



How you can be involved¹

Have you ever wanted to change the way things are done?

Would you like them to be done differently?

Can you see a better way of doing things?

There are many ways to get involved, bring about change and influence decisions.

In Australia decisions and laws affecting citizens are made at three levels:

- the local level
- the state/territory level and
- the national level

At the national and state levels, people vote for politicians to represent them in parliament. Parliaments make decisions and laws for all citizens. At the local level, decisions are usually made by elected councils. This system of electing politicians to represent us in parliament is called representative democracy.

Politicians can represent us better if we tell them about our concerns and ideas. Here are some ways you can be an active citizen.

Contact Your Representatives

Your representative will probably have an office not far from where you live. Drop into the electorate office, make an appointment, make a phone call, write a letter or email a message.

Contact your local, state or federal representative to:

- let them know what you think,
- get advice or help, and
- pass on a suggestion or good idea.

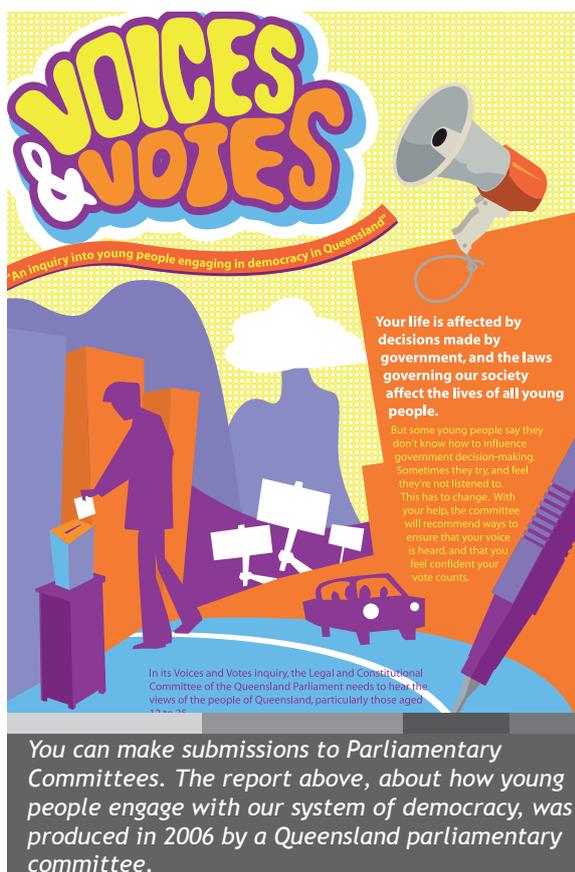
You can find contact details for your state representative at www.parliament.qld.gov.au and for federal representatives at www.aph.gov.au.

Write or Sign a Petition

A petition is a document that states a concern and asks that something be done to improve the situation. Members of the community sign the petition to show their support. If someone asks you to sign a petition and you support the idea - sign it. The more signatures the better.

Petitions are tabled in the local councils, state/territory and the federal parliament. They tell our representatives how members of the public are feeling about an issue. In Queensland, the relevant Minister must respond to the tabled petition within 30 days.

If you want to write a petition, decide whether the issue is a local, state or federal one and contact your representative. They can then provide you with information on how to write your petition. (In Queensland you can circulate petitions online using an e-petition. Go to www.parliament.qld.gov.au). You will need to collect signatures and ask your representative to present the petition in parliament or at council.



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Write a Letter to the Editor or Phone Talkback Radio

If you want other people to hear about your concern or good idea, a newspaper may publish a letter from you in the 'letters to the editor' section. Look in the newspaper for details on how to do this.

You can also phone talkback radio if they are discussing a relevant topic.

Join a Political Party

All Australians are free to join a political party. If you want to be involved in selecting candidates (or becoming one) and developing policies, contact the political party of your choice and find out about membership fees and how to apply.

Join or Start a Lobby Group

Lobby groups try to bring about change in regards to particular causes. A lobby group may be a big organisation or a small community group who share the same ideas about an issue.

Larger lobby groups are listed in the telephone directory and would welcome your enquiry about membership.

Inform the Media

Newspapers, television, and radio are the main ways that information is spread - to us and to our representatives. If you feel that you have been disadvantaged or have something worthwhile to tell, consider contacting the media. A journalist may choose to report your story to the wider community.

Attend or Organise a Rally

In Australia you have the right to protest. It is legal to attend or organise a rally or meeting to express your view on an issue. A protest can be a powerful way of sending a message to your representatives, and often attracts media attention.

Although it is legal to express your opinion by attending or speaking at a rally, make sure

that you obey laws about behaviour in public places.

If you plan to organise a rally, contact the police first and obtain any relevant permits.

Send a Submission to a Parliamentary Committee

The state and federal parliaments regularly form committees to get more information about an issue. Look out for notices in major newspapers advertising parliamentary inquiries. These committees want to hear ideas from the community.

You will need to make a submission in writing, however committees sometimes also invite people to speak at a hearing. Information on Queensland parliamentary committees can be found at www.parliament.qld.gov.au/committees.

Attend Your Local Council Meetings

Some local councils allow members of the public to speak at their meetings. Contact your local council for more information.

Be an Informed Voter

In Australia there are regular elections to choose representatives for local, state and federal governments. All Australian citizens who are 18 years or older must register to vote.

Find out who the people are who want to be politicians. What action do they (or their political party) plan to take on issues that are important to you? Vote for the candidates who you believe will represent you well.

Use Social Media

You can use social media to connect to others and to provide input to parliamentary committees.

¹Based on information from the Parliamentary Education Office, Australian Parliament.