

HOUSING JUSTICE: A HOME FOR EVERYONE

GUIDE FOR MEETING YOUR MP AND CANDIDATES

In March 2023, people across NSW will have the opportunity to cast their vote on the direction they want our State to head over the next four years. The St Vincent de Paul Society wants NSW to become a State where everyone has a place to call home.

Our [Election Statement – Housing Justice: A home for everyone](#) – calls for:

- investment in a housing system that delivers on the right to a home;
- protection for renters through fairer tenancy laws;
- increased funding for specialist services for people who are homeless.

Meeting with current and aspiring MPs in your electorate is one of the most effective ways to bring their attention to the experiences of people experiencing rental insecurity and homelessness in their area and secure their support for the recommendations in the Society's Election Statement.

This guide aims to assist members of our Social Justice Network to hold candidate meetings in the lead up to the NSW 2023 State election. It includes four key stages for a successful meeting:

1. **Contact your MP and candidates**
2. **Prepare for your meeting**
3. **Run the meeting**
4. **Follow up after the meeting**

MPs and candidates will be eager to meet with residents of the local electorate during this period. As people actively involved in the work of the Society you are likely to have deep understanding of your local community and the pressures faced by the many families and people we assist. The organisational reputation of Vinnies will assist you to win a meeting.

1. Contact your MP and candidates

- Identify your local MP and candidates. To work out your electorate, visit: elections.nsw.gov.au/Elections/Find-my-electorate and enter your street address and suburb. Then go to parliament.nsw.gov.au/members to access contact details for your MP. A list of candidates for each electorate will be available closer to the election. In the meantime, Google searches are the best option for identifying candidates.
- Contact your Central Council's Social Justice Representative or the Social Justice Team at Social.Justice@vinnies.org.au to let them know you are planning a visit. There may be other Conferences in your electorate who are also intending to visit, and we can help you plan a meeting together.
- Email or phone your MP/candidate's office and introduce yourself, including your role with Vinnies. Request a meeting to discuss the work of the Society in the electorate and the need for a housing system that protects those most vulnerable to poverty and homelessness. Follow up in a week if you have not received a response. Draft text for an email is included in Appendix 1.

When you are given an appointment, confirm how long you will have and ask who else will be attending the meeting (e.g. their Adviser) so you can plan appropriately. Also email the MP or candidate confirming the meeting time once it has been offered and accepted.

- Inform the Social Justice Team that you have secured a meeting at social.justice@vinnies.org.au.

2. Prepare for your meeting

- Research your MP or candidate. MPs' details, first reading speeches, parliamentary statements and biographical information can be found at: parliament.nsw.gov.au/members
- Download and study the Society's Election Resources
 - Election Statement – [Housing Justice: A home for everyone](#)
 - Your electorate-specific [Briefing Note on Housing and Homelessness](#)In addition to your own copies, print out two copies of each to leave with each MP/candidate and their staffers.
- Have key statistics that illustrate the impact of housing stress, renter vulnerability and homelessness in your electorate. Local area statistics are available in your electorate Briefing Note. The key asks relating to a fair housing system, protection for renters, and homelessness services are in the Election Statement.
- Share some brief stories. Firsthand accounts of experiences of need and the types of assistance that have been given have the power to bring the statistics to life. Consider the members who can speak of the hardship experienced in the local community. Can a staff member or a person you have assisted tell their story?
- Consider who will attend the meeting. Consider inviting the manager/s of Vinnies Services in your area to join your delegation. You may like to invite another member of the Society, perhaps a Conference or Regional President, a local staff member, a person we have assisted.
 - Where your local MP is also a key decision-maker/portfolio holder (e.g. Premier, Treasurer, Minister), ideally an appropriate employee (i.e. member of the Policy and Advocacy Team or a Regional Director) should be part of the delegation. This is because we will also seek meetings with these MPs in their leadership roles and this enables greater coordination and continuity.
 - Ensure all attendees are aware of the purpose and focus of the meeting and that they have read the Election Statement and Electorate Briefing Note.
 - Set clear tasks. The following can be divided up depending on the number in the delegation – *someone to chair and introduce members, *someone to speak to some of key statistics of the housing and homelessness crisis in the electorate *someone to share a brief story or stories about the personal impact of the crisis, *someone to present the key asks, *note-taker/time-keeper.
 - Prepare an agenda/running sheet and practice what you are going to say. An example of an Agenda is attached in Appendix 2.
- Organise Vinnies apparel. At the end of the meeting, it's always good to capture the event with a photo. So, organise for any Vinnies caps, badges or shirts you can wear on the day.

3. Run the Meeting

- Be on time. Meet immediately beforehand to run through the agenda and key points each person will make.
- Stick to the agenda. Drawing up an agenda or running sheet ensures the meeting will stay on track and that each person knows their respective role and the points they are speaking to. It means that the most is made of the time you have with a busy MP/candidate and that there is enough time to put forward the key asks.
Appendix 2 has an example of an Agenda that can be adapted for your MP/candidate meeting.
- Time is precious. Don't take it personally if your meeting is cut short or interrupted. Be prepared to condense your story or to cut to the chase on key asks if necessary.
- The critical part of the meeting is when you ask your MP/Candidate to commit to champion our concerns within their Party and to take concrete action on social housing, protection for renters and homelessness services. If your MP/Candidate gives an undertaking to do so, thank them. If there is no clear commitment, politely ask them a second time. The aim is to get a clear 'yes' if possible so that we can follow up with MPs who are elected to represent their constituents.



