LOCAL ACTION for MS

MS Society

Contents

Introduction to campaigning

Campaigning is about speaking up for what matters to you.

So whether you’re angry about hospital parking charges, concerned about cuts to local MS services, or want to improve access to local leisure facilities, you can make a difference. And this toolkit can help you do that.

Top tip

If you decide to start a campaign and would like support planning it, please do **get in touch**. We can help you work out which decision-makers to target, or offer advice on holding a campaign event. **We’d also love to hear from you if you’ve been campaigning already, and want to take your campaign further.**

Why campaign?

Decisions made by your local councils or NHS leaders, and even some local businesses, can affect many aspects of our day-to-day lives.

You know your local area best, the issues you face and the impact it's having on your local community. If you're not getting the services and support you need, speaking out and campaigning really can change things.

Our community campaigns on a real range of issues. You might choose to campaign to:

- protect services, such as access to specialist nurses, wheelchair services, or rehab services like physiotherapy
- raise awareness of MS amongst decision-makers or businesses in a local area
- stop the closure of local services like public toilets
- increase facilities like blue badge parking spaces
- make more services and buildings accessible for those with mobility needs.

You'll need to carefully plan your campaign to make sure you're reaching the right people and to make your campaign a success.

Below are some things to consider. You can use our **campaign planning template** to help you get started.

Top tip

There are **template resources** you can use for your campaigning, or you can create your own campaign identity.

Your campaign aim

You should start by identifying the problem you're trying to fix.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Why is this an issue?
2. What's the impact on people living with MS in my community?
3. Who is affected by this problem?
4. How can I change it?

Try to find out as much as possible about the problem before working out what the solution might be.

Top tip

Personal stories and evidence (such as the number of people affected) make all the difference in campaigns. Check out our guide on **gathering evidence**.

Your campaign messages

What are you asking decision-makers to change?

Writing a few short bullet points on the issue and the outcome you're calling for can help you stay focused when writing a press release or speaking to decision-makers.

Be sure to keep these messages consistent throughout your campaign.

The first message should identify the problem

For example: 'People in Newcastle are going without access to wheelchairs'

The second message should identify the impact it's having

For example: 'This is having an impact on their independence, with 200 people with MS affected'.

The third message should identify what needs to change

For example: 'The wheelchair service needs to restart urgently, so people can live full and independent lives'.

Your campaign targets

You'll need to work out which decision-makers to target with your campaign.

Here are some questions to think about:

- Who makes the ultimate decision about this?
- Who else can help influence them? Who do they listen to?
- Are there any other decision-makers that get a say?

Decision-makers to consider are:

- political representatives like your Member of Parliament (MP)
- local health bodies, who make decisions about how money is spent in your area
- local service providers,
- local councils.

Find out more about influencing local decision-makers in our **decision-makers guide**, or **get in touch** for support.

Top tip

We work with decision-makers every day – **get in touch** if you'd like support or to let us know you'll be getting in touch with a decision-maker in your local area.

Campaigning with others

Getting people on board to support your campaign is really important.

The more people you have involved,
the more likely you'll bring about change together.

You might want to involve:

- other organisations and charities
- your local MS Society group
- community groups
- the wider public.

Check out our guide on **working with others in the community**.

Thinking about your impact

During your campaign, you should consider how successful it's been so far.

It's a good idea to regularly review the progress you're making, so you can think about what else you can do to achieve your campaign aims.

It's good to think about the following questions:

- What responses have you got from decision-makers and other people affected by the issue?
- Do I need to contact a different decision-maker?
- Do I need to get more people involved in the campaign and spread the word further?
- Could you change your tactics in any way?

After you've finished each campaigning activity, ask yourself:

- Have we achieved what we wanted to? If not, why do you think that was, and what could have been done differently?

Top tip

Think carefully about the timing of your campaign so it can have the most impact. For example, a local council makes its budget decisions at certain times of year, and once a budget is set, it can be difficult to change funding.

Campaign tactics and events

Campaigning doesn’t just mean taking to the streets to protest.

There are lots of different ways you can bring about change for the MS community where you live.

Here are some ideas about how you can campaign on your particular issue.

Writing letters or emails

A good way to start your campaign is by letter or email.

You can explain the issue to decision-makers and the impact it's having on local people. You may want to ask for a meeting to discuss the issue further.

You may also want to think about a letter-writing campaign. This is where you encourage as many people as possible to write to a local decision-maker about the issue you're campaigning on. This can be a good idea if your first letter doesn't get a response.

Top tip

Before you write your letter, think about the best person to raise your issue with. Do you want to go straight to the decision-maker, or add weight to your campaign by getting support from a local politician first? **Read more about decision makers**.

Meetings

One of the best ways to get your message across is to meet with the person making the decisions in person, or virtually using services like Zoom or Skype.

You may need more than one meeting, and you should time these carefully to fit with key points in your campaign. This could be at the start, to raise the issue for the first time, followed by meeting again before important votes, decisions or deadlines.

Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your meeting:

- **Plan what you want to say.** Gather your evidence on the issue and any other information that backs up your campaign. Bring copies of evidence or detailed information for other attendees.
- **Think about who to invite -** is there someone who can speak from personal experience?
- **Stick to the topic -** remember your campaign's key messages and your campaign goal.
- **Make notes during the meeting,** so there's a record of what's agreed

Follow up with a letter or email thanking the person you met with for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you or they agreed to take.

Petitions

Petitions are a great way to get people to support your campaign.

They also show decision-makers in your area the strength of feeling about an issue.

To reach more people, and make signing your petition easier, you could set up an online petition using a website such as Change.org. You could also have paper copies so people can sign up at events or meetings.

Once you have enough signatures, arrange a time to deliver your petition to your decision-maker. You could also contact your local press to see if they'll cover it.

Read more about speaking to press.

Campaign events and stunts

To get more interest in your campaign from the public or press, you could arrange a public event or stunt.

You could hold a demonstration outside your council office, or invite a local decision-maker along to an MS service or local group meeting.

There are a few things to consider when planning a campaign event or stunt:

- **Do you need permission?** If it's in a public place you may need to contact the local council first. If you're inviting a decision maker along to a therapy centre or group, you'll need to arrange this with the person in charge.
- **Is it the right time?** You may want to hold your event before an important vote or meeting, or in the evening or weekend so more people can attend.
- **Is your event accessible?** It's also a good idea to check it can be reached by public transport.
- **How will you follow up?** Think about how you'll keep decision-makers and interested members of the public informed about the campaign.

Raising awareness

Think about ways to raise awareness of your campaign or of MS in general.

