

campaign for
Australian Aid

How To Visit Your Member of Parliament to Talk About Aid



Visiting your MP is easy, can even be fun, and is certainly one of the most effective ways to show your concern and encourage your MP to act on an issue.

MPs are almost always friendly people, who enjoy and take notice of visits from their constituents. They are not experts in aid or development so you don't have to be an expert to talk to them about it. In fact, one of the most important elements of your meeting is demonstrating that there are people in your MP's electorate who are passionate about the issue you have come to talk about. By meeting with your MP, you are able to express that you want to see them take action.

Find out which MP to talk to

Your MP is the Member of Parliament who represents the electorate you live in. A simple postcode search in the Senators and Members section of the Australian Parliament website will tell you everything you need to know about your local Member of Parliament and state Senators.

Search: www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian_Search_Results

As well as electorate office contact details, you'll find links to personal websites and profiles, records of speeches, ministerial appointments and committee memberships.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Before you meet with an MP

Know why you want to meet	The meeting must fit into your pre-arranged plan. What are their current views on your issue? Why are you meeting with this MP? What are you trying to achieve by meeting?
Notice given	If humanly possible, avoid making the meeting so urgent that other things have to be moved to make way for it. Let the MP's office know what you want to see the MP about.
Location	An MP's office is their comfort zone. Decide whether you want them to be comfortable, or want to challenge them a little. You could ask to meet at your own office or a local cafe.
Time	Ask for what you realistically need – but be prepared to only have a few minutes or even to postpone if chaos descends on their day.
Do your homework	Use any contacts which you have prior to the meeting. Research the known views of that MP, both in general and specifically about that topic. Also, find out any information in their background which can be a starting point for genuine communication. Recognise the constraints on them, e.g. a Minister has the additional constraint of collective Cabinet responsibility.
Pay attention to any staff of the MP	Staff can be very influential to an MP and, depending on circumstances on the day, you may meet with a staff member instead of the MP. Example "Once I was meant to be meeting with an MP but it was the day of the wall street crash, and so he was called into an emergency cabinet meeting and we met with his chief of staff. Our talk connected with her and she really passionately decided to champion the cause with the MP she worked for".
Groups of people	Don't overwhelm the MP with large numbers of people, and make sure that everyone has a task or role.
A practice run	If the message is complicated, if the task of persuasion is hard, if there will be more than a couple of you at the meeting, then meet and run through things beforehand.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Before you meet with an MP

Image	Wear whatever you feel most comfortable in and – if possible – fits with your message. But clothing should be appropriate. Make sure that you know where the meeting place is, and that you are on time.
Something to leave	Never leave the MP empty-handed. Prepare something (no more than one page) which fits in with your message and reinforces key points. Work through it at the meeting and leave it for them to consider.
Know your campaign ask and keep the relationship going	Plan ahead what action you will ask the MP to undertake, and any commitments which you will make to them. Be clear about what you want the MP to do to influence their party or electorate towards the campaign asks. Ensure that you have the resources to deliver what you promise, and make use of whatever they may do for you.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Meeting delivery: things to remember in the meeting

Not too long	Ask at the start how much time the MP has, and/or check with their staff member beforehand. Plan your presentation accordingly. If it sounds as though they have lots of time, don't use it all up unless it is vital.
Keep them involved	You have come to discuss an issue, not lecture the MP about it. Make sure that you don't let your enthusiasm for the issue become a one-sided conversation.
Recognise tiredness & boredom	The MP may well be tired. Pick up the signs (snoring, irrational comments...) and focus down to the key points. Maybe even suggest a further meeting if things seem to be getting nowhere. Learn to read signs that MPs have stopped listening. Change the focus onto them, introduce something lighter.
Follow the lead but stick to your plan and set the agenda	Outline with the MP what you hope to discuss and lead the conversation. This will demonstrate leadership and avoid the MP taking the meeting in an unhelpful direction. If the MP wants to talk about something – even irrelevant to the topic – humour them and then try to massage the conversation back to the topic.
Illustrate and justify	When possible, bring issues to life with stories involving people, preferably real people from their electorate. Don't make exaggerated claims which sound unbelievable and can't be justified.
Stay safe	Avoid entering the MPs danger zone/s such as topics that could hijack the conversation. Refer back to the research you've done before the meeting.
Cope with aggression	The MP may simply loathe the message – or the messenger. Do what comes naturally and won't destroy a potential lobby relationship forever. If possible, maintain your cool and follow rational arguments, focusing on the most powerful and irrefutable facts. Be aware that a threat can backfire.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Meeting delivery: things to remember in the meeting