4. Follow up after the Meeting

- Debrief. Immediately after the meeting, spend 10 minutes discussing how the meeting went. What worked well and what might be improved? What undertakings were given by the MP/Candidate and what needs to be followed up? Congratulate each other for contributing to this vital aspect of the Society's good works.
- Email your MP/Candidate thanking them for the meeting and to confirm any decisions that were made or actions to be followed up. Include any information or resources requested at the meeting. Highlight how the Society and local Vinnies services are a point of contact if s/he needs to refer constituents in need of assistance.
- Contact the Social Justice Team (social.justice@vinnies.org.au) and your Central Council Social Justice Representative to let us know how the meeting went and about any undertakings given by the MP/Candidate. You can also fill out an online Political Engagement Feedback Form [here](#).
- Upcoming events or site visits prior to the NSW Election might be something you could consider inviting the MP/Candidate to, particularly if they show an interest in the good works of the Society and support our call.

Thank you!

By meeting with your MP/candidates you are doing something positive for your community and playing an important role in speaking up for social justice. Encourage your friends and associates to visit their own local candidates too. The more people's voices are heard on issue of local community concern the more politicians will listen and take the action our community needs for positive change.

Appendix 1: Example of wording for an email to you MP and candidates seeking a meeting.

Dear [title and name of candidate],

In advance of the March 2023 NSW State Election, I am writing to ask you to meet with a small delegation of members of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Social Justice Network to discuss the local impact of the housing and homelessness crisis and the actions we would like our next MP to take to address this issue.

The St Vincent de Paul Society wants NSW to become a State where everyone has a place to call home. In [name of electorate] we are concerned about the number of people experiencing housing stress and at risk of homelessness. We believe much greater effort is needed to tackle this growing crisis, and to ensure every person in our community has access to the support they need.

To arrange a time to meet, please contact [name, phone number and email and street address of person].

[If you have this information...:] In attendance at this meeting will be [Names and titles of others to be attending the meeting]

We look forward to meeting with you in the lead up to the State election.

Yours sincerely,

[Name/s of signatory/ies]

Appendix 2: Example of an Agenda that can be adapted for your MP/candidate meeting.

Agenda Item	Who	Time
Outline meeting outcomes and agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Acknowledge Traditional Custodians. ➤ Thank MP/Candidate for agreeing to meet. ➤ Note that you come to share our deep concerns about the housing crisis and homelessness in this electorate. ➤ Note that the MP/candidate will be asked to: 1. Acknowledge our concerns and raise them with party leaders; 2. Explain what they/their party will do to address the concerns; 3. In Parliament, to take concrete action to address the housing crisis. 	Chair	2 mins
Intro of Conference Members at the meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Introduction of each person by name, suburb and Conference. ➤ Relevant history and work of the Conference and Vinnies services in the electorate. ➤ Note that the Society's good works are deeply ingrained in the community – serving vulnerable individuals and families – and advocating change that will improve their lives and strength of the community as a whole. 	Person 1	3 mins
Outlining the Housing and Homelessness crisis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Draw from the Election Statement and particularly the Electorate Briefing Note to highlight issues of rental stress and inadequate protection for renters, unmet social housing demand, homelessness. ➤ Highlight key asks: 5000 new social housing homes each year over 10 years; the protection of renters through fair limits on rent increases and the removal of 'no grounds' evictions; increased funding for specialist services for people who are homeless. 	Person 2	5 mins
Client story/stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stories could be from Conference Members, Services or Retail. Keep them short (say 3 minutes), don't name the client and make sure the story is relevant to the issues of rental stress, social housing waiting lists and/or homelessness. 	Member, Staff, Client or Volunteer	6 mins
Party/Candidate Position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask the MP/candidate to explain what they/their party will do to address the concerns raised. ➤ Ask specifically for their commitment: to increase the social housing stock by 5000 homes p.a.; to ease housing stress and improve protections for renters; to increase funding to specialist homelessness services. 	MP/Candidate	9 mins
Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask the MP/candidate if they have any questions. They may have general questions about the good works of the Society, what services Vinnies runs locally, or anything discussed in the meeting. ➤ If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, advise that you'll take the question on notice. Please then alert the Social Justice Team at social.justice@vinnies.org.au so that we can find the answer to the question. 	Chair	3 mins
Agreed Actions and Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Summarise the undertakings given by the MP/Candidate – in terms of the policy asks and their willingness to raise the Society's concerns with their Party leadership. 	Note-taker	2 mins
Thank you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Thank the MP/Candidate for giving you time from their busy schedule and ask when you can check in with them again. ➤ Highlight how the Society and local Vinnies services are a point of contact if s/he needs to refer constituents in need of assistance. ➤ Thank their staff for helping you set up the meeting. ➤ Ask a staff member to take a group photo with the MP/Candidate. 	Group	2 mins