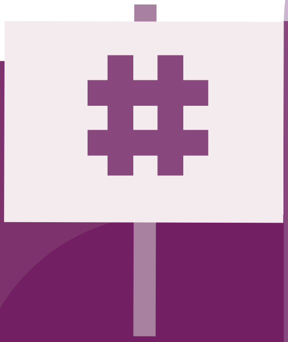
Organising a stall in a public place like a school, hospital, town hall, local fair or library could help you reach more people locally.

Again, it’s a good idea to consider whether you need permission, and exactly what you want to speak to people about. You should also think about what promotional materials you might need, like flyers or posters.

We have a suite of easy templates that you can use to support your campaign activities. These include templates that you can download, edit and print yourself and online templates for contacting decision-makers. Find out more on our **local campaigning page**.

Top tip

If you need support deciding what tactic to use for your campaign, or setting up an event, please **get in touch**. If you sign up to be a campaigns volunteer, you can access extra training and support too.



Gathering evidence

At the heart of your campaign sits the evidence for why you're campaigning.

Anything you can do to show the impact of your issue on people's lives can help persuade decision-makers. There are many different types of evidence and different ways you can gather it.

It's important to use a variety of evidence to back up your campaign. It means you can tell the story of why you're campaigning, at different times and in different ways. You can use evidence in meetings with decision-makers, on social media, and when speaking to your local press and other members of the MS community.

Types of evidence

Evidence to support a campaign can be:

- population data (the number of people affected by an issue)
- survey data
- personal stories from case studies or focus groups
- facts about MS and how it affects people
- supportive comments from professionals
- real examples of where the change you're calling for has already happened, and the difference it's made.

Population data

Depending on the focus of the campaign, there will be different people affected, and the issue may affect some people more than others.

For example, a campaign for a local MS nurse will affect the whole MS population in the area. But a campaign for accessible footpaths will affect people who have mobility issues or may do in the future, so will be a different population.

You can find the population of people with MS in the four nations of the UK on our website. And you can go to the ONS website to find out the population of your local area.

You can also get data from government departments and the NHS by submitting a freedom of information (FOI) request, if you can't find the data you need.

Survey data

If the data you need to support your campaign isn't already available, you may need to carry out a survey to gather it.

A survey is unlikely to capture the whole of the population your campaign issue affects, but you can use the results to represent the affected population.

Because of this, it's important to report certain information (demographics) of the people who responded to the survey that could influence the results. These could include age, gender, type of MS and ethnicity, and are all factors that can influence a person's experience of an issue.

For examples of how to word questions and categories around demographics see our **My MS My Needs methodology report** for a copy of the survey.

If you want to compare your survey findings to other survey data it's important to make sure the answer options you provide in your survey can be compared to the answer options in the other survey.

For example:
If the age brackets in the survey you want to compare to are 18 - 24, 25 - 34, and so on, then you'll want to use similar brackets. If you used, for instance, 20 - 25, 26 - 30, you wouldn't be able to compare the two because one crosses the other.

Top tip

If you're asking questions about an emotional topic, you can also include information about Our MS Helpline in case people need to speak to someone.

It’s best to collect anonymous data, as it means you don’t need to include data protection guidance. If you’re collecting identifiable data (like data about demographics mentioned above), you need to make sure you get consent to process and use this. This should be optional so people can opt-out of providing this if they want to.

There’s no ideal number of responses you should gather. But you should try to get as many responses as you can, from as many different types of people.

You can include ‘closed’ or ‘open’ questions.
It’s likely you’ll want to include a mixture of both.

Closed questions are when you have a list of answer options to select from.

For example:

Have you seen your MS nurse in the last 12 months?

1. Yes
2. No, but I needed to
3. No, I didn’t need to
4. I am not sure

Open questions are when you allow the respondent to expand on an answer in their own words. Open questions are useful if you think there’ll be a wide range of answers, if you’re not sure what the answers will be, or if you want to share quotes from the survey.

For example:

Q: What support do you need most from your MS nurse?

A: The support I need most from my MS nurse is...

Survey format

Think about what format your survey will be in and how you'll promote it.

- Will it just be online using websites like SurveyGizmo and also in paper format?
- Will you share it and hand it out to people (on social media or perhaps with your local group), or ask others to hand it out for you?
- If it's in paper form, how will people return the survey to you?
- Will the format of the survey influence who responds? For example, if it's only online, there might be people who don't use computers or smartphones. Is this important for representation of your survey?
- You'll never reach everyone, and you have to make decisions based on the time and resources available. It's important to explain the decisions you made about how to share it when writing up the survey findings.

Top tip

It's a good idea to test the survey with people who would be likely to complete it, and ask them whether they understand the questions. This will give you more confidence that you're getting the right information when you share your survey.

Personal stories or focus groups

Personal stories can be really powerful.

Individual stories which share the impact a campaign issue is having really help to make the case for change. You can collect personal stories by speaking to people face to face, over the phone or in written form by email.

Focus groups can be held with a group of people to get more in depth insight into the issue you're campaigning on.

Here are some tips:

1. **Be prepared**
   Have a list of questions or topics that you'd like the focus group to discuss.

2. **Record the sessions**
   It's a good idea to record the focus groups. You must let people know this is happening and give them the opportunity to not take part. It's also important to store the recording somewhere where it can't be shared with others, and delete it after notes are written up.

3. **Handle data properly**
   Remember to get consent to process sensitive data for everyone (like personal data such as their address, and health information), and from a parent if you are collecting any information concerning children under the age of 13. You'll need to make sure people are happy for you to share their experiences, particularly if you're presenting these to a decision-maker, or sharing with a journalist or on social media.

Supportive comments from professionals

It can be useful to show decision-makers that there's support from the professional community (such as GPs or MS nurses) for your campaign issue.

- Always ask if the professionals you're speaking to would be happy to give a public comment or quote in support of your campaign
- Allow them to edit the statement or quote to fit with what they're comfortable saying. Professionals might be more likely to speak frankly in conversation but wish to be more discreet publicly

Examples of successful campaigns elsewhere

If you know of a similar campaign that's been successful elsewhere, or if your campaign is for a service that's already in place elsewhere, then sharing evidence about this can really help.

It's good to gather as much information as possible on the similarities and differences between the two services, to make a comparison between what's working and what isn't.

It would be useful to know how much the service cost and if they have any evidence of the difference it's made to people with MS.

Top tip

We can let you know of other campaigns similar to yours that we know about, for you to use as evidence. We'd also love to hear about the evidence you've gathered too, so please **get in touch**.

Reporting

Once you've gathered all of your evidence you can put it together into a report.

It's useful to have a short summary with the aim of the campaign and your key findings.

