



Ontario Society of  
Occupational Therapists

# Advocacy Resource Guide

2013



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This Advocacy Resource Guide was developed by the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT) to assist its members in their advocacy activities to promote occupational therapy and its issues and positions to key policy and decision-makers. The primary purpose of the resource is to facilitate the establishment of communications and relationships with these important audiences. Although focused on advocacy to a member's Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP), the steps and advice in this resource are transferable to the establishment of communications with other key influencers of issues affecting occupational therapy practice – hospital administrators, program directors, local health advocacy organizations, municipal politicians, etc.

The primary purpose of an advocacy campaign or effort is to promote the issues and positions of the profession. OSOT remains an advocacy resource for all members. A secondary, but nonetheless important purpose of advocacy activity is to build a good working and communication relationship with local decision-makers so that when issues do arise concerning health care or affecting occupational therapy, these relationships can facilitate opportunities for communication and input.

OSOT members are encouraged to use this guide to prepare and plan meetings with MPPs and decision-makers. The resource includes guidelines and tips aimed at making your meeting run smoothly and assisting you to deliver messages that leave a lasting impression.

Good luck in your advocacy activities and *thank you!*

**Updated June 2013**

## **What is Advocacy?**

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When a group of persons are engaged in trying to influence legislators or other public officials in favour of a specific cause; to try to influence the thinking of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause, they are engaged in advocacy.

Another term often used for this type of activity is lobbying. In recent years, the term lobbying has come to be associated with more aggressive negotiation of influence, often undertaken by paid lobbyists. Legislation in Ontario requires that all “Lobbyists” – those paid to advocate for a cause – be registered with government.

OSOT is not asking members to be “lobbyists”. In fact, the profession is more comfortable with the notion of “advocating” for its positions and views. We are asking members to participate in professional advocacy.

## **Advocating your Positions to your Local Politicians**

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All politicians can and should be targets of professional advocacy. Their job is to represent the constituents in their riding. Therefore, it is their job or duty to meet their constituents, to understand what they think and to acquaint themselves with all sides of an issue.

Individuals in public office are meant to be accessible and accountable as they go about the business of government, such as enacting laws and creating public policy.

Often, decision-makers do not have direct access to information on how a particular proposal might affect stakeholders. It is the job of advocates and industry experts to educate elected officials who will be making these decisions and to make certain that they have the necessary information to make the best decisions possible.

Successful politicians make a point of staying in close contact with the people who elect them and continuously seek the advice of constituents on the issues that are important. One way of doing so is by regularly meeting with community representatives to discuss topics of interest. Politicians also keep careful track of the issues that people call or write them about.

Who are politicians that you might advocate your positions to? With respect to health care policy and service delivery, the most influential politicians are likely MPPs (members of the provincial parliament) who are elected to the legislative assembly. This is because health care delivery is a provincial jurisdiction. Nevertheless, you may find that your local mayor or council members may be valuable contacts to advocate

your issues to if they are issues that affect municipal or regional affairs (e.g. transportation services for persons with disabilities). Although not elected, Executive Directors of Local Health Integration Networks, hospital administrators, etc. may also be valuable targets to influence and educate with respect to your positions. The more voices that can share your perspective, the better!

You do not have to be an expert to advocate to an MPP or other politician! You just need to concentrate on the issue and provide as much pertinent information to him or her as possible. Consider yourself that important member of his/her constituency that can educate them about impacts of potential policies. You can do this as simply as in meeting with your MPP or writing them a letter.

The goal of a meeting or letter writing campaign is to ensure that your MPP is aware of your issues and your views but an equally important goal is to create a relationship with your MPP. It is the relationship that will enable you to keep in touch on issues affecting you and your profession.

*“If you really have an expectation that at some point something is going to come down the pipeline... then you have a responsibility to try and establish a relationship [with your MPP] that will allow you to get in the door and be heard”  
~ Honourable George Smitherman, Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, 2001*

## Steps to Assure an Effective Advocacy Meeting

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Once you commit to communicate your thoughts and concerns and educate your MPP, take the following actions to ensure that your meeting is effective and productive;

- Set up your Meeting
- Prepare for the Meeting
- Engage in a constructive, professional Meeting
- Follow-up
- Communicate your results to OSOT

### 1. Setting up your Meeting

The first step in setting a meeting with your MPP is knowing who that individual is! For a complete listing of Ontario MPPs and their contact information [click here](#). You will need to know your provincial electoral riding. If you are not certain of this, visit the [Election Ontario website](#) and search using your postal code.

