

Having your say: action pack for carers

Working with the media

The media play an integral role in raising awareness of caring and carer issues in the wider community.

Raising awareness of caring is important, but working with the media can definitely seem daunting and time-intensive. But, with a little preparation, it can be a really effective and efficient way of talking about issues important to you and reaching new audiences. One interview can reach thousands of viewers or readers – some of whom might even be carers in need of some support.

Carers Victoria most often uses media relations to:

- raise awareness of caring
- influence or comment on organisations or individuals, and
- publicise an event or campaign.

What makes something newsworthy?

We always need to give journalists a reason to run with the story we're pitching – it needs to be 'newsworthy'. Stories can be newsworthy for many reasons. They might have:

- **timeliness** | there's something else in the news that hits on the same issue
- **significance** | a large number of people are affected by the story
- **proximity** | local papers are more likely to run local stories
- **human interest** | the story appeals to emotion, and aims to evoke an emotional response from its readers, or
- **an unusual angle** | the unusual and unexpected often attract media attention.

Have a look through the last couple of week's local papers – see what sort of articles are being included, and if you can identify a journalist who seems to be covering most of the community or 'social affairs' issues.

This can help cut down the time you spend finding the right person to talk to.

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Working with the media | making contact

Before you get in touch with the media, it's a good idea to think about what you want to say and why you're saying it.

Before you call anyone

The first thing you want to do is write down your key messages. Think about what you want to say, boil it down to three short and snappy major points, then write them down – they're your key messages!

The Five Ws (and one H)

When writing a letter (or making notes for a phone conversation) ask yourself some simple questions – most journalists will ask for these details, so it's good to have them all down on paper before you start.

- **Who** are you?
- **What** are you saying?
- **Why** are you saying it?
- **When** is the event/issue happening or relevant?
- **Where** is the event/issue happening or relevant?
- **How** did it happen?

Make contact

Once you have your thoughts sorted, it's time to talk to someone. Most people contact the media with a letter, email or phone call. Any of these methods is fine – but you must always be concise and clear.

If you're writing: at the end of the letter, let them know how and when is best to contact you. Be clear that you would like them to follow up – even if they're not interested in the beginning, you might be able to find a story they are interested in.

If you're calling: before you start, ask if it's a good time to talk. It might not be – journalists are often under deadline, and it can be hard to get their full attention. If they say no, politely give your contact details, a brief explanation of why you're calling, and request that they call you back at their soonest opportunity.

A sample letter is included on the back of this factsheet.

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Working with the media | preparing for an interview

If you contact the media, there's a chance you may be interviewed; it can be a valuable opportunity to get your voice heard, so the key is to be prepared.

Some handy tips and tricks for preparing for an interview:

- have your 'key messages' on hand
- have a 'call to action' – what do you want people to do about your issue?
- think about the questions you're likely to be asked and how you'd like to respond to them
- ask about the article – what's the journalist's angle?
- nothing is off the record. Even if a journalist says a conversation is 'off the record', do not say anything that you wouldn't want made public.
- you are the expert on caring, and you are in control of the interview; you can ask the interviewer to stop at anytime, and
- try not to use jargon or acronyms, e.g. DoHA, HACC, etc.

Don't be discouraged if your story is dropped at the last minute – it might be used at a later date, and you can always have another go!

Talkback radio

Politicians and policy makers listen to talkback radio – you can get heard by calling in and expressing your concerns, as long as you can do it concisely. Callers usually get between 30 seconds and two minutes to make their case, so remember:

- familiarise yourself with the show, and the tone of callers who get on the air
- prepare your messages before you call
- expect some delays before you get on air (it's good practice time)
- increase your chances of getting on air by being polite and open when talking to the producer/operator, and
- you can always send a text; hosts often read out text messages sent in by listeners.

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Working with the media | sample letter to the editor

You may wish to use the sample letter below as a guide when writing your letter to the editor of a newspaper. Keep the letter personal and relevant to your local area.

Things to remember:

- journalists like hearing about 'real' people and events
- try to link your issue to a recent article or event
- make sure your letter is clear and easy to read, and
- invite the journalist to follow up.

Sample letter

Carer name or carer group name / logo

Address

Telephone

Date

Dear Editor,

I am 78 years old and have cared for my husband for the last 4 years. I feed, bathe, wash, and dress him. Without essential services like respite and garden maintenance, provided by local services, we would not be able to survive.