- Remember to give as much information as you can on how the evidence was gathered and how many people took part in your survey or focus group.
- Say how and when the data was gathered.
- Try not to draw general conclusions from the data but instead report what the data shows. You can say how this reflects the experience of the wider community.

Example summary:
We carried out a survey of 150 people with MS living in West Sussex between 1 February 2020 and 28 February 2020. The survey was completed online and in paper form. It was promoted via local social media groups including West Sussex MS group, Brighton MS group and Lewes MS group, and through personal contacts. Paper versions of the survey were available at local group meetings during this time or by request.

Data protection and ethics

When gathering and reporting your evidence, it’s important to think about whether it’s ethical and fair.

Some questions to think about are:

- How will you make sure people are fully informed about the data you’re gathering before giving their consent: where you will use it, how long you’ll keep it, and how you will protect it (such as in a password protected file).
- Will you be able to ensure anonymity being guaranteed if it’s asked for?
- Are there any potential negative impacts for those taking part in the survey or focus group, for example affecting their relationship with their MS nurse of specialist?
- Are you allowing everyone to participate who wants to?
- Have you let people know what you plan to do with their data? It’s good to write up a short statement so you’re telling people the same thing.

Top tip

We have a template form which you can use to collect consent for using people’s data. Please **get in touch** if you’d like to use this form.

Useful sources of evidence that you can use for your campaign

- Information about MS: **www.mssociety.org.uk/what-is-ms**
- Our evidence on areas like care and support, treatments, employment and the number of people living with MS in the UK: **www.mssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/our-evidence**
- NICE guidelines for MS management: **www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg186**
- Office for national statistics: **www.ons.gov.uk/**
- MS Trust work on how MS services can work best: **www.mstrust.org.uk/health-professionals/resources/service-development/generating-evidence-ms-services-gemss**

Influencing local decision-makers

Here you can read more about the different decision-makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings.

The right decision-maker to contact might be different depending on where you are in the UK. We've split this section by nation, to make sure you get the information you need.

Influencing local decision-makers in England

Different campaigns will have different 'targets' or decision-makers.

When you begin to plan your campaign, you'll need to decide which decision-makers you need to target. This will depend on your campaign issue.

It's a good idea to find out more about the decision-makers you want to target before you plan the tactics you might use to influence them.

Here we've explained more about the different decision-makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings.

Influencing decision-makers

Before approaching a decision-maker

- Check if they're the ultimate decision-maker on your campaign issue, or if they'll need to influence someone else. This will help to make sure you speak to the right people.
- Consider what you want them to do. Do you want to ask them to agree to your campaign aims straight away, or would you like to invite them to meet with you or attend an event to find out more about your concerns?
- Think about any barriers there might be – why might a local decision-maker not wish to support your campaign? How might you change their mind?
- Our campaigns teams are here to support you. If you aren't sure who to approach or how to approach them, **get in touch**!

Approaching decision-makers

- You can approach them by email, letter, social media or phone, or you can use one of our **handy templates** to get in touch.
- Remember your campaign messages. Stick to your one issue and explain the outcome you'd like to see.
- Include personal stories or evidence to back up your campaign.
- Include your full contact details so they're able to reply.

Meeting decision-makers

- You can arrange to meet the decision-maker in person (this might be somewhere like their office, or a café), or virtually using services like Zoom or Skype. You may also want to ask to speak to them over the phone.
- Some decision-makers may hold regular public meetings, or you might be able to speak to them at an event they're attending.
- Explain your issue and the outcome you'd like to see. Keep discussions focused on your issue and how they can help.
- If people disagree with your position, remember it isn't personal. Try to understand why and present your case for change clearly and confidently.
- Your decision-maker won't expect you to be an expert, but they'll want to know why you think this is an important issue for local people.
- Be prepared. Take some time before meeting to make notes to remind you of the points you want to make so you don't forgot something
- Take any evidence you may have, and bring a copy for the decision-maker to keep if you can. You could also send this to them afterwards by email.
- Follow up with a letter or email thanking them for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you or they agreed to take.

Your local council

Your local council, also known as your local authority, is responsible for providing some important services to people affected by MS, including social care.

They're also responsible for local transport issues, and looking after the local environment you live in.

Many parts of England have two tiers of local government: county councils, and district, borough or city councils. In some parts of the country, there's just one (unitary) tier of local government providing all the local services, such as in London boroughs for example.

You can read more about **their different responsibilities here**, and find a **map of the different council types in England here**.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local council are:

- to influence a decision that is about to be made, for example, on social care funding
- to make the case for new services to be offered
- to challenge a decision that has already been made, such as the closure of a day centre.

Your local councillor is elected to represent your views to others in your council. Some councillors also have responsibility for local budget allocation. As well as **writing to**, calling or emailing councillors, you could arrange to meet them in person during their office hours which should be available online. You may also be able to attend a public council meeting where your issue is discussed. You can find out more about how to do this by visiting your local council's website.

For issues around poor accessibility in your area, disabled parking or accessible transport, you may find your local council has a dedicated Access Officer you can approach. You should be able to get in touch with them on your council's website.

Top tip

It's important to know what the local council structure is in your area as different types of councils are responsible for different things. You should be able to find this out by searching online, or **get in touch** if you can't find out.

Your Member of Parliament (MP)

MPs are elected to represent their constituents – that's anyone who lives in the area they serve.

They do work locally to represent issues that matter to their constituents, and it can be very useful to have their support for your campaign. They can be useful for contacting and influencing other local decision-makers, or getting publicity for your campaign.

In your local area your MP can:

- attend a meeting or launch event to show support for your campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance)
- express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local council.
- visit a local service, like an MS Therapy Centre or MS Society local group event, to learn more about living with MS.

Your MP can also raise issues that matter to their local constituents in the House of Commons or directly with a national decision-maker such as a Minister. If you think they can help with an MS Society campaign, please get in touch to let us know.

Top tip

You can use our tools to write to your MP, local health authority or councillor, or find their contact details at www.writetothem.com

Local health bodies in England

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)

CCGs commission the majority of health services in their local area. This means they decide what services are needed and make sure they're provided. This includes hospital and rehabilitation services, urgent and emergency care, as well as most community health services like occupational therapy or physiotherapy. CCGs also have a say in commissioning GP services.

CCGs are membership organisations. Their members include GPs and other clinicians, such as nurses and consultants, as well as local members of the public.

CCG members are not directly elected, but they do have a duty to involve patients, carers and the public in decisions about the services they fund. They do this through things like patient and public involvement groups and public Board meetings. You can contact your local CCG to find out more about how they are doing this, and ask to get involved. You can find your local CCG online.

