



Raising Your Voice:

A Toolkit for Advocacy in Saskatchewan

Inclusion Saskatchewan



"I realized that my voice does matter and it will make change, even if it's not then and there. If you say something, it will make people look and understand the issue. How are we going to be heard, how are there going to be changes if we don't say anything?"

- Dee, Self-Advocate

Your voice matters, and you have the right to be heard.

This toolkit is here to help you speak up for change. You will learn:

- Which government leaders make decisions that affect you.
- How to contact elected officials.
- How to write letters or petitions to government officials.
- How to ask for changes for people with intellectual disabilities.
- How to take care of yourself when advocating.



What Is Different About This Toolkit?

- It is in plain language.
- It is specific to Saskatchewan.
- It is trauma-informed. The information will help you take care of yourself when advocating for change.

Who Is This Toolkit For?

- Self-advocates. This means people who have a disability and advocate for their own needs.
- Family members of people with a disability who want to advocate for their family members and the disability community.
- Anyone who supports the rights of people with disabilities.

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Section 1:

Understanding Our Governments

There are three levels of government in Canada. Each level is responsible for different things. When you advocate for change, it is important to talk to the right person. This means you need to know who is responsible for the system you want to change.

Municipal or Civic Government

The people who are elected to civic governments are called councilors. They work together to run cities, towns, or rural areas. The highest role of civic or municipal governments is the Mayor.

Civic governments make decisions about local services like:

- Roads, road signs, and sidewalks
- Garbage and recycling pick up
- Libraries and public transportation
- Police and fire services
- Buildings and construction projects

Provincial Government

The provincial government makes decisions about Saskatchewan. The people who are elected to the Government of Saskatchewan are called Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The highest role in the provincial government is the Premier.

The Government of Saskatchewan is responsible for many day-to-day services, like:

- School and student services
- Services for people with disabilities
- Social services and income support programs
- Hospitals and health care services
- Housing and the rules about renting a home

Federal Government

The federal government is responsible for things that affect the entire country, including some provincial issues. The people who are elected to the federal government are called Members of Parliament (MPs). The highest role in the federal government is the Prime Minister.

The federal Government of Canada makes decisions about:

- National defense and the military
- Indigenous lands and treaty rights
- Immigration, citizenship, and visitors to Canada
- Collecting income taxes
- National benefits and financial programs. For example, the Canadian Pension Plan and the Canada Disability Benefit

This toolkit is about advocacy to the provincial Government of Saskatchewan. Some of the information can also be used for advocacy at other levels of government, so we want you to know a little bit about those too.

Role of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)

Everyone in Saskatchewan has a representative in the provincial government called a Member of Legislative Assembly, or MLA. There is one MLA for each area of the province, called a riding.

An MLA is responsible for representing the people who live in their riding when the government is making decisions. They do this by voting on laws, budgets, and policies of the government.

Reaching out to your MLA with problems helps them understand what barriers people experience in their lives. They can use that shared experience to work with the rest of the provincial government to make things better.

Your MLA should support you when you have a problem within a provincial system. You should try to solve it with the people who provide the service first, but if that does not work, you can ask your MLA for help.

If you ask for support from your MLA, it will likely be a staff member from their office who helps you instead of your MLA helping you directly.

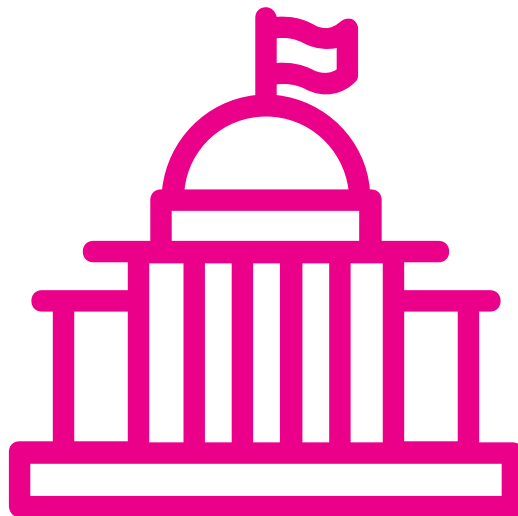
Some things you might ask your MLA for help with might be:

- Problems with your provincial benefits like SIS or SAID
- Your school or your child's school does not meet your schooling needs
- You cannot get the healthcare services that you need

Ministers

The government of Saskatchewan has offices called Ministries that are each responsible for a different service. The MLA who is the head of a Ministry is called a Minister. The Premier chooses which MLAs will be Ministers.

