



# MEET YOUR MP

## TOOLKIT

### WHY MEET WITH YOUR MP OR SENATOR

#### **To win marriage equality, your story matters – nothing is more powerful!**

It is up to our elected officials to pass marriage equality through a vote in Parliament. **But it is up to us to build the momentum, confidence and support behind them to achieve this.** Their support will come from connecting with the personal stories of Australian families.

It is critical that our politicians hear from you – that together we remind our MPs and Senators that fairness and equality are at the heart of Australian society.

#### **You don't need to be an expert, a lobbyist or have any special credentials or connections to set up a meeting to share why this matters to you.**

Whether you're directly impacted by this issue, care about someone who is, or simply want to see a fairer society, you can be a leader within your own community for equality. **We know that it is hearing from ordinary people from all walks of life** that will move MPs and deliver the change we want to see.

The majority of our politicians, including the leaders of our major parties, are in favour of marriage equality. They just need to be reminded of the real people who are affected, to support them in taking a stand to make this change.

MPs and Senators who aren't yet in favour or aren't so sure about marriage equality may not personally know any same-sex couples or LGBTI people. And it's possible that, even if they do, they may not have had a conversation with them about why marriage equality matters.

**Changing MPs' minds and building momentum requires conversations with real constituents.** There's no one better than you for your MP or Senator to be hearing from, especially face-to-face.

Together we will help MPs and Senators around the country, in every region of Australia, make the journey from **'what am I voting for'** to **'who am I voting for?'** as we campaign to recognise marriage equality in Australian law.

### NOW IT'S TIME TO SHARE OUR STORIES!



## SETTING UP YOUR VISIT

First, you need to find out the details of your local MP or Senator and where they stand on marriage equality. Visit <https://www.australianmarriageequality.org/wheremympstands> and search for your representatives by entering your postcode.

When you contact their office, be sure to introduce yourself as a member of their electorate. Then explain what you'd like to discuss and whether others will be joining you as well.

It's natural to feel a bit nervous, but remember that as a constituent, they're here to listen to you and represent your concerns. And they value these conversations too! Time and again, the feedback we get from MPs and Senators is that personal visits are the most effective form of lobbying and persuasion.

## CHOOSING WHO TO MEET WITH: MP OR SENATOR?

Ultimately we need a majority of both houses of federal Parliament to vote yes for equality. So, it's equally valuable to meet with either or both.

It's up to you to decide. If your local member or Senator is already a supporter of equality, great! You can still meet and talk to them about how to get a free vote in Parliament soon. If your representative isn't yet in support or not sure yet, then you can help them think about this issue from a different perspective.

## YOUR MEETING: SHARE YOUR STORY

You're in! Now it's time to share your story.

You don't need to come armed with a bunch of research or facts. In fact, evidence shows this approach doesn't work.

Instead, share your story. Talk about who you are and why this matters to you. This is how we change hearts and minds, and bring our MPs and Senators on the journey to embracing full equality. Our job is to help our MPs and Senators understand why this is an issue for real people in the community.

## A WORD ABOUT TONE

**It's so important to be positive, engaging and understanding.** For some MPs, this may be the first time a constituent has talked to them about marriage equality. Research shows many people hesitate to ask questions of marriage equality supporters for fear of getting a negative reaction. They might have questions or concerns around religion, children or why marriage matters. Keep your tone respectful and calm. See suggested talking points below for more.

Remember your MP or Senator may be also be lobbied from others with different views, or belong to a faith community that says marriage equality goes against God. Our job is to build rapport, show empathy and respect. Approach this as a conversation, rather than a furious debate.

**We are.... respectful, fair, positive, conversational, calm, supportive, sharing, inclusive, storytellers.**

**We are not... aggressive, exclusive, elitist, polarising, cynical, arrogant, political, defensive, controlling, here to 'beat' the other side.**

## LET US KNOW HOW IT WENT...

After your meeting we'd love to hear from you about how it went! Contact [allofus@equalitycampaign.org.au](mailto:allofus@equalitycampaign.org.au).

**And how about a photo?** Many supportive politicians would love to pose for a selfie with an equality campaigner! It doesn't hurt to ask. But if your local representative is not keen, you can also snap a selfie of yourself outside their office.

**Send these through to us!** Your photo may help give the confidence to a fellow equality campaigner to download this kit and make a meeting with their local representative.

## SOME FINAL PRACTICAL TIPS

**Plan for a short conversation.** MPs and Senators run on very tight schedules, which can change at the last minute. If an advisor has to step in and take their place, still conduct the meeting as planned. Know

the advisor will still communicate what you've said, and you can always follow up to request a meeting with your representative directly. A 10-20 minute meeting is pretty standard, so be ready to dive right in!

**Figure out who's talking and what you'd most like to say in advance.** If there's a group of you going in together, think about who's going to do the talking, or in what order. You might want to practice your key points in advance and get feedback from family and friends. (See some suggested talking points below.)

**Know your representative's position.** Find out where they stand ahead of time (a quick internet search should help, or feel free to contact us). You might want to talk with supportive MPs and Senators about what needs to happen to get a free vote in Parliament. Or if they're not currently in favour/not sure yet, be ready to reassure their concerns and help them see this issue from a different perspective.

	Ideas for responding	Some questions you can ask
<b>But don't children do best with a mother and a father?</b>	<p>Decades of research overwhelmingly confirm what we already know: children do best in a family with loving parents, regardless of whether those parents are straight or gay.</p> <p>Lesbian and gay people have been successfully parenting, including adoption, in Australia for many years. Marriage equality will not change this but will offer stronger protection and inclusion for all families.</p> <p>No two families look alike and what's important is that kids grow up in a stable and supportive home.</p>	<p>Does it seem fair to exclude the children of same-sex couples from the security that comes from marriage?</p> <p>I really understand being concerned about kids. What messages do you think unequal laws send to young people growing up gay?</p>

**This may be a priority for some, but I'm not confident the time is now for a vote in Parliament.**

Research shows that now two-thirds of Australians support marriage equality. And while most people think a change is inevitable, real people are being impacted the longer we delay.