CCGs do not currently commission 'specialised' services, which include disease modifying therapies (DMTs). These are commissioned by NHS England, so your CCG won't be able to change access to DMTs on their own.

However, some decisions about fundings for some treatments like Functional Electrical Stimulation (FES) or sativex and cannabis based treatments rely on local decisions and CCGs agreeing funding. You can find out from your CCG if treatments like that are available in your area and who to target your campaign at to make a change.

NHS Trusts

NHS hospital trusts and community trusts run hospital and community based services. These include MS specialist nurses and rehabilitation services. If your campaign is about changing these services, a good place to start your campaign is by approaching the relevant NHS service manager and then moving up to the Chief Executive of the NHS trust.

To find out who to contact, you could ask your MS nurse or specialist for the name of the NHS service manager, or look up details on your NHS trust's website. Look in the 'contact us' section where there should be the process for raising issues.

There might also be an expert patient group that you could get involved with and might support your campaign. Details should be on the NHS trust's website or your MS nurse might have details. Look out for posters in waiting rooms.

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can provide information, advice and support about healthcare matters – you can also use PALS to make complaints about an experience. PALS can guide you through different services available in the NHS and in your area, can support you to give feedback about a problem you've had with a healthcare service, or to make a complaint. They're usually based within a hospital. You can find PALS services in your area here.

Mental health services are usually provided by your local mental health Foundation Trust or via individual providers through the Improved Access to Psychological Therapies programme (IAPT). GPs and primary care managers will know more about local IAPT services.

Local Healthwatch

There's a local Healthwatch organisation in every area of England. They work to find out what people like about services in their area, and what could be improved. They give patients and members of the public the opportunity to influence how local health and care decisions are made in their local area, and may be able to support your campaign. You can contact your local Healthwatch if you think a service isn't being provided in the way it should for people with MS. Find out more on their website - **www.healthwatch.co.uk**

Health and Wellbeing Boards

Local Health and Wellbeing Boards are run by your local authority, to make health and social care services work better together. They carry out assessments, called Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), which look at the needs of the people in the local area. They then use this information to write a strategy - recommending how to provide better, more joined up services in the area.

Your Health and Wellbeing Board consults local people on both their JSNA and their strategy. You can find out more about your Health and Wellbeing Board on your local council's website, including how to get involved.

Influencing local decision-makers in Northern Ireland

Different campaigns will have different ‘targets’ or decision-makers.

When you begin to plan your campaign, you’ll need to decide which decision-makers you need to target. This will depend on your campaign issue.

It’s a good idea to find out more about the decision-makers you want to target before you plan the tactics you might use to influence them.

Here we’ve explained more about the different decision-makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings.

Influencing decision-makers

Before approaching a decision-maker

- Check if they're the ultimate decision-maker on your campaign issue, or if they'll need to influence someone else. This will help to make sure you speak to the right people.
- Consider what you want them to do. Do you want to ask them to agree to your campaign aims straight away, or would you like to invite them to meet with you or attend an event to find out more about your concerns?
- Think about any barriers there might be – why might a local decision-maker not wish to support your campaign? How might you change their mind?
- Our campaigns teams are here to support you. If you aren't sure who to approach or how to approach them, **get in touch**!

Approaching decision-makers

- You can approach them by email, letter, social media or phone, or you can use one of our **handy templates** to get in touch.
- Remember your campaign messages. Stick to your one issue and explain the outcome you'd like to see.
- Include personal stories or evidence to back up your campaign.
- Include your full contact details so they're able to reply.

Meeting decision-makers

- You can arrange to meet the decision-maker in person (this might be somewhere like their office, or a café), or virtually using services like Zoom or Skype. You may also want to ask to speak to them over the phone.
- Some decision-makers may hold regular public meetings, or you might be able to speak to them at an event they're attending.
- Explain your issue and the outcome you'd like to see. Keep discussions focused on your issue and how they can help.
- If people disagree with your position, remember it isn't personal. Try to understand why and present your case for change clearly and confidently.
- Your decision-maker won't expect you to be an expert, but they will want to know why you think this is an important issue for local people.
- Be prepared. Take some time before meeting to make notes to remind you of the points you want to make so you don't forgot something.
- Take any evidence you may have, and bring a copy for the decision-maker to keep if you can. You could also send this to them afterwards by email.
- Follow up with a letter or email thanking them for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you or they agreed to take.

Your local council

Your local council is responsible for providing services such as leisure centres, local parks and looking after the local environment you live in.

They're also responsible for community planning.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local council are:

- influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, about a council facility which should be accessible
- fighting for new services to be offered
- challenging a decision that has already been made

Your local councillor is elected to represent your area. They have a duty to represent your views and make the relevant staff member at the council aware of your concerns. Speaking to your councillor can be an effective way to put pressure on the local council.

As well as writing to, calling or emailing your councillor, you could arrange to meet them in person or attend a council meeting. You can find out more by visiting your local council's website, or get in touch with them using our **online tool**.

Your Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)

Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are elected to represent the interests of constituents – that's anyone who lives in the area they serve.

They represent their constituents in the Northern Ireland Assembly and can be useful in influencing local decision-makers, or getting publicity for your campaign. Each constituency is represented by five MLAs, and you can contact all of them about your campaign.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has power over areas such as health and social services, local government, housing, transport and employment and skills. So if your campaign is about one of these topics you could contact your MLA. The responsibility for some matters such as taxation and national defence lies with the UK Parliament and therefore your local MP (Member of Parliament).

You can find out who your MLAs are and their contact details at **www.niassembly.gov.uk** or email them using our **online tool**.

In your local area your MLAs can:

- attend a meeting or launch event to show support for a campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance)
- express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local Health and Social Care Trust
- visit a local service or MS Society group event to learn more about living with MS.

Your MLAs can also be influential in the Northern Ireland Assembly. If you think your MLAs can help with an MS Society campaign, please get in touch.

Your Member of Parliament (MP)

MPs are elected to represent their constituents.

That's anyone who lives in the area they serve. They represent issues that matter to their constituents where you live, and it can be very useful to have their support for your campaign. They can also be useful for contacting and influencing other local decision-makers, or getting publicity for your campaign if it's a UK wide issue or is outside the power of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Like MLAs, your MP can:

- attend a meeting or launch event to show support for your campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance)
- express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local council.
- visit a local service, like an MS Therapy Centre or MS Society group event, to learn more about living with MS

Your MP can also raise issues that matter to their local constituents in the House of Commons or directly with a national decision-maker such as a Minister. If you think they can help with an MS Society campaign, please get in touch and let us know.

