

# Writing to your Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP) or Member of Parliament (MP)

## **Before you write your letter**

**Identify the problem.** What do you want the person to help you with? What would you like to happen as a result? Is this something that this person will be able to help you with?

**Identify the goal.** When campaigning for positive change, or the prevention of negative change, it's important to identify what you want your end goal to be, and then identify the stepping stones that will help you reach this goal. Ensuring that those making the decisions are aware of how this change would affect local people and users of a service is an important first step.

**Identify who you need to contact.** Healthcare in Scotland is devolved, this means decisions about this are made by the Scottish Parliament, and not in the House of Parliament. To discuss issues relating to health in Scotland you will need to contact your Member of Scottish Parliament (MSP). It is your right to tell them what matters to you, and their job to listen. You can tell them about your experience of waiting for treatment, highlight Beat's campaigns and ask them to make a difference for those in your area. You can find the name and contact details for your MSP [here](#).

You will also have a Member of Parliament (MP) who has been elected to represent you in the Houses of Parliament. They will be able to help you with constituency related matters and discussion of funding at a national level. Most MPs have websites, which will contain details about their interests, when they hold their local surgeries and how to get in touch with them. You can find the name and contact details of your local MP [here](#).

**Surgeries.** Most MSPs and MPs hold regular surgeries in their local constituency, where you as a constituent can meet with them and discuss local issues.

Consider making an appointment to meet with them here. This would usually be a ten minute appointment, so prepare for this as you might for an appointment at the doctors; consider the most important points that you want to get across in the time you have. The details of surgeries might be on their website if they have one, but if not you can contact their office to find out when they are held and to make an appointment.

**Show wider support.** This can be from other organisations and individuals affected. This will help you build a broader picture of the challenges as well as strengthening your voice, and showing this issue affects many people.

**Do your research.** Our glossary of terms might be useful for navigating some of the jargon and acronyms. Your MSP or MP might have no prior knowledge about the issue, or even about eating disorders, so try to give them a good overview, so that they can understand the problem.

## **Writing your letter**

These top tips will help you to structure a letter, or meeting.

- Keep it concise – try for a maximum of one side of A4.
- Give a key 'headline' and outline the situation, explaining why you are writing.
- Briefly outline the current situation. Outline the issue and any proposed changes.
- Talk about how the current situation or any changes will affect you/your family, and if possible, mention how many other people this will affect.
- Discuss what you would like to happen.
- Be sure to include your contact address, telephone number and email address.
- Ask for an appointment to discuss the issue.
- You can send this via post or email. You can always send again via email when following up.
- Encourage others affected by this issue to write to their representatives too.

## **After you have sent your letter**

It can take time for your them to respond, so be patient. If you have not heard within three weeks, you might want to give them a telephone call to follow up the enquiry. Remember if you need any more support you can contact one of the campaigns team via [campaigning@beateatingdisorders.co.uk](mailto:campaigning@beateatingdisorders.co.uk).

## **Template letter**

[Your address]

[MSP/MP's name  
Constituency Address]

[Date]

Dear [MSP/MP's name],

**Introduction** – Explain why you are writing and what you are asking for (briefly), and if you would like to arrange a meeting.

**Outline the area** – Introduce any important legislation or new initiatives that are relevant to why you are writing. Discuss why you are interested, such as a personal connection.

**Outline the issue** – Explain your main concern(s) about your area. For example, these might be about delays in getting referred to a specialist team, or about waiting for treatment once referred. Try to keep this short, with just one or two main points.

**What would you like them to do** – You might ask them to contact your local NHS Board to find out what progress is being made regarding this issue, and the implementation of any key legislation.

**Arranging a meeting** – If you feel able to, explain that you would like to meet with them to discuss the issue further, and ask them to contact you to arrange a suitable time.

**Contact and thanks** – Provide your email address and telephone number. Thank them for their help, and let them know that you look forward to their response.

## **Example letter**

Sara Preston  
Beat Scotland,  
Edinburgh Offices,  
26, Forth Street,  
Edinburgh, EH13LH.

Ben MacPherson MSP  
Tuesday 28 March 2017

Dear Ben,

I am writing to ask for your help with improving access to local treatment services for people with eating disorders in Edinburgh and the Lothian area. I would also most appreciate the opportunity to arrange a meeting with you to discuss this issue.

The recently published 'Eating disorders - recognition and treatment' NICE guidelines outline that GPs should refer to specialist treatment providers 'without delay' if an eating disorder is suspected. These guidelines are utilised UK wide however, are only binding within England and Wales legislative areas – therefore I wish to ask whether there are plans to update and produce comparable SIGN guidelines for Scotland?

We have seen from the recently released 'Access and Waiting times' data in England, that children and young people in are still facing significant delays in receiving treatment once referred. Again, comparatively to England, Scotland does not possess eating disorders specific CAMHS access and waiting time standards, where our English counterparts do – given that Anorexia reports the highest premature mortality rate of all mental illnesses, alongside evidencing detrimental impacts upon individuals and families, and that greatest prevalence of onset is adolescence – I wish to ask why Scotland does not yet have comparable standards for young people in Scotland? In respect of the Mental Health strategy for Scotland published earlier this year, possessing a pertinent focus on early intervention and the importance of supporting identification and treatment at the earliest point possible, I further question why the aforementioned CAMHS standards have not been established here? Additionally, across the UK, there is no timescale set for adults, so we would unfortunately have to assume that the picture might be even worse for those over 18. The present recommended therapies are more effective at an early stage of an eating disorder's development, and individuals can better engage with treatment so it's important that once referred, people are able to access treatment straight away.

As Senior National Officer [Scotland] for Beat, the UK's eating disorder charity, I am keen to see that Scotland establishes and delivers guidelines and standards to safeguard and ensure the wellbeing of individuals impacted by eating disorders, alongside guaranteeing these are implemented effectively and that patients, once referred, are not subject to a long wait before treatment is able to start.

Would you be able to speak with the Minister for Mental Health regarding my points raised above, and further submit a question to First Minister's Questions – asking for an update on intention in creating standards for young people with eating disorders accessing and receiving CAMHS services, and plans for addressing the waiting time for specialist eating disorders treatment all those impacted [both children, young people and adults]?

Thank you for taking the time to read my correspondence. I would also very much like to meet you to discuss this matter further. Please could you contact me to arrange a suitable time?

You can contact me at [email address] or on [telephone number]. Thank you for your help with this matter, I look forward to your response.

Best wishes  
Sara.