The Minister is responsible for making the highest level decisions like how the money in that ministry is spent. They are also responsible for reporting what is happening in their ministry to the government. There are many other people who also work in the ministry to help make these choices.



Saskatchewan Ministries

Each ministry is responsible for different programs. It is important to find out which Ministry is responsible for the system you want to change. The ones most often involved in disability issues include:

Ministry of Health:

- All levels of health care, like family doctors, hospitals, and walk in clinics
- Mental health and addictions
- Drug plans and health coverage
- Community health like vaccination services
- Your healthcare records

Ministry of Social Services:

- Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disabilities (SAID)
- Community Living Service Delivery (CLSD)
- Cognitive Disability Strategy (CDS)
- Subsidized housing programs

Ministry of Advanced Education:

- Post-secondary schools like universities and colleges
- Funding for post-secondary students

Ministry of Justice:

- The court system
- Landlord and tenant issues
- Human rights

Ministry of Immigration and Career Training:

- Programs that support people with disabilities to get jobs

Ministry of Education:

- Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools
- Early childhood education and daycare

You can find a complete list of Saskatchewan Ministries on the Government of Saskatchewan website at: <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/ministries>

Section 2:

Advocating for Systemic Change

What is Systemic Change?

Systemic change means making a change to a policy or regulation so that it changes something for everyone who gets that same service.

Examples of Systemic Change:

- Changing the curriculums taught in schools to be more accessible
- Changing the amount of money paid to people who get SAID benefits
- Changing the amount of money invested into accessible housing

Who Can I Reach Out to For Systemic Change?

You have the right to talk to your MLA about any provincial issue. You can talk to your MLA or a Minister about making systemic changes. You can ask them to advocate for changes to provincial systems. You do not have to be directly affected by an issue to share your perspective with your MLA or Minister.

In Saskatchewan there is an Official Opposition party. This is the political party that has the second most MLAs in the government. The Official Opposition party typically has one MLA dedicated to each ministry, called a Critic or a Shadow Minister that gives a different point of view on policies and practices. It can be helpful to reach out to them as well so that more people know about the issue.

Even if the MLA, Minister, or Critic don't end up making the change you ask for, it is still good to tell them about the issue so that they can learn about it and understand how it affects people with disabilities.

Letters and Emails

A letter or email is a way that you can advocate for systemic change. You can write to your MLA or the Minister responsible for the issue you are advocating about. You can also write to the Critic or Shadow Minister. You can also write to them to ask for help with a situation or government policy that is affecting your life.

Sending them a letter about an issue might be how they learn about it for the first time. Other times they may know about the issue, but getting letters from more people can show them that there is a lot of community support for a systemic change.

What is FOIP?

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) is a law that makes rules about what information should be available to the public and how people can access that information.

Writing a letter to any MLA or Minister will make sure that your voice is saved to public record. This means that other people are able to find out how many people have brought up an issue.

It is usually other government groups or community-based organizations who want to find these things out. They do this under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP).



What Should I Include in My Letter?

1

Who You Are:

- You can share your name or not share your name and write anonymously. It can be helpful to let them know who you are
- Where you live
- If you are comfortable, information about your disability, especially if it will help them understand the issue you are advocating about

2

Information and Details About the Problem:

- Background information about a specific disability
- Your personal experience with the issue you are writing about
- The policies, regulations, or laws that are causing issues
- A possible solution

3

A Call for Positive Change: For Example:

- Increase SAID rates to a livable amount
- Increase the number of accessible units in subsidized housing
- Change the funding model for students with disabilities

4

A Request for Follow-Up:

- You can ask them to respond to your letter or ask for a meeting to talk about the issue further
- A Minister is not required to meet with people, but they might choose to

Helpful Hints

- **Avoid information overload.** Try to stick to one or two important issues instead of bringing up a lot of things within one letter. This will help to have your message heard loud and clear.
- **Avoid political opinions.** You do not have to tell anybody who you have voted for in an election, or what your political beliefs are. Who you vote for should not matter in your advocacy, so you don't need to share that in your letter. It can also be helpful to avoid negative remarks about any political party.

What Should I Expect After Sending a Letter?

Most often, you will get a letter or email from the MLA or Minister you wrote to saying that they received your letter and let you know that your concern has been heard. Sometimes this message will talk about the specific issue, but sometimes it won't. It can be frustrating if a response does not seem to address the issue you wrote about.

Find a Minister or MLA's contact information:

To find contact information for all MLAs and Ministers, you can use the Saskatchewan Government Directory at
<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/directory>

If you don't know who your MLA is, there is an online map you can use to find your community's MLA at
<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/>

You can also reach out to your MLA by social media if they have public accounts.

