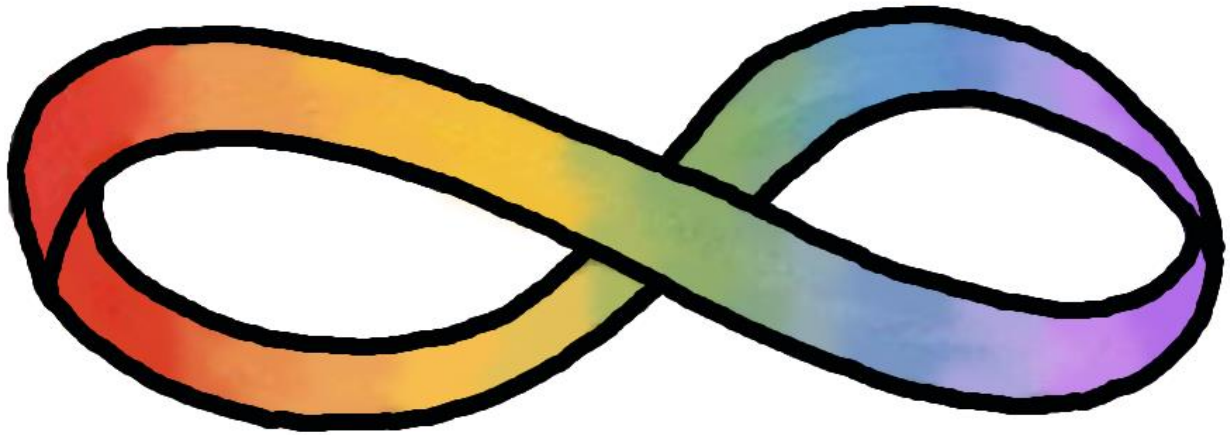


**Talking to Your MP  
About  
Autistic Self-Advocacy  
A Toolkit**



**Autistic Advocacy Coalition of Canada (A4A  
Ontario, Autistics United Canada, and London  
Autistics Standing Together)**

**June 2019**

Welcome! If you are reading this, you are interested in meeting with your Member of Parliament (MP) to help make sure that autistic views are heard by our government and that autistic self-advocacy groups will be consulted by the government when it makes autism policy.

Currently, **the government does not meaningfully consult with autistic people** about autism policy. **This is wrong and we are going to change that.** We are following the model of the disability rights movement: **Nothing About Us Without Us.**

This is a guide with scripts on how to:

- Find out who your MP is
- Contact your MP to make an appointment
- Prepare for your meeting
- Present your talking points during the meeting
- Follow up with your MP after the meeting

### **In-person meetings make a difference!**

We are meeting with MPs at their offices because MPs do not tend to respond to email or messages. They receive many emails and calls per day on many issues. They tend to only listen and take action on issues following an in-person meeting. Emails are most effective after establishing that in-person contact. **One-on-one relationship building with your MP is key!**

### **Main goals of the meetings**

1. To make us real to them. Most MPs have only met neurotypical service providers and parents, but have never really talked to #actuallyautistic people.
2. To convince the government that the mainstream lobby groups (service providers and parents) do **not** have the sole knowledge or vision to be directing the government's autism policy.
3. To convince the government that they **must** begin to meet with autistic self-advocacy groups before making autism policy.

### **We are here to support each other!**

Meeting with MPs can be a new and stressful experience for many of us. **If you have any questions or concerns at any step of the process**, or would like support or advice, please let us know! We are here to help each other as autistic people fighting collectively for our future.

Thank you for reaching out to your MP. **Every visit makes a difference!!**

— Autistic Advocacy Coalition of Canada (A4A Ontario, Autistics United Canada, and London Autistics Standing Together)

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# 1. Find your Member of Parliament (MP)

- You can find out who your MP is and how to contact them on this web page: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/en/contact-us>
- In the search bar, type in your postal code.
- The website will tell you the name of your MP and contact information. It will also tell you the name of your constituency or riding, which is the regional area the MP represents.

# 2. Contact Your MP and Make an Appointment

- **Choose your timing wisely.** MPs divide their time between their hill offices in Ottawa and their constituency offices. MPs are likely to be in their constituency offices until Parliament resumes mid-September. They also are scheduled to be in their constituency offices the weeks of October 13 and November 10. Many MPs are also available on Fridays and weekends in their constituency offices.
- **Make your appointment early.** It is best to schedule your appointment at least a few weeks before you plan to meet your MP.
- **Say why you want to meet the MP.** It is up to you how specific you want to be, but be prepared to say why you want to meet the MP while scheduling the meeting. It can be about a specific policy or issue, or it can be more general about the work you do.
- **You may meet with a staff member (aka staffer) of the MP's office instead and that is okay.** MPs rely on staff as sources of information and are in close contact with them. Staff, especially staff in Ottawa offices, are important in influencing an MP's opinion on issues.
- **Please reach out to us if you require support** in contacting your MP!

## a. Emailing your MP to make an appointment

- Unfortunately, it is difficult to arrange an in-person meeting just through emails. The political world is incredibly ableist and MPs also receive hundreds of emails a day. As a result, MPs usually ignore emails, take a long time to respond, or send back inappropriate form letters.
- The best way to get an in-person meeting with an MP is either to phone or visit their office. If you do email your MP, you can follow up with a phone call or office visit.
- The same works vice versa: if you phone or visit, you may be asked to email afterwards to schedule the meeting.

- **Email template:**

Dear Mr./Ms. [name of MP],

I am a constituent of [name of your constituency/riding] and a member of [name of your group], a disability advocacy organization by and for autistic people. We have been meeting with government representatives to discuss federal autism policy, and as a constituent of your riding, I would like to schedule a meeting with you.