Make a hit	<p>Leave the MP with some action to undertake and negotiate yourself the ability to keep the channels of communication open. Follow up the meeting with a thank you note or phone call. Forward any information to the MP which they request.</p> <p>Ask them to do something for you which is achievable, makes it easy for them to show support and keeps you in their mind. Don't plague them with phone calls, but do keep in touch with them from time to time.</p>
Document the meeting	<p>Take notes during your meeting so that you have a record of what was said, particularly any action your politician promises to undertake. Be sure to get a good photo of you and your politician to share with your church, family, friends or other social networks. Send a copy to your local paper - they love to report on politicians meeting with the local community.</p>

When you started campaigning for Australian Aid, you would have been given access to our online campaign tool, the **Advocacy Tracker**. Advocacy Tracker gives us a tool to share information within our campaign coalition, and to track the progress that we are making to make sure our hard work has the most impact. The advocacy tracker is your ultimate campaigning companion, so make sure you use it to plan, and track the work that you do and keep it as up to date as possible.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Key information about Australian Aid

Australia's future is connected to a fairer, safer and more sustainable world. Australian aid supports people, just like us, who are working hard to get ahead in life. It supports promising people to realise their full potential by overcoming barriers of extreme poverty and becoming economically self-reliant. Australian aid is a partnership with our global neighbours to create the building blocks for a better future for everyone.

One of our greatest accomplishments as a nation is something that comes naturally to us - helping our neighbours. Australian aid focuses on helping our neighbours to actually become independent of our help. Whether it's recovering from a natural disaster, getting access to basic human rights or overcoming the new challenges of climate change, it's just what we do as Australians. We help.

In the last 20 years, humanity has made great progress in shaping a fairer world. Together, through Australian aid, we have played a part in that story. Now the world is agreeing on a new set of global goals for the next 15 years called the Sustainable Development Goals. They have a gutsy ambition to end poverty, reduce inequality and secure a safer planet. Isn't that the kind of world you want to live in? If so, now more than ever, the world needs Australia to stand up for a just and equal world.

We are calling for more and better Australian aid to ensure Australia does its share towards eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequality, promoting sustainable and inclusive development, and protecting human rights. Through education, healthcare, the provision of essential services, disaster preparation and relief, and helping to create strong democratic institutions in emerging democracies we help create stability and prosperity in our region and beyond, free of poverty.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Key information about Australian Aid

Australia's aid program reaches millions of people and communities around the world. In 2014 alone, Australia's aid program enabled over **1.3 million** more children to enrol in school, built more than **9,000** new classrooms, vaccinated more than **2.3 million** children, gave **2.9 million** people access to safe drinking water and **1 million** people access to basic sanitation. Australia has also responded generously and effectively to humanitarian crises in more than **20** countries in the last year.

Despite these achievements, the last 24 months have seen the most significant cuts to aid in the history of Australia's aid program. Since September 2013, projected aid expenditure has been reduced by more than \$11 billion over five years. The 2015-16 Federal Budget reduced the aid budget by \$3.7 billion over three years. In 2015, in what was one of the single biggest cuts to aid, Australia's aid budget was projected to fall by \$1 billion (or 20%), to just over \$4 billion.

The 2015 Budget confirms Australia's position as one of the least generous countries in the OECD. By 2017-18, our aid budget as a share of national income will fall to just 0.22% (22 cents in every \$100). This will mean

Australia will rank 16th out of 28 countries in the OECD in terms of generosity, falling from 13th place last year.

We know this is at odds with both the generosity of Australians, and how we have always engaged with the world. At the same time, other wealthy nations like the UK have reached the global goal of giving 70 cents in every \$100, and they've even introduced legislation to keep aid levels there.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

With respect to aid, we suggest you ask them to:

- Contact the Treasurer and the Prime Minister to keep their election promise to maintain aid at \$5 billion dollars with an increase for inflation.
- **Advocate for a party policy to:**
 - Ensure a timetabled commitment to increase aid to 0.7% of GNI by 2030 (the international aid target of 0.7% GNI).
 - Restore the Australian aid budget to approximately \$5.5 billion (0.3%GNI) during the life of the next parliament (2016-2019).
 - Endorse the Sustainable Development Goals and adopt them as a framework for the policies, priorities and performance benchmarks of the Australian aid program.
 - Introduce appropriate mechanisms to ensure we spend the aid budget effectively.
- Support the Australian Aid Campaign. If they will, ask them to join you in a picture holding up an Australian Aid sign and to also tweet their support for aid.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Answers to some of the questions you may be asked

But this is a budget emergency – how can we afford to give as much aid?

