follow up.** Within one week, send a note or e-mail to your politician to thank them for taking the time to meet with you (an example of a “Thank You Letter” is included in this toolkit).

Depending on the topics you’ve discussed, there may be more follow-ups involved in terms of future meetings or providing supplementary information. And on your way out, don’t forget to thank the scheduling assistant. They have a difficult job and are not always sufficiently appreciated.

**11. Share your experience.** As soon as possible, complete the Meeting Feedback Form included in this toolkit and return to the Arthritis Alliance of Canada by email to Lina Gazizova at [lgazizova@arthritisalliance.ca](mailto:lgazizova@arthritisalliance.ca) or your regional Team Manager and provide brief update on your meeting.