Today I received a letter from Woop Woop Council announcing that from next month garden maintenance will cease. I am devastated. I look out at our garden and wonder how I can keep it in order.

I also received the latest edition of your publication. It contained an advertisement from the federal government saying that it is wonderful to be older, and that it is important for older people to feel valued.

This is ironic! As an 'older' carer I need government (local, state and federal) to make me feel valued by giving me the services I need. I need a break! Not to be told that I have to work harder.

Your sincerely,

Mary Blow

P.S If you would like to pursue this issue further, please contact me on 03 1234 5678

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Influencing politicians

You are an influential voice in getting local, state and federal politicians to represent your concerns and issues in the political arena.

Why play politics?

The old saying ‘the squeaky wheel gets the grease’ is pretty apt when it comes to advocacy; in order to influence politicians and policy, we need to make carers’ voices as loud as we can.

As a carer, you have your own voice and your own power. When Carers Victoria is meeting with politicians and lobbying for change, it is your stories we are telling – so why not meet a politician and tell them yourself?

Who do you want to influence?

Most politicians belong to a political party and hold their own political views – but what’s important to remember is that they have been elected to represent your interests. You might be pleasantly surprised at some politician’s abilities to focus on issues, instead of party politics – especially when it comes to championing a cause like caring.

To identify which politicians you want to influence, you need to know who you want to talk to. You can access information about Federal, State and Local Governments on the website www.gov.au, including a description of each politician’s portfolio and their contact details.

How can you be heard?

The most effective methods of letting a politician know what’s on your mind are letter writing and face-to-face meetings. Find out more in the factsheets, [Writing a letter](#) and [Meeting politicians](#).

Having your say: action pack for carers

Influencing politicians | writing a letter

Letters are a very effective way of expressing your concerns to politicians, supporting those who act on behalf of carers and making carers' voices heard.

Here are some tips for making your letter a sharp, powerful communication too.

- Address the receiver by name and title – and make sure it's the appropriate person. Check www.gov.au for details on who to write to, and how to address them.
- Write your/your group's name and address. Include a logo for your group; if you don't have a logo, write your name in a strong font.
- Begin by stating your reason for writing. Be specific and courteous.
- Use your own words to say how you feel and how the current situation affects you, or members of your group. Stick to one issue, keep it concise and personal.
- End with a specific request e.g. suggest a meeting with the politician to discuss the concerns you have raised. Use your name or if appropriate sign on behalf of your carer group.
- Letters should ideally be typed, but can be handwritten.
- Consider sending the letter by courier or registered post as proof of delivery. Keep a copy of the letter.
- Use an e-mail or fax if your message is urgent, but remember these have varying success and should be followed up by a telephone call or letter, and
- Enlist the help of friends, or members of your carer group to write similar letters, but not the same; personalisation makes more of an impact than a form letter.

You may wish to use our sample letter (see over the page) as a guide when writing your letter to a politician. Carers Victoria can assist you to write your letter, and provide contact details for your local member; call **03 9396 9500** to get some guidance from our Communications team.

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Influencing politicians | meeting politicians

Meeting are great way to build a relationship with a politician. Appointments will be short, but it's an opportunity to make an lasting impression.

Visiting politicians can be daunting, but remember: they're just people! Here are some ideas to help your meeting be easy, effective and productive.

- Consider having another person accompany you – maybe a friend or a member of your group. You can support each other.
- You may initially deal with a staff member in the office of the politician you have contacted. Be polite when talking to them.
- Prepare by writing your main arguments down. Use a personal angle. If working with a group, agree on your goals before your meeting. You could also write up a one page summary sheet of your issue to give the politician.
- Know the politician's stance on your issue.
- Like anyone, a politician is likely to get defensive and annoyed when confronted aggressively. In a positive relationship, a politician can be a powerful voice for you and other carers; hostile behaviour or accusatory remarks will only damage your reputation and get the politician offside.
- Remember that politicians are responsible for representing your rights and issues.
- Press for a commitment. Ask the politician to clarify responses and agree on a process for follow up i.e. who will contact who and in what way.
- Write a follow up letter to the politician and staff thanking them for their time. Stay in contact, even if nothing comes out of the meeting.
- Ask the politician to raise your concerns either at a local council meeting, in parliament or at the party's decision making forums. This ensures it gets a public 'airing' and is put on the public record.