Would you be willing to meet at your constituency office in the coming weeks to talk about my concerns relating to federal autism policy?

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,  
[Your name]

## **b. Visiting the constituency office to make an appointment**

- **Preparation:**
  - Dress business casual.
  - Be prepared to shake hands.
  - Bring a business card if you have one and information flyers about your group.
  
- **Script for an office visit to make a meeting appointment:**
  - “Hi there, I’m a constituent of [MP name]. I would like to make an appointment to meet with them in the next few weeks.”
  
- **If the staffer suggests that you email for an appointment, say:**
  - “Is there any way we could try to schedule it while I am here?”
  - If you prefer email, feel free to use email instead but be prepared to remind the office more about confirming the appointment, as they will likely be slower to set up appointments through email.
  
- **If the staffer asks what the meeting is about, say:**
  - “I belong to an autistic self-advocacy organization called [name of your group]. We’ve been talking to people in the government and as a constituent, I wanted to reach out to MP \_\_\_\_\_.”
  
- If you have a business card, leave it with them. Also, make sure you get the business card of the person you spoke with!

## c. Calling the constituency office to make an appointment

- **Preparation:**
  - Have a pen and paper (or an electronic device) to write down the name of the person you are talking to, the date and time of the appointment, and any contact information.
  - Be prepared to get transferred around or be asked to call a different number.
  
- **Script for a phone call to make an appointment:**
  - “Hi, I’m a constituent of [MP name]. I would like to make an appointment to meet with them in the next few weeks.”
  
- **If the staffer suggests that you email for an appointment, say:**
  - “Is there any way we could try to schedule it while we are on the phone now?”
  - If you largely prefer email, feel free to use email instead but be prepared to remind the office more about confirming the appointment, as they will likely be slower to set up appointments through email.
  
- **If the staffer asks what the meeting is about, say:**
  - “I belong to an autistic self-advocacy organization called [name of your group]. We’ve been talking to people in the government and as a constituent, I wanted to reach out to MP \_\_\_\_\_ as well.”
  
- **NOTE: If you are using AAC for your call, you may want to say something like this near the start of your call:**
  - “I am a constituent who uses text-to-voice technology to communicate. Please give me time to respond in this conversation.”
  
- **NOTE: If you start to get upset with the conversation or have trouble following the conversation, say:**
  - “It takes me time to process conversations on the phone. I need you to slow down and repeat what you just said.” OR
  - “Could I have your office email so we can arrange the appointment that way?”

### 3. Prepare for Your Meeting

- Dress business casual. Wear a collared shirt, button-down shirt, or blouse with slacks or medium to long skirt. Do not wear jeans, shorts, runners, or hoodies. Neutral or dark colours are best. Stick to clothing with simple patterns or solid colours.
- Bring a business card if you have one.
- If possible, bring two (2) print copies of the information flyer about your group, as well as any relevant documents from your group. One-page bullet point summaries of your talking points are great to leave with your MP!
- **Bring something to take notes with.** You will have to send a follow-up afterwards, such as a handwritten thank you note or email with more information.
- **Research your MP ahead of time.** You should tailor your talking points to appeal to their concerns and interests, as much as possible.
- **Know what you want to talk about.** You may want to script or write out what you want to say and practice ahead of time.
- **Aim to arrive at least half an hour early.** Your meeting will likely last half an hour, but if you arrive early and they are ready, you may get more time.
- If you can, take a selfie at the office to share on your social media!

### 4. During your Meeting: Present Your Talking Points

- **Shake the hands of everyone who introduces themselves.** Put yours out if they don't.
  - Handshakes are extremely important to neurotypical people in Canada.
- **Introduce yourself and the organization** you are working with.
- **Focus on what needs to change** and how we can help make things better.
  - Don't focus on individuals; instead focus on systems.
- If they try to talk bad about another political party, **stay neutral.**



- **If they ask about information/stats that you don't know about, it is okay to say:**
  - "I will check on that with my organization and follow-up with you about this by email."
  - Make sure to take notes on this so you follow-up on it!
- **Keep an eye on the time. If it gets close to the end and you haven't been able to say what you need to say, you will need to be "awkward" and just get it out there!**
  - Use a transition such as "I want to make sure before this meeting us over that you know..." and then state your most important point.
  - This may feel rude but it's not: all advocacy groups do it when they have limited time.
- **It is okay to repeat points, do not worry about sounding repetitive. It is important to repeat main points because not everyone is listening the first time.**
- **If the politician tries to ask you your life story, you are not obliged to give it, especially since it will eat away at the time you have to state your points.**
  - Script: "I'd rather not talk about my life story in the short time we have, but I'd like to talk about some of the bigger issues in our whole community."
- **Remember we have many positives as self-advocates. We want to help, have no hidden agenda and are honest. Many politicians find all of that very refreshing.**

## **At the end of the meeting**

- Say something like "I hope we can meet again to discuss this more." That puts a bit of pressure on them to do something after the meeting.
- Take notes before you leave the building, such as any names or info you want to remember.
- Share your photos to social media and tag us.

## 5. Follow up with your MP after the Meeting

- Send a thank you email or handwritten note to the MP and include their staff assistants by name as well.
- Include any follow-up information that you promised to send. If there was something you didn't know, check with your organization first!

## Conclusion

Just by being there, you broke a barrier. Anything else you add is extra to that. Remember it is impossible to cover everything in one meeting and that's okay. The biggest goal in these meetings is to make autistic people known as a presence. This will all be very new to most MPs and it will take them time to adjust.

Thank you for meeting with your MP!!