

Tips and suggestions for contacting your MP

The following are tips from an information session with Tracey Foley, who is the Activist Leadership and Development Coordinator at Amnesty International. Any positive communication that you can make with your Federal MP that raises our concerns will be valuable.

You are invited to use the tips and suggestions below in the way that best communicates your concerns and your personal style.

1 IDENTIFY YOUR FEDERAL MP

Who is your local federal MP?

Go to https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

Enter your postcode to find your local Federal MP.

Research the MP – find common ground

On MP's web page there are links to their speeches.

Check if health is an important issue for them. Look at their maiden speech. Usually in their maiden speech they will say what is most important to them, what their passionate about. Look for something you have in common to build rapport e.g. "I noticed in your maiden speech you're really concerned about health, so are we, we have that in common. We offer people a complementary therapy that people can gain real benefits from..."

Resonate with their passion, find a way to relate to them.

Think (and act) LOCAL

Gather local facts.

How many shiatsu therapists in the area? (affecting jobs in their electorate)

How many of your clients have health rebates? (affecting healthcare in their electorate)

Gather testimonials from clients. Show them there is concern in your electorate.

Focus on building a relationship

Engaging with MPs is about building a relationship, not a one-off communication. It's an ongoing, sustained relationship that can have an impact. Share information with them.

2 CONTACT YOUR MP

There are multiple ways to contact your MP:

- **Write a letter or send an email (refer to sample)**

Use correct titles – The Honorable... you can find on Parliamentary website www.aph.gov.au

Give background your practice, clients and STAA e.g. "I have a shiatsu practice in your electorate and have 100 clients. I also look after clients at the local respite clinic, I have tourists coming in from right around the country, I volunteer at... etc. I am a member of the Shiatsu Therapy Association of Australia. We are an association with 300 members."

Outline your concerns for the effect on your practice, your clients and future clients. Ask for action.

Include the *Key Points Statement* so they can get an understanding of the issue and our concerns.

Request a meeting if you wish.

- **Follow them on Social media**

Most MPs have a Facebook page, follow them to find out what they are doing/interests, you can post on their page in response to their posts.

- **Call the MP's office**

Write down what you want to say.

Identify yourself as a constituent, explain that you are a shiatsu practitioner in their electorate, and outline your key concerns.

e.g. I'm X and I live in your electorate. I'm really concerned about the loss of shiatsu rebates and the effect of the government denigrating shiatsu as a health therapy. I would like you to raise this next time you are in parliament the concerns about the impact on small businesses, public health and the right for people who pay for health insurance to continue to receive rebates for the shiatsu therapy that benefits them.

Leave a message. You rarely get through to the Minister. Usually you will talk to a staffer and they will record your message and pass it on. Be very clear about what to say. They may not get back to you immediately but they log calls and may get back to you later. Don't doubt the importance of leaving a message. You can follow up with an email or letter, e.g. I left a message with your assistant John Smith yesterday. Just wanted to follow up with some information about my concerns... You can use that as an opportunity to schedule a meeting if you wish.

- **Event**

Invite to the MP to a local event or treatment day, invite them to come along and see what you do. Use that opportunity to voice your concerns. Keep control. Know what you want them to do, don't let them hijack the event for their own purposes.

Does your MP send out a flyer/newsletter? Check out if they are having a meet and chat session locally where you can raise the issue. If they are having a public engagement activity, go to that and introduce yourself and say this is a real concern to me. I've written to your office. I'd like to come and talk to you about it. You won't be able to speak to them for long, but you are raising it again, you're meeting them face-to-face, you're in communication with them.

- **Meeting with MP**

Call the MP's office and ask for the person who books meetings. Be clear that you want to meet them and have a chat. Might take a few phone calls if they're busy at that time. You might get 20-40 min to have meeting.

Prepare talking points — what does it mean for you, your clients, the industry, healthcare in the electorate.

Take support — take a client with you to give their own testimonial as to what shiatsu has meant to them, or go independently or with another practitioner. Don't have too big a group 2 or 3 people is best. Know your roles within the meeting, a main spokesperson, someone taking notes for follow-up, and be ready to help each other out.

Get together as a group to roleplay the meeting. Know what you are going to ask. Get person playing MP to be a bit obnoxious so you have to think on your feet. Think about what their questions/objections might be and prepare for them and how to respond. Think about where things might get sticky so you can respond in the moment.

Always be polite in meetings, keep it light and pleasant.

Take notes with you to refer to and keep on track. MPs may try to hijack the meeting to talk about all the good things they do for the community. Interject and say something like that's fantastic but we're here to talk about...

Give them a copy of the *Key Points Statement*.

Have clear objectives and 2 or 3 asks. Know what you want them to do e.g. How can shiatsu rebates be retained? Will the government look at funding more research? Will you raise this in parliament?

Have a small task for them to do that you can follow-up, e.g. "Come to the respite centre and meet some of my clients to hear about how it alleviates their pain and suffering". Something on a small level that you can follow up.

Ask your MP to let you know what they have done and the outcome.

Send a thank-you straight after the meeting. E.g. "Great to meet with you, just wanted to touch on the fact that you that you promised to do this, we will follow up with you. Appreciate your time." Take photos with MP, put on social media, generate buzz and confidence, positivity.

Always follow-up. A win doesn't mean a win forever, so you need to continue building the relationship. Thank them when they do something for you. Work out different asks. Keep momentum building. Keep them informed. Pass on any new information/changes when becomes available. Anything that particularly interests them, keep them up to date with any issues around that.

Key messages

Refer to the *Key Points Statement* for messages to communicate. Use your own words and experience, and keep that local focus. How it will **affect** their electorate.

Comeback response to "lack of evidence"

If someone says: "We only consider modalities with evidence behind them."

Refer to the evidence on the STAA website, refer to the evidence of your experience and your clients' experience. Point out the flaws in the government review (see *Key Points Statement*).

e.g. "While shiatsu did not meet the requirements of a flawed review, it does have benefits, these are the benefits I regularly see in my clients..."

My association is working on research, and this could be helped further with government funding.

3 REPORT ANY CONTACT TO STAA OFFICE

Let Sandra at the office know what happened, so we can assess how it's going.

Share your experience on STAA's Facebook page. Motivate others.

THANK YOU.