Having your say: action pack for carers

Services and complaints | your rights and expectations

You probably use many services in your caring role; there are many ways you can help improve those service through feedback and complaints.

Your rights and complaints

Each service will have a full list of your rights and responsibilities as a service user. Some rights related to complaints include the right:

- to complain about any aspect of a service
- to be provided with information on how you can complain
- to have your complaint dealt with fairly and promptly, and
- to be informed of the outcome of your complaint.

Reasons you may complain

Don't "put up" with your dissatisfaction for fear of losing the service – if you feel you have the right to complain, it's important to do so as quickly as possible.

You may complain because:

- you have received poor quality service
- you have been treated unfairly or inappropriately
- a service or government department has been unhelpful
- you have been discriminated against on the basis of your religion, culture, gender, marital status, geographical location or ability to pay
- you were refused a service without an explanation
- you refused a service in the past and believe that this is now being 'held' against you
- you had to wait for the service and were not informed of the need to wait, or
- you did not get what you thought you had paid for or what was in your service agreement

What you might expect:

- an apology
- a reduction in fees or a refund
- another service
- service improvement, or
- compensation

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Services and complaints | making a complaint

You probably use many services in your caring role; there are many ways you can help improve those service through feedback and complaints.

Types of complaints

Formal complaints follow a procedure, either within the service or by an independent body. They are usually in writing and given to a person in a position of authority.

Informal complaints are "off the record". They are not governed by any set procedures. For example, if a care worker did something you were not happy with, you may request that they not do the same in future.

When to use a formal or informal complaint

It depends on the situation. If someone made a simple error or could do things better, then an informal complaint will suffice. However, if the situation does not improve, you feel intimidated by the person, or you feel they will not listen, you may decide to make a formal complaint.

Who to complain to

You can complain to a number of people within a service including the coordinator of the program, or director of the service. Deciding on whom to direct your complaint depends on how serious the complaint is, and who is in the best position to respond; if you are complaining about a service internally you may also have the right to complain to an independent body.

Complaints path

1. If you have concerns about a service or worker, speak to the worker directly expressing how you feel. Most times problems can be resolved at this level. Document your concerns e.g. when you spoke to the worker and what you spoke about.
2. If the situation does not improve and you still have concerns speak to the service manager or coordinator.
3. If the situation still does not improve write to the head office of the service.
4. If you are still not satisfied you can make an appointment with your local MP or councillor.
5. Contact an independent body to find out more about your rights.

Adapted from 'Through the maze' (1999), 3rd edition Melbourne, Association for Children with a Disability.

Having your say: action pack for carers

Services and complaints | resources and useful contacts

You probably use many services in your caring role; there are many ways you can help improve those service through feedback and complaints.

Asserting yourself

Carers Victoria aims to improve the quality of life of carers through our education services. The following programs may help you to advocate for yourself:

It's OK to be assertive™

This session aims to increase your assertive communications skills to help you state your needs and wishes clearly and without guilt.

Dealing with professionals™

This session explores some of the reasons for difficulties and provides strategies that may help you with working with service providers and other professionals.

Speak up, speak out™

This workshop explores how you can take action to represent your concerns. You will learn some key methods for effective self advocacy to suit your individual situation.

To find out more about our carer education programs contact Carers Victoria on **1800 242 636** or email education@carersvictoria.org.au

Useful contacts

Victorian Ombudsman for complaints about government departments and authorities

03 9613 6222 or 1800 806 314

www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Office of the Public Advocate for complaints about services for people with disabilities

03 9603 9500

www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au

Victorian Disability Services Commission for complaints about services for people with disabilities

1800 677 342 or 1300 728 187

www.odsc.vic.gov.au

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Services and complaints | resources and useful contacts

You probably use many services in your caring role; there are many ways you can help improve those service through feedback and complaints.

Equal Opportunity Commission for complaints about discrimination

1300 891 848

www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Health Services Commissioner for complaints about health services

03 8601 5200 or 1800 136 066

www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc

Aged Care Complaints Scheme for complaints about aged care services

1800 550 552

<http://www.health.gov.au>

Victoria has a wide range of advocacy services which specialise in representing various concerns.

If you are unsure about who to approach contact Carers Victoria on **1800 242 636**.

Adapted from Villamanta Legal Service, 'How to Make a Complaint' Fact sheet.