Top tip

You can use our tools to write to your MLA, MP or councillor, or find their contact details at www.writetothem.com

Local health bodies in Northern Ireland

Local Commissioning Groups (LCGs)

LCGs fund services that are provided by the Health and Social Care Trust, including hospitals, community based services like occupational therapy and physiotherapy and social care.

LCGs have a duty to involve their patients, carers, and the public in decisions about the services they fund. Their meetings are public and anyone can attend and listen to what is being discussed. You can contact your LCG to find out more about how they are doing this, and ask to get involved.

Health and Social Care Trusts

Health and Social Care Trusts provide important services to people affected by MS, including services like hospitals, residential homes and health centres.

Health and Social Care Trusts have a duty to consult the public on any major decision they make about new and existing services. It is important if you disagree with their proposals that you tell them you views.

Patient and Client Council

The Patient and Client Council gives patients and members of the public the opportunity to influence how local health and care decisions are made in their local area. You can contact the Patient and Client Council if you think a service isn't being provided in the way it should, or if you think the needs of people with MS need to be considered in more detail. Find out more on their website.

Influencing local decision-makers in Scotland

Different campaigns will have different ‘targets’ or decision-makers.

When you begin to plan your campaign, you’ll need to decide which decision-makers you need to target. This will depend on your campaign issue.

It’s a good idea to find out more about the decision-makers you want to target before you plan the tactics you might use to influence them.

Here we’ve explained more about the different decision-makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings.

Influencing decision-makers

Before approaching a decision-maker

- Check if they’re the ultimate decision-maker on your campaign issue, or if they will need to influence someone else. This will help to make sure you speak to the right people.
- Consider what you want them to do. Do you want to ask them to agree to your campaign aims straight away, or would you like to invite them to meet with you or attend an event to find out more about your concerns?
- Think about any barriers there might be – why might a local decision-maker not wish to support your campaign? How might you change their mind?
- Our campaigns teams are here to support you. If you aren’t sure who to approach or how to approach them, **get in touch**!

Approaching decision-makers

- You can approach them by email, letter, social media or phone, or you can use one of our **handy templates** to get in touch.
- Remember your campaign messages. Stick to your one issue and explain the outcome you’d like to see.
- Include personal stories or evidence to back up your campaign.
- Include your full contact details so they’re able to reply.

Meeting decision-makers

- You can arrange to meet the decision-maker in person (this might be somewhere like their office, or a café), or virtually using services like Zoom or Skype. You may also want to ask to speak to them over the phone.

- Some decision-makers may hold regular public meetings, or you might be able to speak to them at an event they're attending.

- Explain your issue and the outcome you'd like to see. Keep discussions focused on your issue and how they can help.

- If people disagree with your position, remember it isn't personal – try to understand why and present your case for change clearly and confidently.

- Your decision-maker won't expect you to be an expert, but they'll want to know why you think this is an important issue for local people.

- Be prepared. Take some time before meeting to make notes to remind you of the points you want to make so you don't forgot something

- Take any evidence you may have, and bring a copy for the decision-maker to keep if you can. You could also send this to them afterwards by email.

- Follow up with a letter or email thanking them for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you or they agreed to take.

Your Local Council

Your local council is responsible for providing services such as leisure centres, local parks and looking after the local environment you live in.

They're also responsible for community planning, looking at all the services of a council and making sure they work well for the area.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local council are:

- influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, about a council facility which should be accessible
- fighting for new services to be offered
- challenging a decision that's already been made.

Your local councillor is elected to represent people in your area. They have a duty to represent your views and make the relevant staff member at the council aware of your concerns. Speaking to your councillor can be an effective way to put pressure on the local council.

As well as writing to, calling or emailing your councillor, you could arrange to meet them in person or attend a council meeting. You can find out more by visiting your local council's website, or get in touch with them using our online tool.

Your Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs)

MSPs are elected to represent the interests of constituents - that's anyone who lives in the area they serve.

They represent issues that matter to constituents like you in the Scottish Parliament and can help influence local decision-makers or get publicity for your campaign. You are represented by eight MSPs in total: one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs. You can contact all of them about your campaign.

In your local area your MSPs can:

- attend a meeting or launch event to show support for a campaign (you'll need to ask them quite far in advance)
- express concern on your behalf to local organisations, such as your local health board
- visit a local service or local group event to learn more about living with MS.

Whether it's more appropriate to contact your MSP or your MP depends on the issue you're campaigning on.

The Scottish Parliament has powers for areas including health, social work, local government, housing and transport. If your campaign is about one of these topics you could contact your MSP. Other topics such as energy and employment are reserved to the UK Parliament, so it's best to contact your MP about these topics. The Scottish Parliament has devolved responsibility for some aspects of welfare and benefits, such as disability benefits, so you can contact your MSP about these too.

Your MSPs can also be influential in the Scottish Parliament - if you think your MSPs can help with an MS Society campaign, please contact scotlandcampaigns@mssociety.org.uk to let us know.

Your Member of Parliament (MP)

MPs are elected to represent their constituents – that's anyone who lives in the area they serve.

They represent issues that matter to their constituents where you live, and it can be very useful to have their support for your campaign. They can also be useful for contacting and influencing other local decision-makers, or getting publicity for your campaign.

Your MP can do similar things to your MSP to support your campaign. They can also raise issues that matter to their local constituents in the House of Commons or directly with a national decision-maker. If you think they can help with an MS Society campaign, please **get in touch** and let us know.

Top tip

You can use **our tools** to write to your MSP, MP, health board or councillor, or find their contact details at **www.writetothem.com**

Health and Social Care in Scotland

Health Boards

Health boards are responsible for delivering health services and improving the health of the population. This includes primary care like GPs and pharmacies, and community based care like physiotherapy and hospital care.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local health board are:

- influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, on health services that are being delivered in your area
- fighting for new services to be offered
- providing feedback and suggestions on how services can be improved
- challenging a decision that's already been made, such as the closure of a day centre.

All health boards provide opportunities for the public to share their views through public consultations and groups such as Public Partnership Forums, where people can help shape health services.

You can find information on all the NHS Scotland Health Boards on their website. Or, you can go to the 'Get Involved' section on your local health board's website.

Integrated Joint Boards

The NHS and local council services should work together to make sure those who use services get the right care and support whatever their needs.

The NHS and local councils work together through Integrated Joint Boards which design and deliver services. These also involve charities and patient groups. Get in touch with your local council or health board to find out how to raise issues with your local integrated Joint Board if you feel services aren't working well together.

