

Factsheet 8

How to reach government bodies and how to get involved in guideline development and updates

This factsheet provides information on how to reach government bodies and policymakers in your country and how you/your organisation can get involved in guideline development or updates.

Things to ask yourselves before engaging with government bodies and decision makers

1. **What do you want from them? What's your key "ask"?** – Have a clear, achievable request; captured on one sheet of A4, backed up with evidence, as appropriate
2. **Who is the decision maker?** – Find the correct minister or government body to engage with in your country e.g. the Minister of Health, or the Minister of Public Health?
3. **Who can make it happen? Who should you prioritise to influence?** – If the civil servants or clinical leaders are making the real decision, question if it is better to engage with them, rather than the health Minister for example
4. **What or who will persuade them to take up your issue?** – Where is your evidence for your issue? Will they care more about human rights or costs? Who does the Minister work closely with? What are their other interests and who do they admire or trust? Do your research on who you are meeting first
5. **What is the best way to reach them?** – Fringe meetings, Parliamentary events, constituency members and personal connections can all be routes of access. Social media could also be considered if they are active on social media in a professional capacity
6. **What alliances can you make that will strengthen your case?** – Who else has the same problem? It is good to show a broad alliance and demonstrate that the sector is united, particularly with doctors too.¹ Consider engaging with a partner organisation

Who should I engage with and why?

- To reach government bodies and get yours/your organisation's voice involved in guidelines development, lobbying government officials is key
- You will need to research the exact names and contact details of who to get in touch with and lobby. This is likely to be your country's Minister of Health and their department, or the body that develops clinical guidelines (e.g. BHIVA in the UK)

- Ensuring that the Minister of Health and/or the clinical guidelines development body are aware of your organisation and its aims and objectives, is necessary to create change and improve health²

How do I reach them?

- Your Minister of Health's contact details are likely to be online, so search for these on your government's website
- Your first official approach should be via letter or e-letter
 - However, there are lots of informal ways to meet a key decision maker, such as at conferences or talks they are hosting
 - Informally, you can introduce yourself and ask them a question, or even follow up on your letter and request a meeting

Things to consider when going to the meeting

- Decide who is coming to the meeting
 - Only take a few individuals from your organisation to avoid overcrowding the meeting room
 - Take with you relevant people who can get across your key messages
- Agree your key messages for the meeting in advance
- Do some background research on the person you plan to engage with, so that you have a good understanding of who they are, which can help form a rapport
- Take with you background reading to leave with the policymaker
- Be on time – don't be late!
- Be clear in what you want to ask during the meeting
 - Consider what the policymaker can do for you
 - Give them an action that is achievable for them to do
- During the meeting
 - Introduce yourself and/or organisation and explain your aims and objectives
 - State clearly and concisely what issue you want to discuss
 - Stress how the issue will affect the member's role, constituency or district
 - Mention other organisations, influential people, government officials and lawmakers that support your position
 - Be a good listener, allowing the official individual to respond
 - Explicitly 'make your ask' – e.g. direct yes-or-no-question, commitment to support a campaign or attend an event
 - Leave them with your background reading
 - Thank them for their time

- After your meeting, write down any information you learned and share this with your organisation to help develop advocacy plans
- Follow up from your meeting with a ‘thank you’ letter or email, reiterating your key points and any commitments made to you by the official individual³

How do I find out about guidelines development?

- Ask the relevant government official – e.g. Minister of Health or your constituency/district representative
- Research your area of interest within the clinical guidelines development body website or give them a call
- Ask colleagues and contacts in your field if they are aware of guidelines in development or in the process of being updated

Recap of actions

- **Ensure your voice is heard** – contact your country’s Minister of Health, their officials and the bodies that make guidelines in HIV and/or Hepatitis
- **Find the right decision maker and contact them directly** with a letter or e-letter
- **Set up a meeting** to introduce and explain yours/your organisation’s aims and objectives
- **Have your key messages ready** so that you are able to talk through your story in two lines or 10-20 seconds
- **Decide who will go to the meeting**
 - Keep the number of people small
 - Consider taking someone who can bring your issue to life from their own experience
- **Know your ask** and explicitly make it
- **Follow up after the meeting** – keep in touch and see where you can get involved

References

¹ OptTEST, from a forthcoming toolkit on challenging legal & regulatory barriers to HIV testing and treatment, <http://www.opttest.eu/>, Accessed October 2016

² Recommendations for Community Involvement in National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases HIV/AIDS Clinical Trials Research, February 2009

³ Center for Health and Gender Equity, *The Lobbying Process: Basics and How-To Guide*, adapted from the One Voice Summit 2009 Advocacy Guide and Wellstone Action’s “Lobbying Basics”