For the kids growing up feeling different and excluded, for the couples who are being denied the right to marry the person they love, for the parents and grandparents of gay children or grandchildren... isn't it time?

We all want children growing up today to be able to have the same hopes and dreams, and not be treated as second best.

Unfair and unequal treatment under the law is hurting real people. And it's something we have the power to fix.

How much longer do you think Australians should have to wait for equality?

With so many other countries already saying yes to marriage equality, is there a reason Australians should have to wait longer?

**A number of states already have recognition schemes for same-sex relationships as well as defacto unions, and we've eliminated discriminatory laws around superannuation and more. Why marriage?**

It's true that all couples can have their relationship recognised as a 'de facto' union under Australian law if they meet certain criteria (namely living together).

However just like other couples live together and then choose to marry, marriage is also important to many same-sex couples. Marriage is important to Australian society and it's important to Australian couples.

This is an issue of fairness and equality. Our laws should reflect the values we're most proud of as Australians, and here we believe in treating all people equally.

Both civil unions and same-sex law reform have been positive steps embraced by Australian society and many LGBTI couples. However they still fall short of full Constitutional equality. Only marriage can achieve that.

Why did you get married/do you want to get married?

Is your marriage important to you?

Can you see how it might be important to other couples too, regardless of gender?

**But this might mean that schools have to deliver programs that I don't support.**

The decision about what kids get taught in schools is made by the State Government and locals school, so updating the Marriage Act will not change that.

This is just about whether two individuals should be allowed to marry. Let's teach the values to our kids that we're most proud of as Australians - that all people should be treated equally.

Parents are the people who shape kids values and beliefs - do you think that allowing same sex couples to get married will change that?

What do you want to teach kids about lesbian and gay people?

**This goes against many people's faith/religious views about the purpose of marriage. I don't want their rights and views to be disrespected.**

We don't have to be religious or one particular faith to value marriage. What we are looking at is the legal definition of marriage, and everyone should be treated equally under the law.

We know that no religious group will be forced to marry a lesbian or gay couple against their beliefs (just like some religious authorities won't marry people who are divorced).

While marriage equality will take nothing away from the religious freedom of those who oppose it, it will actually uphold the religious freedom of those who support it.

The research actually tells us that the majority of Australians of faith - including 59% of Christians and 75% of followers of other religions - are in favour of marriage equality.

Here in Australia the Society of Friends (Quakers), some Jewish synagogues and rabbis, the Metropolitan Community Church, and individual congregations and celebrants within the Anglican, Uniting Church and Baptist churches all condone or perform same-sex unions. Over 100 leading Christian ministers have publicly declared their support for marriage equality including several Anglican bishops.

But their religious freedoms and views are being disrespected, because the same-sex ceremonies they perform lack the legal standing of marriage.

Would you like to see what some faith leaders are saying about why they support marriage equality?

What my faith teaches me is that God is love. Is that something you believe too??

**There are too many unknowns; this could be a slippery slope to redefining marriage as between multiple partners ... or who knows what?**

**I'm concerned about the possibility of community backlash. A plebiscite would have been one path forward, but I don't want people to feel like I'm forcing this change onto them.**

The only question before us is whether all Australians should have the right to marry the person they love. Nothing else can or will be changed by amending the Marriage Act to recognise marriage equality.

Allowing marriage between two people of the same sex is about advancing fairness and equality. It is a step we're ready for: two-thirds of Australians as well as a majority of MPs agree. Marriage equality will not change anything for the vast majority of Australians, but will make a profound difference to the status and dignity of some.

Today 21 other countries today have marriage equality: including the UK, New Zealand, Ireland and the US and happily, in those places, the sky hasn't fallen in. Marriage is still about two loving, consenting adults making a legally recognized commitment to each other.

Marriage equality is about celebrating same-sex couples' love and commitment and strengthening their families. Affirming their equality has brought joy, dignity, security and belonging to millions of people.

Just like people in many other countries across the world, Australians are now more accepting of LGBTI people. If we have eliminated discrimination from our hearts, isn't it time to eliminate it from our laws?

In the end, Australians came to oppose the plebiscite for a number of understandable reasons. It amounted to a \$175 million public opinion poll. Even after the plebiscite, Parliament would still have to have voted to allow marriage equality. Meanwhile it's clear why lots of mental health experts asked the government not to do this (imagine growing up an LGBTI kid in a small town; or being the child of a gay couple and seeing months of taxpayer-funded ads telling you that your family is wrong or you don't have the same right to love and happiness).

For your constituents who might question your vote, you can explain to them that treating people unfairly and unequally is a thing of the past. As a decent and fair nation, our attitudes have evolved over time on a range of issues - including race, sexuality and gender. The vast majority of Australians (including people of faith) believe it's now time to make marriage available to every Australian.

Happily, marriage equality does not take anything away from anyone. It does not affect anyone else's marriage. It will not change anything for the majority of Australians but will mean a great deal to the dignity and happiness of some.

How do you think life would be different if all loving, committed couples could get married?

Do you think it would be a good thing for Australians to be able to celebrate all of our friends' love and commitment equally?

I imagine you frequently have to vote on issues where you get disagreement from some in the community. It must be hard sometimes, but it's part of the job. How is marriage equality any different?

What would you like your legacy to be in another 10 or 20 years when we look back on this issue?