Patient Opinion

To give feedback on services where you live you can visit www.patientopinion.org.uk. All health boards in Scotland use this service. Wherever you live, your story will be passed onto the right person within the health board and you will receive a response.

Influencing local decision-makers in Wales

Different campaigns will have different ‘targets’ or decision-makers.

When you begin to plan your campaign, you’ll need to decide which decision-makers you need to target. This will depend on your campaign issue.

It’s a good idea to find out more about the decision-makers you want to target before you plan the tactics you might use to influence them.

Here we’ve explained more about the different decision-makers in your area, and some top tips for arranging and attending meetings.

Influencing decision-makers

Before approaching a decision-maker

- Check if they're the ultimate decision-maker on your campaign issue, or if they will need to influence someone else. This will help to make sure you speak to the right people.
- Consider what you want them to do. Do you want to ask them to agree to your campaign aims straight away, or would you like to invite them to meet with you or attend an event to find out more about your concerns?
- Think about any barriers there might be – why might a local decision-maker not wish to support your campaign? How might you change their mind?
- Our campaigns teams are here to support you. If you aren't sure who to approach or how to approach them, **get in touch**!

Approaching decision-makers

- You can approach them by email, letter, social media or phone, or you can use one of our **handy templates** to get in touch.
- Remember your campaign messages. Stick to your one issue and explain the outcome you'd like to see.
- Include personal stories or evidence to back up your campaign.
- Include your full contact details so they're able to reply.

Meeting decision-makers

- You can arrange to meet the decision-maker in person (this might be somewhere like their office, or a café), or virtually using services like Zoom or Skype. You may also want to ask to speak to them over the phone.
- Some decision-makers may hold regular public meetings, or you might be able to speak to them at an event they're attending.
- Explain your issue and the outcome you'd like to see. Keep discussions focused on your issue and how they can help.
- If people disagree with your position, remember it isn't personal – try to understand why and present your case for change clearly and confidently.
- Your decision-maker won't expect you to be an expert, but they'll want to know why you think this is an important issue for local people.
- Be prepared. Take some time before meeting to make notes to remind you of the points you want to make so you don't forgot something
- Take any evidence you may have, and bring a copy for the decision-maker to keep if you can. You could also send this to them afterwards by email.
- Follow up with a letter or email thanking them for their time. Use this as an opportunity to remind them of any actions you or they agreed to take.

Local Authorities in Wales

Your local council is responsible for providing services such as leisure centres, local parks and looking after the local environment you live in.

They are also responsible for community planning, looking at all the services of a council and making sure they work well for the area.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local council are:

- influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, on accessibility of a council facility, town centre or public toilets
- fighting for new services to be offered
- challenging a decision that's already been made.

Your local councillor, elected to represent people in your ward, has a duty to represent your views and make the relevant staff member at the council aware of your concerns. Speaking to your councillor can be an effective way to put pressure on the local council.

As well as writing to councillors, calling or emailing, you could arrange to meet them in person or attend a council meeting.

You can find out about your local councillors by **finding the council website**. You can also use our **online tool** to write to your councillors.

Your Members of the Senedd (MS)

Senedd Cymru (also known as The Welsh Parliament) is made up of 60 Members of the Senedd.

Each Member of the Senedd is elected to represent the interests of constituents – that's anyone who lives in the area they serve. They represent issues that matter to constituents like you in the Welsh Parliament, make laws for Wales and hold the Welsh Government to account.

You're represented by five Members of the Senedd: one for your constituency and four for your region - either North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales West, South Wales East or South Wales Central. You can contact all of them about your campaign.

Members of the Senedd raise questions, call for debates at the Senedd and intervene at a local level when there are problems with local services.

Your Members of the Senedd can:

- attend a meeting or launch event to show support for a campaign (you’ll need to ask them quite far in advance)
- express concern on your behalf to Welsh Government Ministers and organisations such as your local health board or local authority
- visit a local service or local group event to learn more about living with MS

You can find out who your Members of the Senedd are and their contact details on the **Welsh Government website**. Or, you can use our **online tool** to write to them.

Top tip

Senedd Cymru (also known as The Welsh Parliament) has powers over areas such as health, social care, education, local government, housing and transport. If your campaign issue involves one of these areas, you could contact your MS.

Issues such as welfare and benefits, energy, and employment are handled by the UK Parliament, so if your campaign focuses on these topics it’s best to contact your MP.

Your Member of Parliament (MP)

MPs are elected to represent their constituents – that's anyone who lives in the area they serve.

They represent issues that matter to their constituents where you live, and it can be very useful to have their support for your campaign. They can also be useful for contacting and influencing other local decision-makers, or getting publicity for your campaign if it is a UK wide issue or outside the power of the Senedd Cymru/The Welsh Parliament.

Your MP can also raise issues that matter to their local constituents in the House of Commons or directly with a national decision-maker like a Minister. If you think they can help with an MS Society campaign, please **get in touch** and let us know.

Top tip

You can use **our tools** to write to your MP, Members of the Senedd, Local Health Board or councillor, or find their contact details at **www.writetothem.com**

Local Health Boards in Wales

There are seven Local Health Boards (LHBs) in Wales.

They’re responsible for delivering health services and improving the health of the population.

Some of the reasons you might get in touch with your local health board are:

- influencing a decision that is about to be made, for example, on health services that are being delivered in your area
- fighting for new services or treatments to be offered
- providing feedback and suggestions on how services can be improved
- challenging a decision that has already been made, such as the closure of a day centre.

All local health boards provide ways to involve the public. They do this through consultations and platforms such as the Community Health Council which works to improve services. You can find out more on your local health board’s website.

Top tip

Please **keep in touch** with our campaigns team in Wales and let us know if you have any questions about influencing local decision-makers.

Working with the MS community and other organisations

By working with your wider community, you can increase support for your campaign.

The more people you have involved, the more likely you'll bring about change together.

When you've decided what you want to campaign for, think about other people that may want to support the campaign or get involved. This could be people you already know, or your wider community.

MS Society Groups

We have a network of over 250 local groups, all run by volunteers.

The size and remit of each group varies, but every local group brings people with MS together in their local community.

You could consider approaching your local group to ask them to support your campaign. They may be able to help gather evidence about how the issue affects other people with MS in your area, get more people involved, or help set up a meeting with local decision-makers.

You can find the contact details of your local group on our website.

Community Groups

Your campaign may cover issues that are relevant to other people with disabilities and long-term conditions.

If so, you may want to consider joining forces with other local organisations, such as nearby disability groups or charities.

Across England, there's a network of regional neurological alliances, campaigning to influence care and treatment in local areas. Visit the **Neurological Alliance website** to find out if one exists in your area and get in touch.

