

SPEAKING UP FOR CHANGE: A GUIDE FOR SURVIVORS MEETING WITH LOCAL DECISION MAKERS (AUSTRALIA)

Your voice is the difference

If you've experienced child sexual abuse, your story holds power. You can use it to help change the systems that failed to protect you and make things better for future generations.

In Australia, laws and policies that impact victim-survivors are made at both the state and federal levels, by Members of Parliament (MPs), ministers, and government officials. This guide is here to help you feel confident meeting with your local MP or another decision-maker to talk about improving laws, funding, and systems to better support survivors.

You don't have to be a policy expert. You just have to be willing to speak from the heart and be clear about what needs to change.

1. Find the right person to talk to

The first step is securing a meeting with your state and federal MP. If you are unsure who your local MPs are (state or federal), you can look them up online.

2. Request a meeting

Most MPs are open to meeting local residents, especially when the issue involves child safety or justice. You can phone their office, write a short email, or drop in and ask politely for a meeting.

For example:

"I'm a survivor of child sexual abuse and I would like to meet with [MP Name] to share my experience and talk about some changes that could better support victims and protect children."

3. Know what you want to change

Before your meeting, have a think about:

- What didn't work in the system for you?
- What would have helped you?
- What needs to change - laws, funding, services, or support?

Focus on the messages as per the guideline so that the MP might be able to act on.

4. Prepare what you want to say

You don't need to tell your whole story, or relive painful experiences. Share only what feels safe and helpful. You might say:

- "I'm sharing this because I want to stop this from happening to anyone else", or
- "My experience showed me where the system broke down. I'm asking you to help fix it."

Bring a short note, printout, or key points on paper if it helps you stay focused.

5. At the meeting

- Be yourself. You don't need to be formal - just clear and respectful.
- Share your experience if you feel safe to do so, and explain why the issue matters.
- Clearly say what change you'd like the MP to support.
- If they ask questions you don't know the answer to, it's perfectly fine to say: "I'm not sure, but I can find out and follow up."

Tip: You can bring a support person with you if that helps.

6. After the meeting

- Send a short thankyou note or email.
- Follow up after a few weeks to ask if any progress has been made.
- Keep in touch if you can - advocacy is often built over time.

7. When you can't get a meeting

If you can't speak directly with a decision-maker, think about:

- Who influences them? (e.g. party leaders, local media, community members)
- Can you speak to someone they trust, who might pass on your message?
- Can you write an open letter, start a petition, or join a campaign?

You can also work through survivor-led organisations or advocacy groups who already have relationships with key politicians.

Final Words

Speaking up isn't easy. But every conversation you have helps make it harder for people in power to ignore the truth.

- Your voice can shape policy.
- Your story can help shift laws.
- And your courage can lead to real change.

Thank you for standing up, not just for yourself, but for those who haven't yet found the confidence to use their voice.

