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## ADVOCACY KIT

### Meeting With Your Local MP

There is real momentum for change at the moment, but we won't see better laws for retirement housing residents unless our state members of parliament are motivated to make this change. We need you to contact your local MP to explain why we need reform, and what they should do about it.

Here are our top tips for contacting your local MP, and how to make the most of your meeting:

#### 1. Find your local MP

Retirement housing is regulated by the Victorian Government so you will be contacting your state MP.

If you are not sure who your local MP is (or how to contact them), search the parliamentary website here: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/members/>

You can also find your electorate by searching the Victorian Electoral Commission website here: <http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/>

#### 2. Do your research

Before you contact your local MP, find out some information about them. Check their website, social media or media releases to see what motivates and interests them.

Are they in government or opposition? Do they have a ministry or a particular interest? Have they visited your village or park before, or have you voted for them previously? The more you know about the MP, the better you can tailor your pitch for a meeting.

#### 3. Call your local MP's electorate office

Start off by giving the MP's electorate office a call. MPs receive huge numbers of email every day, so calling can cut through. You will probably speak to a staff member rather than the MP themselves. This is fine as they arrange the meetings.

If you would prefer, you can also send a letter to your MP to request a meeting. There is a template letter at the end of this Advocacy Kit. Make sure you follow up your letter with a phone call.

#### **4. Be clear, prepared and brief**

When you call your local MP's electorate office, introduce yourself and where you are calling from. Make it clear that you live in the MP's electorate. Clearly explain the reason for your call, and that you would like to have a meeting with the MP to explain your concerns.

Consider outlining your experience living in retirement housing, such as how long you have lived there, the main problems you have experienced, and the effect it is having on your community. You may wish to take along a retirement housing advocate (such as someone from RRVV, HAAG, COTA or Consumer Action) to build your credibility with the MP's office.

Don't talk too much – keep it short (no more than 5 minutes).

Give the staff member enough information to convince them that they should get you an appointment. Offer to send through more information by email if that would help. Staffers are also busy and deal with a lot of calls on a huge variety of issues. They really appreciate clarity and brevity.

#### **5. Arrange a meeting**

During the call, make it clear that you would like to meet with the MP. Following the call, be sure to email or write to the office to confirm the meeting details. Ask for the best email address to contact the staff member during the call. Be patient and flexible about meeting times. MPs are busy and receive lots of requests for meetings.

#### **6. Meeting your MP**

You will probably have less than 30 minutes for your meeting with the MP. Don't waste time getting to the point or on insignificant issues. Be specific and clear about the problems, and what you want. You should cover three main areas in your meeting:

- **How does the issue affect the MP's electorate?**

Consider bringing along another resident or a community advocate to the meeting to tell their story. If you do this, ensure that your guest is aware of the context of the meeting, and keep them on track.

- **What am I asking for?**

Consider the key reforms you would like to see. For example, do we need a Retirement Housing Ombudsman, better regulation of fees and charges, or higher training and accreditation standards?

- **What do I want the MP to do?**

Tell the MP that there was recently a Parliamentary Inquiry into the retirement housing sector, and that the Victorian Government has until September 2017 to respond.

You could ask that the MP to contact the Minister for Consumer Affairs to support the Inquiry's recommendations, or make a public statement about the need for reform.

Think about these questions before you attend the meeting. Be clear and prepared.

#### **7. Follow up promptly**

Make sure you follow-up after the meeting by thanking the MP via email. Maintain your relationship with the MP by keeping in touch about important new developments or issues.

## Template letter to MP

[insert date]

[insert your name and address]

[Insert name and correct title]

Member for [insert electorate]

[Insert electorate address]

Dear [insert MP's name],

1. **Request a meeting:** You should start the letter by asking to meet with your MP. If you are having difficulty arranging a meeting, offer to bring along a retirement housing advocate from an organisation such as RRVV, HAAG, COTA or Consumer Action.

2. **Introduce yourself:** Outline who you are and a brief summary of why you are writing. Make it clear which village or other retirement housing you are writing about and that you are a member of their electorate. It can also be helpful to briefly set out your relevant connections in the community, such as whether you have lived and worked in the electorate for a long time, your involvement with a local church, Rotary organisation or sporting club.

3. **Why you are writing:** You should make it clear that there was a recently a Parliamentary Inquiry into the retirement housing sector, and what your specific concerns are. You should set out the particular concerns you have in your own words. For example:

- *'I am concerned that my retirement housing contract is overly complex, which has left me uncertain of my rights and how to enforce them.'*
- *'Resolving disputes with my retirement village manager is very difficult - Consumer Affairs Victoria can only conciliate, and VCAT is expensive and time consuming.'*
- *'The exit fees I have to pay are huge, so I can't afford to go anywhere else. I feel trapped.'*

You should refer to your own personal experiences with the issue and highlight how this issue affects the broader community.

4. **What you want:** It should be clear what you want the MP to do. For example, *'I would be grateful if you would write to the Minister for Consumer Affairs to support the recommendations of the Parliamentary Inquiry.'*

5. **Provide your contact details:** For example, *'I can be contacted on [insert phone number] or at [insert email address].'*

Yours sincerely,

[Insert signature]

[Insert name]