Your local **Healthwatch** may also be able to support your campaign by mentioning it in their newsletter or linking you up with others who have raised the issue. Read more about **Healthwatch in England**.

Whether you live in Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland, do **get in touch**. We can help link you up with other campaigners in your area, or let you know about progress that's been made on the same issue elsewhere.

Other groups to consider:

- **Residents associations -** does your issue affect their members too?
- **Local GP surgeries or community buildings -** can they display a poster in support of your campaign?
- **Local community groups –** like rotary clubs or the women's institute
- **Local faith based groups or religious organisations -** could they show support for your campaign by circulating a petition or providing a place to meet?
- **Local activity groups -** for example, a local photography society might be willing to help you create images for posters, or publicise your campaign.

Look at your local council website for information about local community groups, and to find their contact details. You could approach them directly for support for your campaign.

Top tip

Use social media to track down local community groups or organisations. Asking them to share your campaign on social media will help spread your message further!

Other organisations and charities

You might want to work with other MS organisations in your area who might be campaigning on a similar issue.

There are other MS charities such as the **MS Trust** or **Shift:MS** where you might find others who are experiencing the same issue as you.

There are also other charities who we work with at national and regional levels to campaign on the same issues. This includes coalitions like the **Disability Benefits Consortium** and other charities like **Parkinson's UK** and the **MND Association** which also run some local campaigns.

The wider public

To get decision-makers to listen, it's often important to reach a wider audience than just the people directly affected by your campaign issue.

There are lots of different ways you can reach your wider community, both in person and online.

- Display posters around your local community - you might want to advertise an event or petition you're running in locations such as community centres, schools, libraries and town halls.
- Explore local interest groups on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and look for local community interest pages. These could be great places to promote your events or your campaign directly. Read more about using social media for campaigning.

- Hold an information stand at local events such as craft fairs and fun days, or community social events.
- Plan campaign events or activities in public places. You might want to use this as an opportunity to get press coverage, gather petition signatures or draw decision-makers' attention to your issue.
- Organise a public meeting and invite local people and decision-makers to come along and find out more about your campaign
- Contact your local media. Find out more in our **speaking to the press** guide.
- You could also hold an online event, like a Q&A or live chat event using tools like Zoom or Skype. You could also involve a councillor or another decision-maker who's already supporting your campaign.

Find out more about tactics you could use to engage the public and how to plan events in our **campaign tactics and events**, **speaking to the press** or **social media** guides.

Top tip

There are lots of different ways to raise awareness of your campaign. This can even include social events! Think about the places and events you usually attend, and how you might be able to promote your campaign to the different groups of people you might already be seeing regularly.

Using
Social Media

Social media is a great way to spread the word about your campaign.

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook can be used to provide updates on your campaign, contact decision-makers and community groups, or build a network of supporters in your local area.

You can follow other campaigners and volunteers too to create an online network and gather support for your campaign. Most people check their social media accounts in the morning and evening, so 7am - 9am and 7pm - 9pm are good times to post. However, live tweeting (posting a series of updates while an event is happening) is also good!

Using Twitter

- Hashtags can help you reach more people. A hashtag is a word or phrase after a # symbol, which can help identify tweets on specific topics.
- Research what **hashtags** people are using to talk about your issue. You can use a free tool like **hashtagify** or just look through conversations on twitter.
- You could also create a dedicated account and hashtag for your campaign. Our **social media guide** for volunteers has more information about setting up accounts.
- Tweet information such as a web page or **infographic**. An infographic is an image which shows data or quotes in a visual way.
- You can tweet information to local community accounts (such as a neighbourhood Facebook group/page) or decision-makers (like your MP) to spread the word.
- Most local media and news outlets will have a Twitter account. Find your local paper or radio station and share your campaign with them. You can also get in touch with reporters and journalists directly.
- Use images or videos to grab attention.
- Tweets are limited to 280 characters.

Top tip

You can contact councils, MPs and organisations directly on Twitter. If you haven't heard back following a letter or email, try sending a tweet. A large number of tweets from people affected by an issue will often make a decision-maker take notice!

Using Facebook

- You can create a Facebook **page** or **group**, which other supporters can join. Use this to keep local people up to date with campaign news through updates, events or pictures, and to spread the word.
- Share your campaign events, petitions, or news in other local community Facebook groups to raise awareness.
- Just like on Twitter, you can contact local media outlets through Facebook to draw attention to your events by posting on their pages. You can search for your local paper or radio station.

Using Instagram

- Instagram is a platform for sharing photographs and images.
- You can create a dedicated account and use a hashtag for your campaign, in the same way as Twitter.
- Tagging local community accounts in your posts, using hashtags, and adding a location when posting your picture can help others find your campaign.

Using LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is used as a professional network for people to connect with colleagues.
- You can use LinkedIn to contact businesses, connect with other campaigners and give updates on your campaign. You can also write blogs on your LinkedIn profile too.

Profiles

- Your social media profile can either be your personal account, or you might create an account just to promote your campaign.
- On your Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, you can choose a profile picture and a cover photo (which will be the background on your profile). You can use your cover photo to promote the campaign, and your profile picture can just be a headshot of yourself.
- You can write a biography on your profile – this can include your campaign hashtags and interests. Always finish your biography with ‘all views my own’. This helps identify your profile as being personal, even if you’re volunteering for one or more charities/organisations.

Top tip

You can follow us on social media and tag us on Twitter and Instagram (**@mssocietyUK**) to let us know what you’re campaigning about.

Photography and video

At an event or meeting, you must make it clear if photographs or video will be taken, and make sure people give their consent for you to use these on social media. When using photos and videos, landscape is best for Twitter, and portrait is best for Instagram. On Facebook, you can use both formats.

Staying safe online

If someone is harassing you, don’t engage with them. You can block them so that they can no longer see your profile or content, or report them to the relevant social media platform. Here’s how to report someone on **Twitter**, **Facebook** or **Instagram**.

Top tip

Remember to keep your social media posts positive and focused on your campaign’s key messages. You should also add images and videos to your posts wherever possible, as this really helps boost your posts.

More information

- Read more about using social media on our website: **volunteers.mssociety.org.uk/social-media**
- Or read our social media guide for volunteers: **volunteers.mssociety.org.uk/resources/social-media-guide**
- If you need further information on using social media for campaigning, **get in touch**.

Sharing your campaign story with media

Involving your local newspaper, radio or TV station can be a great way to build awareness of your campaign in the local community and put pressure on decision-makers.

What makes a good story?

Making sure a story is ‘newsworthy’ can be the difference between a publication covering it and not.