Australia has the second lowest level of public debt to GDP amongst all rich, aid-giving nations (second only to Luxembourg). Even if we were to lift aid to the target of 0.7% of our national income, aid would still make up just around 2% of the Federal Budget.

Australia gives much less than many other countries that have weaker economic positions than Australia. Of the 5 least-indebted nations, only Australia and New Zealand give less than 1% of their GNI in aid. The UK, with three times the level of debt of Australia, still gives 0.7%. The UK Prime Minister David Cameron, in speaking about the pressure to cut aid to help repay debt, stated that he 'will not balance the budget on the backs of the poor'.¹

It is worth remembering also that Australia is one of the very wealthiest countries on earth – how much wealthier do we have to become before we are willing to be good global citizens who do our fair share to help people overcome poverty?

¹ IMF World Economic Outlook, Database October 2014, OECD Development Assistance Committee, Aid Statistics and Tables 2013 (released December 2014)

How can we possibly borrow money from overseas to fund aid?

Always room for charity

I disagree with Joe Hockey's recent statement on Q&A that "Australia can't borrow money just to give it away to other countries" (paraphrased). I am a mother of three children with a sizeable mortgage. I borrow from the bank and give a portion of our household income to various charities. If money is a little short I get with a cappuccino or miss out on a holiday. I do not reduce my giving to charity. Similarly I think it is wrong for my government to balance its books on the backs of the poor.

Australian Aid works. It directly contributed to saving thousands of lives and allowing millions of children to attend school. Our current government's use of Australian Aid as a means to balance the budget is greatly damaging our international reputation. Turning our back on our global responsibilities is unacceptable.

Paula Paterson
Newport, NSW

Australia has second the lowest debt levels in the world, so using Australia's debt as an excuse to cut aid does not really make sense. Our government, like all governments around the world, borrows to fund all government programs and pay salaries - not just for our aid program. Borrowing to fund government spending is a normal part of budgeting. It doesn't make sense to single out just one thing the Government spends on - like Australia's aid program - and say that it should not be funded the same way as all other Government programs.

Because the Australian aid program only makes up 0.9% of government spending, cutting it makes very little difference to Australia's debt levels.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.

Answers to some of the questions you may be asked

Aren't we still very generous?

Aid generosity has always been measured by giving as a percent of Gross National Income (GNI). By financial year 2017-18, Australia will only give 0.22% of GNI in aid. This is the lowest ever level that Australia's aid contribution has been since records began.

This means we will rank 16th out of the 28 aid donors in the OECD. The UK, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada will all rank ahead of Australia at this point.

Even in terms of absolute dollars, this will see Australia drop out of the top 10 largest donors, and rank 13th out of 28 donor countries.

Shouldn't we be more concerned about homeless people and other problems experienced by poor Australians?

Homelessness and other domestic problems concern us too. At the same time, we believe Australia is wealthy enough to support all Australians while also doing our part to support people in poor communities as they work hard to build a fairer future.

Australia is one of the very wealthiest countries on earth. We can afford to meet our aid commitments and meet people's needs here in Australia. Even if we were to reach the target of 0.7% GNI to ODA, that would still use just around 2% of the budget, leaving over 98% for Australia's needs.

Is the problem caused by the Senate blocking other cuts?

There are always alternative options to balance the budget. NGOs such as Save the Children have suggested alternative ways to increase revenue or reduce expenditure. The aid budget makes up just 0.9% of Government expenditure, yet 25% of all budget savings have come from the aid budget.

There is no public support for aid spending

The Australian public does support Australia's aid and development efforts. Around 2 million Australians regularly donate to Australian aid and development NGOs annually. Many thousands more are volunteers. Last year, Australian households donated \$950 million to Australian aid and development agencies.

Does aid make much of a difference anyway?

Australia's aid program does substantial good for millions of people living in poverty around the world as well as supporting our national interests. In 2014 alone, according to DFAT, the Australian aid program:

- Enabled over **1.3 million** more children to enrol in school, built more than **9,000** new classrooms, and trained over **100,000** teachers across our region.
- Provided more than **400,000** farmers living in poor communities to access farming technology.
- Vaccinated more than **2.3 million** children and ensured nearly **1 million** additional births were attended by a skilled birth attendant.
- Gave **2.9 million** people access to safe drinking water and increased access to basic sanitation for over **1 million** people.
- Responded to emergencies in **24** countries including Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and flooding in the Solomon Islands, and gave life-saving assistance to **10.2 million** people.

Campaign for Australian Aid is a joint initiative of the Make Poverty History and Micah Challenge coalitions, for all Australians who believe we can and should do more as a nation to end extreme poverty around the world.