

Advocacy Tips

1. The first step in effective advocacy is being well informed. As a person living with schizophrenia, or a family member/friend of a person living with schizophrenia, you already know the effects of this illness. Your experience and knowledge is one of the greatest tools you can bring to your advocacy efforts.
2. Understanding the size of the problem is the next step in good advocacy work. As you know, schizophrenia affects one in 100 persons or approximately 300,000 Canadians. According to a recent study from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the average length of hospitalization for individuals with schizophrenia was six times that for depression and 33 times greater than for anxiety disorder (Hospital Mental Health Services in Canada, 2000-2001)
3. Identify your issue. You may have many areas of concern (i.e. access to medication, decriminalization of the individuals living with mental illness), but it is best to keep your communication with an MP targeted.
4. Now that you are well informed and know the size of the problem, here are ways that you can effectively bring this information to government officials:
 - Meet with officials to expand relationships and communicate key message. You can find your Member of Parliament by entering your postal code at:
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/house/PostalCode.asp?lang=E&source=sm>
 - If you would like to contact your local provincial government officials, visit http://canada.gc.ca/othergov/prov_e.html for more information on contacting your MPP
 - Send a letter to a federal government ministry such as Health or Justice. You can find contact information at <http://www.parl.gc.ca>.
 - Call your local MP and review your key issue. If you cannot speak directly with your MP, leave a message with his/her assistant. Be sure you know what you want to say, say it politely and don't forget to leave your name, address and phone number.

If you are able to speak directly with your MP be specific, persuasive and factual. Keep your conversation short and ensure you thank the official for his/her time. Finally, follow up your conversation with a brief letter reinforcing your key messages.

- Letters, either hard copies or email, are also powerful ways to get key messages to MPs. When writing a letter remember to use the correct address, use your own words and personal experiences, identify the issues and key messages and don't forget to say thank you. Letters are a great way to make the personal political. It is important for politicians to know the real faces of schizophrenia and you are the best person to bring these messages forward. For more information on communicating with your MP visit <http://www.vsr-trsb.net/publications/roundeng.pdf>
- Utilizing your local media is another way to advocate for individuals and their families living with schizophrenia. Your local newspaper, television or radio station may be willing to write an article about your experiences and key issues. Again it is important to be clear and concise when speaking to the media. Be prepared to speak to a journalist and remember to stick to your key messages. You may also want to contact your local provincial society or the national for more information before speaking with the media.