If you are advocating for your own needs and you are not getting the help that you need from your MLA or a Minister, you can reach out to Inclusion Saskatchewan or another advocacy organization for more help.



Meeting an MLA or Minister

You can request a meeting with your MLA or a Minister for a lot of different reasons. When you are advocating for systemic change it's often because you want to share your story and ask for their commitment to help.

Anyone can call or email their MLA's office to request a meeting. Your MLA is not required to meet with you though, so requesting does not mean you are guaranteed to get a meeting with them.

Who to Invite

Try to keep a meeting like this small to make sure that everybody has enough time to talk. One or two people to share their stories is great.

It can be helpful to have someone else there to take notes, share specific information like statistics, or be a support to you in case it's a difficult meeting. This will help you focus on sharing your story in the meeting.

What to Expect

When an MLA or a Minister attends a meeting, they are often there to gather information. They might ask you a lot of questions, or they might just want to hear your story. You can ask them questions, but they may not always be able to give you an answer.

MLAs and Ministers will often schedule many meetings back-to-back, so they might not be able to make your meeting longer. They might have to end the meeting at a certain time, even if you haven't had time to tell them everything you wanted to. Before the meeting, you can ask how much time you will have with them so that you can feel prepared for this.

What to Say

When you are meeting with an MLA or Minister, it is helpful to share with them why and how a problem is affecting you. They may not have thought about the problem from your point of view before. You can share things like:

- What the problem is
- How it affects you or other people with disabilities
- How you would like to have the problem solved

Policies and systemic changes are not decided on by the people in these meetings. They probably will not be able to give you any information about plans or possible changes to services. It is normal to get an answer like, “I will talk to my team about this and try to learn more about the problem.”

Even if you do not get a promise to fix the problem in the meeting, it is helpful to teach them about why the problem is affecting you.

Helpful Hints

There are some things that might not be helpful to do or say in a meeting with an MLA or Minister:

- Avoid blaming your MLA or Minister for the problem. Decisions in the government are made by many people, so it usually is not helpful to try to blame only one person. They might not have even been aware of the problem before you told them about it.
- Avoid getting upset. It's normal to be a bit emotional when you are passionate about something, or when you are not getting what you need. But it's important to try to talk as calmly as possible. It can be helpful to have someone you trust in the meeting with you to help you deliver your message if you are nervous you might get upset.
- Avoid demanding answers or commitments. You may not be able to get many answers during a meeting. What you can do instead is tell them you will follow up with an email in a few weeks to see if they have gotten any answers.

Section 3: Community-Building

When you advocate for systemic change, it can help to have more people join you. The government is more likely to take an issue seriously if they know that a lot of people have the same concerns.

Write a Petition

A petition is a request for the government to make a change that a group people sign. A petition to the Government of Saskatchewan must:

- Be written or typed on paper.
- Be signed by 3 or more Saskatchewan residents.
- Say what the problem or issue is that you would like to be fixed. This is called the grievance.
- Say how you would like the problem to be fixed. This is called the prayer.
- Be sent to one of these offices:
 - The Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan
 - The Government of Saskatchewan
 - A Minister of the Crown
 - A Member of the Legislative Assembly



There are some specific ways that a petition needs to be written, printed, and sent in. You can read more details in the guide link in the Resources on page 19.

Start a Campaign

You can ask your friends and family to join you in your systemic advocacy. Some ideas for how you can do this are:

- Share a letter that you have written to your MLA or Minister.
- Talk about the problem and encourage others to call their MLA.
- Use social media to share the letter you have written. Sometimes you can get your message out there by making a public post on social media and tagging your MLA.
- Share your letter or post with groups that you are a part of if you think other people in the group would be interested.

Join an Advocacy Network

There are some groups that work together to advocate for systemic change. At Inclusion Saskatchewan, adults with intellectual disabilities can join the Individual & Collective Advocacy Network (ICAN). Parents and siblings of people with intellectual disabilities can join the Family Network.

Both of these programs work together to advocate for systemic change and build a more inclusive Saskatchewan. To learn more, go to <https://www.inclusionsk.com/selfadvocacy>

Talk to the Media

Getting the news to cover a story about a problem that exists can be a great way to get more people to know about the systemic advocacy that you are doing.

You can reach out to different news sources like:

- TV stations
- Radio stations
- Newspapers & websites
- Letters to the editor of a newspaper



Each option will have a different way you can send in an idea for a story. News stations cannot cover every story, so if your proposal does not get accepted, try again in the future.