Setting up a meeting with your MPP may be the most difficult step in the entire advocacy effort. MPPs can be extremely busy individuals and/or they may schedule

constituency meetings only one day a week. Often their staff are particularly protective of their time.

Try to arrange a meeting when the Legislature is not in session. You can access a [legislative schedule](#) of the Ontario legislature to determine when it is in session. The Legislature never sits on Fridays so Fridays are the time that most MPPs devote to constituency meetings when the Legislature is in session. When the legislature is not in session most MPPs will be in their constituencies.

Scheduling notwithstanding, remember that MPPs are always anxious to understand what their constituents identify as their issues. They *want* to speak and interact with people – this helps them be a better representative!

The following steps will help ensure that you are successful in arranging a meeting;

**a) Write to your MPP**

- A letter to your MPP requesting a meeting will help establish the first contact with him/her. The most effective letter is a personal one-page letter, not a form letter. This letter should be sent to their constituency office. An email request can be an effective alternative these days but ensure you engage a letter etiquette and formality.
- The letter/email should not give a detailed account of the issue. Highlight the issue and request that a meeting be arranged to give you an opportunity to provide more detail. As well, indicate that you will follow-up with his/her office to arrange a time convenient to their busy schedule. See Appendix 1 (p. 8) for sample letter.

**Tip:** Fax the letter to your MPP prior to mailing it. This will ensure that the letter will be read at least twice by the MPP's staff and will receive proper attention.

**b) Telephone your MPP**

- Approximately one or two days after you have faxed/emailed the letter of request, telephone the MPP's constituency office and ask to speak to the individual who schedules meetings.
- Indicate to the assistant who you are, that you had faxed/emailed a letter requesting a meeting and the reasons why you would like a meeting.
- Indicate how much time you will need with your MPP and how many people will be joining you if any. (Try to limit the number of people attending with you to only one or two people.)

- Indicate that you will provide additional information regarding your issue at the meeting, however, if the MPP requires information beforehand, you would be glad to send it.
- Offer several dates and times for the meeting and be flexible.

**Tip:** *No matter how well you know your MPP, always make an appointment. NEVER just show up at their office when you know they will be there. Also, do not try to discuss the issue in detail with the MPP when you see him/her on the street or socially.*

## 2. Prepare for the Meeting

- Once you have scheduled a meeting and you know how long the meeting will last, you can start planning your presentation. If more than one person is attending, ensure that each participant has a role. Assign someone the responsibility of keep track of time and ensuring that everyone sticks to the agenda.
- Do some research about the MPP prior to your meeting – what Party he/she belongs to; what additional roles or responsibilities they have (i.e. is she/he a Minister, Parliamentary Assistant, Opposition Critic); what involvement he/she has had that may be relevant to your issue (sometimes their former jobs have relevance). You can find more information about your MPP at their party websites;
  - [Liberal Party of Ontario](#)
  - [NDP Party of Ontario](#)
  - [Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario](#)
- Prepare and bring with you information and materials supporting your position, but don't be overwhelming. A concise briefing note, accompanied with additional supporting information to leave with the MPP is sufficient. Contact OSOT for assistance or to enquire if there are association documents that may be of assistance.

**Tip:** *If you have not previously met with an MPP or are nervous, rehearse your presentation. Ensure that you are presenting your facts in an orderly, concise and positive manner. Try not to read your remarks although you may refer to notes.*

### 3. The Meeting

- When it is time to meet with your MPP arrive at their office a little early so that you are not rushed. Dress in “business” attire as it is a formal meeting.
- Be patient. It is not uncommon for an MPP to be late for meetings.
- The MPP may meet you alone or with staff present.
- After a round of introductions, be prepared to make your presentation. Some politicians will sit and listen; others will interrupt to ask questions. Be prepared for either approach and accommodate various styles of interaction. Encourage questions.
- Be polite, focused and businesslike. Stick to the issue and try to avoid being partisan – do not mention who you voted for in the past election or your party affiliation.
- Do not be confrontational or argumentative. If they have a comfortable interchange with you, they are more likely to support you or consult with you in the future.
- MPPs want to represent the best interest of their constituency. Make special effort to demonstrate the connection between what you are presenting and the interests of the member’s constituents.
- If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, say so. Do not guess at an answer. Indicate that you will have to look into it and back to him/her with the correct response.
- Keep your goals in mind throughout the meeting – informing the MPP of your issues and building a working relationship with the politician.
- Interruptions can occur. Be flexible.
- As the meeting begins to wrap up, make sure someone takes advantage of the remaining time to quickly and concisely summarize or reiterate your most important points. You may wish to offer to be an expert resource on issues related to occupational therapy or health care in general.