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Services and complaints | sample letter

You may wish to use the tips and sample letter below as a guide when writing your letter of complaint.

Make sure you include:

- the time and date of the event
- who said what, or did what to whom
- the people responsible
- the effect of the actions on you and the person you care for, and
- what you want done to rectify the problem and by when.

Sample letter

Carer name or carer group name / logo
Address
Telephone
Date

Director of service's name
Address

Dear Ms/Mr Service Director,

I am writing to complain about the removal of my respite service, and the way the situation was handled.

Between March 12 and 4 I received three "occasions" of respite. I was very happy with the service provided. I was scheduled to receive another occasion of respite on March 7, but the worker simply did not show up.

I rang your service after waiting for the worker for an hour and was informed that nobody was being sent, as the previous worker had lodged a report stating that there were OH&S concerns at my home. I was extremely upset at this news as nobody informed me of this change of plan, and I was unaware of any OH&S problem in my home. When I asked what I was supposed to do today, I was told there was nothing your service could do.

I believe I should have been informed of the OH&S concerns as they presented so that I had the option of attempting to resolve it, rather than losing the service. I attempted to contact you, as the service director, but was confronted continually with an answering machine and you did not return my calls.

I have found this experience extremely stressful.

I would like a clear explanation of what the OH&S concerns are, an apology for the way I have been treated and a commitment from the service that they will not pull planned respite from myself or other carers in the future without a sound, substantiated reason and advanced notification.

Yours sincerely,
Jane Carer

Having your say: action pack for carers

Getting online | the how and why of the internet

The internet is an incredibly powerful tool for communicating, learning and self-advocating – using it to speak up is easier than you might think.

Everyone can find a way to use the internet to their advantage – if you're not comfortable using computers or the internet, now's the time to learn!

You can use the internet to:

- send and receive emails from family, friends, politicians, media and service providers
- research illnesses, conditions and medications
- read government or research reports on a variety of issues
- respond to calls for submissions from government and policy makers, and
- communicate with, or even set up, online support groups or communities

If you don't have a computer:

- your local library will provide free access to the internet; alternatively visit an internet cafe, TAFE or university; they can provide public access to the internet at an hourly rate. There are even 'internet cafe' style computers at some shopping centres.
- you may be eligible for assistance under a low cost computer initiative. Contact Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636 for more information, and
- Carers Victoria's Carer Lounge has a computer with internet access for our members (membership of Carers Victoria is free for carers).

For more information

For those interested in knowing more about the internet there are many resources available from your local library.

If you would like basic training on how to use a computer or the internet, try your local library, neighbourhood house or TAFE. Most will charge a fee, but as a carer you may be entitled to a concession.

Having your say: action pack for carers

Getting online | getting started

Here are some quick tips to make your journey into the World Wide Web a little easier.

- You don't need to buy a computer – there are plenty of free services available, including local libraries.
- Think of the internet as a big highway: your browser is the car, and websites are roadside cafes. You might need a few driving lessons, but you'll get the hang of it – and once you do, there are millions of places to visit.
- Be open-minded! It doesn't matter if you've never used a computer before, or you feel you can't learn – don't let an attitude be a barrier to accessing this incredible resource.
- Find a digitally savvy person in your life – ask them to lend you an hour or two of their time to help you figure out the World Wide Web.
- You can read newspapers online (www.theage.com.au, www.news.com.au) – but you can also comment on articles, send letters to the editor, and send articles to friends and family via email or Facebook.
- Facebook is an excellent way to stay in touch with family and friends who may be far away. You can chat with them, see photos and videos they post and post your own. You can also connect to the Facebook profiles of organisations or politicians of interest to you.
- Twitter is a service where you can post updates of up to 140 characters and follow the Twitter accounts of others. For example, Carers Victoria is on Twitter, and we follow – and are followed by – carers, the Department of Human Services, Alzheimer's Australia and others. You can even connect with news programs, journalists and service providers through Twitter!
- For some fantastic tutorials on the basics of the internet, use a learning website like www.gcflearnfree.org/internet. It has lessons on using Google, internet safety, Facebook and email.
- You can set up free email address through easy-to-use services like Gmail, Yahoo Mail and Hotmail.
- Check out Carers Victoria's autumn 2011 magazine – it has loads of information on the internet and social networking online. You can even go to www.carersvictoria.org.au and download a copy.