**Influencing dementia policy: ten top tips and troubleshooting**

**Introduction**

This document is designed to give you the key top tips you need for engaging effectively with policy stakeholders, and answer any questions or concerns you might have. For further detail on effective policy influencing, please watch the video *What makes for impactful and memorable policy engagement,* which has also been shared as part of the policy influencing toolkit.

**Ten top tips for effective policymaker engagement**

While these tips are designed primarily for use in meetings with policy stakeholders (such as MPs or local councillors), they may also be useful to bear in mind when writing to stakeholders, or engaging with them on social media.

1. **Don’t undervalue the contribution that you can make.** As a carer for someone with dementia, you will have unique insights to share, and policy stakeholders will be interested in hearing your stories and experiences. Highlighting lived experience makes campaigns more impactful, and increases the likelihood in securing policy change. At the same time, policymakers won’t expect you to have all of the answers.
2. **Do your preparation.** Spend some time before the meeting making sure you are familiar with the stakeholder you are meeting, and with any relevant policies or organisations. You should also plan what you want to get out of the meeting – with a clear goal in mind – and the key messages you want to share that will help achieve this goal. If you are meeting as a group, make sure to agree a running order and split talking points in advance. It may be useful to refer the following tide documents in your preparation:
	1. *Influencing as a group*
	2. *Getting your point across*
	3. *Presenting and speaking with impact*
3. **Practice makes perfect.** Once you have worked out what you want to say, practise your talking points with a friend or a family member. This will help to build your confidence, and ensure that your narrative is impactful and flows effectively during the meeting.
4. **Highlight your personal experience.** Talking about your own experiences will help to make your case to policy stakeholders – especially when speaking to your own MP or local councillors. This might include challenges you have faced as a carer of someone with dementia, or examples of tide’s work to improve support for people with dementia and unpaid carers. Think about where in your narrative you should include stories to underline your key messages most effectively.
5. **Make your narrative relevant.** If possible, try and demonstrate how your messages and asks are aligned with the national or local policy agenda. For example, if your local health system is eager to reduce delayed discharge of people with dementia from hospital, how might improved access to diagnosis or support for people with dementia and their carers help facilitate this?
6. **Think about solutions, as well as challenges.** While talking about your own challenges and difficulties as an unpaid carer will be impactful, it is also worth thinking about how things might be done differently to improve your own experience, and that of other families in the future. This will help the policymaker to understand the types of policy changes that could have a positive impact, and encourage them to take action.
7. **Leave room for questions and dialogue.** Policy stakeholders may be in ‘listening mode’ or they may be eager to contribute more actively to a discussion, so it’s worth being prepared to lead the discussion if this is required. In any case, don’t be afraid to pause to allow others to offer reflections or ask any questions – this can help generate a genuine and meaningful dialogue.
8. **Have something ready to share.** It is helpful to have a briefing or presentation to hand that you can share as a ‘leave-behind’, summarising your headline messages and asks. This will help to ensure that the key themes and outputs from your meeting stay fresh in the stakeholder’s mind. If possible, try and include facts and statistics local to your area, so that the leave-behind piece is as relevant as possible.
9. **Aim to secure a tangible action.** Wherever possible, try to secure a commitment from the policymaker to take action to support your asks. For MPs, this might include tabling parliamentary questions, writing to relevant ministers or officials, or raising issues in a parliamentary debate. Please see the *Influencing Dementia Policy* guide for further information.
10. **Don’t forget to follow up.** Don’t see the close of the meeting as the end of your engagement: it’s important to follow up to ensure that policymakers are acting on their commitments, and ultimately becoming champions for our issues. It’s worth sending a thank you email, offering to share any further relevant materials or information, and/or to keep them updated on tide’s work, including in their local area.

**Common concerns and how to tackle them**

If you still have any outstanding questions or concerns, don’t panic! We have listed below some common policy engagement fears, and how to handle them. If you’d like to discuss any questions further, please contact the Incisive Health team at frontofmind@incisivehealth.com, or the tide team at carers@tidecarers.org.uk.

***How should I deal with nerves or anxiety?***

It’s okay to have nerves or be anxious, and no one expects you to be a professional communicator. Remember that policy stakeholders are eager to hear from you, and will value your unique insights gained through your everyday lived experiences, not judge you on your policy knowledge. Preparation and practice will help make sure you’re clear on what you want to say, and build your confidence in your delivery. Think about what you want to achieve from the meeting, and the insights and stories you can share to help you achieve this goal. For further information, refer to the tide documents *Getting your point across* and *Presenting and speaking with impact.*

***What if I get emotional during the meeting?***

Don’t worry too much about showing emotion during a meeting: this can help to demonstrate your passion and can leave a lasting impact on stakeholders, driving them to take action in support of your cause. That said, it is useful to think about how you can channel your emotion effectively to best meet your objectives. For further information, refer to the tide documents *Getting your point across* and *Presenting and speaking with impact.*

***What if I get asked a question I don’t know how to answer?***

Policy stakeholders will not expect you to know everything, so don’t feel afraid to say you will look into a question and share an answer following the meeting – it is a useful way to follow up! Incisive Health and tide colleagues will be able to help you prepare any follow up answers if needed. Please also see the tide document *Presenting and speaking with influence* for further information on dealing with unexpected questions.

***How can we most effectively engage with policy stakeholders as a group?***

Wherever possible, organise a pre-meeting to agree a running order for approaching the meeting, and allocate talking points between the group. In doing so, try and think about who will be able to speak to what issue with most impact.

***How should I handle a defensive, unengaged, or hostile policy stakeholders?***

It is unlikely that your local policy stakeholders will not engage positively – they are there to represent you! If they are challenging, remember that it reflects more on them than it does on you, and try not to take it personally. Stay calm and have faith in your narrative and messages.

***“Anyone who thinks that they are too small to make a difference has never tried to fall asleep with a mosquito in the room”***

* The Dalai Lama

**May 2022**