**Tip:** *Always provide written information or briefing packages to the MPP at the end of a meeting. If material is provided at the beginning, the MPP will most likely read*

*through the notes rather than pay attention to your presentation. See Appendix III for additional resources to prepare a briefing package.*

#### **4. Follow-up**

- Immediately after your meeting with the MPP, always follow up with a letter of thanks. (See Appendix II (p. 9 ) for a sample follow-up letter)
- Use the opportunity of this letter to recap the purpose of your meeting and the points that were covered. As well, provide any additional information or materials that might have been requested, or to answer any questions that you were unable to answer at the meeting.
- Indicate that you are looking forward to working with them on this issue and on other health related issues.
- In addition to mailing the letter, fax a copy to the MPP's office.

**Tip:** *Keeping in regular touch with your MPP helps build your relationship and credibility. If you have a newsletter or brochure, include your MPP on the mailing list. Include them in your holiday greeting care list.*

### **Keep your association apprised of your advocacy activities**

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Contact the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT) for additional resources to assist you to promote specific issues and to keep the Society apprised of your advocacy activities. This enables the Society to build on communications that have already taken place at the local level and to monitor reaction and sentiment of the various parties to issues of concern to occupational therapists.

It also enables the Society to extend the well-deserved and sincere “*thank you!!*” for your efforts to promote the profession and its issues and concerns.

## APPENDIX I

### SAMPLE LETTER OF MEETING REQUEST

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Mr./Ms MPP's Full Name, MPP  
Riding  
Address  
City ON Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms. MPP's last name,

**Re: Meeting Request**

Over the past year there has been a great deal of media coverage concerning the Government's Health Care Transformation Agenda. Important priorities have been identified as critical to address – reducing wait lists for cancer care, diagnostic testing, joint replacement surgeries, cardiac care and controlling hospital deficits. These priorities are important but the focus of attention on these priorities has resulted in hospitals withdrawing other important services from their service delivery menu – service cuts that leave members of our community without a means to achieve their full health or recovery potential.

Out-patient services are vanishing from our community. No longer seen as a priority to fund, *Hospital x* has closed its services for persons who are discharged post hand surgery. I am concerned about the lack of services available to these patients for whom there is no community based funding source.

As a practising occupational therapist and one of your constituents, I would like to meet with you at your earliest possible convenience to discuss the impact of current health policy on our community and its residents' health care needs.

I will follow up with your office to arrange a meeting at a time convenient to your busy schedule.

Sincerely,

Occupational Therapist

\*\* *Note: OSOT can help you draft a letter by providing details to support your issues*

## APPENDIX II

### SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO MPP

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Mr./Mrs. MPP's Full Name, MPP  
Riding  
Address  
City, ON Postal Code

Dear Mr./Ms. MPP's last name,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me/us on [date of meeting] to discuss my/our concerns about the lack of out-patient rehabilitation services for members of our community.

I/We hope that you found the meeting to be as productive and informative as we/I found it to be.

As we/I mentioned at our meeting,.....

Again, thank you for meeting with us. If you require any additional information or have any questions concerning out-patient services, or any other issue relating to health care, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Occupational Therapist

## APPENDIX III

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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#### **Preparing a package to leave behind**

It is useful to leave resources with the MPP for his/her use and for that of their staff. This is an opportunity to leave a written summary of the points and issues you raised and any suggestions/recommendations you may have made. It is also an excellent opportunity to leave resources about occupational therapy so that your visit has a professional promotion component as well!

#### ***To support your written summary of the issue/position, etc.....***

- Contact OSOT to attract background material on the issue and to acquire copies of the Society's formal positions
- Check the Current Issues section of [www.osot.on.ca](http://www.osot.on.ca) for background material on issues affecting OT practice in Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists
- Consider what data might best support your positions and inquire if OSOT's database can provide you with this information. For example, we can provide numbers on how many OTs work in various sectors, provide certain services, etc. Contact OSOT's Manager, Member Services at 416-322-3011/877-676-6768 ext 223 or write to [osot@osot.on.ca](mailto:osot@osot.on.ca).

#### ***To support your efforts to inform your audience about occupational therapy....***

- See the Promoting OT section of [www.osot.on.ca](http://www.osot.on.ca) for promotional resources
- Visit [www.OTOntario.ca](http://www.OTOntario.ca) for consumer focused information about occupational therapy – make sure you refer your MPP to this useful website!