It is helpful to prepare for an interview with the media. You should be able to:

- Explain what the problem is
- Have a story to share about how that problem has affected you
- Be able to say how the problem should be solved

It's important to remember that if you reach out to the media, you are only representing yourself. You should never speak as a representative for a group of people or an organization without their permission. If there are other people or organizations advocating on the same issue, you should always ask if it is okay to talk about them in the media.

Section 4: Sharing your Story

Some people feel very empowered when they advocate to the government for their own needs or for systemic change. Lots of people have had great experiences with supportive MLAs and Ministers who value their advocacy work and appreciate hearing their experiences.

At other times, people may feel upset if they advocate for changes and those changes are not made. It can be frustrating to put in effort and share your lived experience, and then see that people who are responsible for the issue affecting you are not fixing the problem.

Not every systemic change will be helpful for every person. Some people may argue against change because they are afraid of how it might affect them. They might be afraid of the costs of a better service, or that having something available to people with disabilities could take something away from them.

If you are talking to people in your community about the advocacy that you are doing, you might hear some things that you do not agree with or that are hurtful to you. This can make it very hard to advocate for systemic change.

This section will give you ideas on how to take care of yourself before, during, and after advocating for systemic change. Remember that if you are struggling you can reach out for more support from a counsellor or peer support group.



Self-Care Before Advocacy

It might be helpful for you to think about how advocacy could impact you, and plan to make it as positive an experience as possible. You can also talk about this with a supporter you trust.

Am I comfortable sharing my experiences with a stranger?

If you are not comfortable sharing your own experience, you can try sharing information in a more general way or writing a letter anonymously.

Am I able to say these things out loud?

Sometimes, talking about hard experiences can make us emotional. If that is uncomfortable for you, you could try asking someone close to you to speak about it in a meeting, or consider sharing it in a letter instead.

How would I respond if I feel like my MLA does not care about this issue?

It is okay to feel upset, but you can plan for ways to feel comfortable and supported in it. You do not need to put yourself into a position to feel hurt if you are not up for it.

What if my family or friends do not support my advocacy?

Advocating to the government can make personal issues seem like political issues, and friends and family members do not always agree on political issues. You can choose who you are comfortable sharing with and how much you would like to share.



Self-Care During Advocacy

When you are writing a letter:

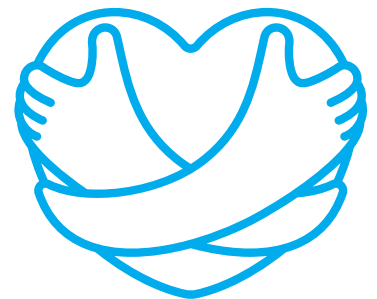
- Take lots of breaks.
- Stay comfortable where you write, and keep snacks and comfort items nearby.
- Ask for help from a friend, family member, or other supportive person to help you write your letter.

When you are in a meeting:

- Ask for support from a friend or family member.
- Come prepared. Before the meeting, write down the key points that you want to discuss, and any policies or regulations are relevant to your points.
- Keep your cool. Use your favourite grounding techniques or other regulation strategies to keep any anger or upset in control.
- It's okay to get emotional! Letting your voice shake or crying in a meeting is not something to feel ashamed of. It shows people how important the issue is to you.
- Take a moment. If you need to gather your thoughts, you can say, "Could I have a moment to think?" or "I would like to step outside to breathe for a moment."
- Set your own boundaries. If a conversation is going in a direction that you are not comfortable with, it's okay to say that you do not want to discuss it anymore.

Self-Care After Advocacy

- Debrief with someone you trust about how it went, how you felt, and your hopes and fears about the issue.
- Do something relaxing to help you feel grounded and in control.
- Reach out for more support if you are continuing to struggle with the experience of advocating from a counsellor or a peer support group.



Conclusion

Your voice matters and you have the right to be heard.

Speaking up about your experiences helps other people understand what needs to be changed. Sharing your story can help make life better for you and for many other people as well.

Every step you take can help move things forward.

Saskatchewan can become more inclusive when people like you share ideas, speak out, and lead the way.

Change does not always happen quickly, but it can start with a voice: your voice.

Additional Resources



Practical Guide to Petitions (October 2024)
<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/media/xq4ddcwt/practical-guide-to-petitions-october-2024-v10.pdf>



To find contact information for all MLAs and Ministers, use the Saskatchewan Government Directory at
<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/director>



To find out who your MLA is, you can use this interactive map at
<https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/>



Inclusion Saskatchewan ICAN (Individual and Collective Advocacy Network) at
<https://www.inclusionsk.com/selfadvocacy>



**INCLUSION
SASKATCHEWAN**

supporting people with intellectual disabilities