Now, more than ever, people want to hear about issues they can relate to and talk about. And giving your story a human interest focus – by putting a person at the heart of it – will be a big hit as journalists want to know how your issue impacts real people in your community.

For your story to stand out it should also be a mix of:

- Timely
- New
- Relatable
- Local
- Powerful
- Emotional
- Quirky
- Attention-grabbing
- Inspiring
- Honest
- Topical
- Community-feel

You don’t need to have all these things, but the more the better!

Examples:

Belfast teacher joins march for improved access to life-changing MS treatments

Essex nurse with MS calls for Government to scrap PIP 20 metre rule

Determined mother unites with MP to help people living with MS in Manchester

Writing a press release

Press releases are one of the best ways to get your message across to media.

They should:

- be no more than 2x A4 sides in length, clear and well presented
- grab the journalists' attention with a headline
- keep the opening paragraph short – around 30 words is ideal
- include the five golden Ws:
  who, what, where, when and why
- include your campaign's key messages and the change you'd like to see
- include a quote from the person leading the campaign and/or someone affected by the issue locally, or a supportive statement from a decision-maker or health professional.
- include your contact details at the bottom.

How to share your story

Getting your story in the press can be a little hit and miss.

There's no guarantee a media outlet will cover anything, but it's always worth a go.

Journalists are under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines, but don't let that put you off. They welcome your stories/press releases as they need to fill their regular pages.

The key is to make their life as easy as possible, so make sure you understand how they work:

- Start by approaching local and larger regional papers, but check the publication you're targeting covers the location 'patch' your story is based in. For example, if your story is in Bournemouth don't reach out to Southampton press! Call the main number and ask to be put through to the "news desk" who coordinate stories for the paper.
- Where possible look at the online version of the newspaper. You'll get a feel for the stories they usually run and will also find good journalist contacts.
- Whether you call or email the outlet, when speaking to a journalist keep your pitch short and snappy offering a brief explanation of why the story is newsworthy i.e. is it timely? Does it fall on an awareness day/week (relevant examples might be World MS Day, or national Carers Week)?
- If emailing, make sure your subject sells your story i.e. 'Cardiff family get 10,000 petition signatures to help MS community'.
- Offer supporting content where you can, like pictures, video footage or a link to a blog/vlog.

- Be prepared to share your personal details with a journalist, and for these to be featured in a published story. This can include details like your full name, age, the area you live in and your connection to MS.
- Try approaching local TV and radio stations – they're always looking to speak to guests who can engage listeners.
- If you don't hear anything, don't panic. The publication may just run your story without needing to ask any extra questions. If you have time, you could make a follow up call after a week to see if they're going to feature your story.
- Consider sharing a press release after one of your campaign events. This is particularly effective if you had a notable person in your community attend the event, like your local MP, or if you have great photos showing your campaigning activity.

Photos

When taking a photo think how it can add colour to your story.

After all, a picture speaks a thousand words! As well as shots of the people featured in the story, journalists look for original pictures that can engage the reader.

If you're running your campaign as a MS Society volunteer and you have a photo of yourself in an MS Society t-shirt – even better. Also, be sure to get written permission from all people in the photos before you share with a publication.

Watch out for

- **Deadlines -** different publications have different lead times. An online title, for example, can receive a press release and turn it into a news story in 24 hours. On the other hand, a local paper has a weekly deadline. So, unless your story is breaking news, don't call the day before the paper is usually delivered. To have the best possible chance at coverage, give the team as much time as possible to develop the story.
- **Interviews -** never agree to an interview without preparing beforehand. Always stick to the main points of your campaign, and keep your campaign's key messages to hand. If you've offered a spokesperson make sure they're able to deliver an interview. For example, if you're pitching an idea for a breakfast show you must have someone available to do an interview at that time.
- **Missing contact details -** make sure you let the journalist know which number/email is best to get you on. And remember to say you're independent from the MS Society, rather than a staff member, to avoid any confusion.
- **Edits to your story -** it's very unlikely a publication will print your press release word for word. However, if you think your story has been changed to make it factually incorrect you're within your rights to ask for it to be corrected.

Top tip

We're here to help – whether that's giving advice on a story angle, providing a quote or sharing a journalist's contact details. Please **get in touch** for support!

Key messages

We develop clear, focused statements, which we call “key messages”, to tell the media what we represent (and help us to stand out).

Here are some messages about MS you might want to include in your press releases:

- More than 130,000 people live with multiple sclerosis in the UK
- MS damages nerves in your body and makes it harder to do everyday things, like walk, talk, eat and think
- It’s relentless, painful, and disabling

Working with celebrity ambassadors

Having the support of a celebrity for an event or campaign can help attract local media coverage, and their attendance at events can add extra excitement.

Celebrity support should be seen as 'the icing on the cake', as it can be difficult and unpredictable to get celebrity support. Your events should not rely on a celebrity or be based around them. If you're considering getting celebrity support, think about why the celebrity is relevant and the value their support might bring. The celebrity will need to see 'what's in it for them' too.

You'll need to budget for the cost of travel and accommodation for our celebrity supporters and Ambassadors, so it's worth considering if engaging a local celebrity might be a more cost-effective option.

Our Celebrity and VIP Supporter Manager is more than happy to offer help and advice. Please get in touch.

Press release

If you want to share your story with your local press, you can do this in the form of a press release.

This will contain all the important information the journalist will need to know. You can download our **template press release**, and fill in the information about your campaign to make sure it has all the essential details before sending it out.

You can also use our online tool to contact your local papers about your campaign, in the form of a ‘letter to editor’. This tool will send your email directly to the editor of your local papers.

Top tip

Share on your social media channels
Local news websites and radio stations get a lot of their content from Twitter. Where possible, mention them in your tweets to get their attention. It could lead to the news outlet following you back on Twitter and a request for more information about your story.

And don’t forget to include **@mssocietyuk** in your tweets. By doing this, it increases the chance of our 53,000+ followers seeing your post!

We have lots more resources to help you campaign

Visit our local campaigning hub to see a full list of template resources and tools.

You can use our online tools to...

- Email your local political representative
- Tweet your local political representative
- Email your local councillors
- Email your local health authorities
- Get in touch with your local newspapers

We hope you found this toolkit useful. If you have any suggestions for other topics to include, or any other feedback or comments, please get in touch with our team on **campaigns@mssociety.org.uk**, or fill in **this form**.

We’re the MS Society

Our community is here for you through
the highs, lows and everything in between.
We understand what life’s like with MS.
Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

mssociety.org.uk

MS Helpline 0808 800 8000
helpline@mssociety.org.uk

▶ Let’s stop MS together

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