

Making a submission | Understanding the process

A submission process is an important way to ensure different views and voices are considered when the government is considering how to address a problem. This process is started when an issue affecting society is identified as a significant problem, and requires something in the law or within policy to change. This could be the result of a significant event, a change in government or changes to legislation. For instance, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability was set up due to community concern about widespread reports of violence against, and the neglect, abuse and exploitation of, people with a disability.

Engaging in the submission process by writing a response is one of the ways the community services sector can engage in advocacy on behalf of their clients or service users, and ensures the voices of those most affected by the issue are considered, along with those who have expertise in contextualising the problem the government is trying to alleviate. While the submission process will vary in length, they will all generally follow the same process. This guide outlines that process, and provides context to this particular form of advocacy

1 A body is set up that will ask for submissions

This could be a Commission, an Inquiry, a Parliamentary Committee, or a Review.

We can call this 'the entity'. These are often set up by government, but can be independent, and the different mode of what is established will often dictate when information is called for, what is asked, and when it is due, as well as what the entity will be doing.

They may call witnesses, hold public or private hearings, but the intent is to collect information and provide a recommendation to the government on what should change.

2 A guide is established

This could be Terms of Reference, the relevant bill and explanatory notes for law changes, or a discussion paper with questions. The purpose of these is to explain how the submission process will work, what questions will be asked, and the outcome the process is aiming to achieve.

3 Call for submissions

This will be done after the guide is established, and before any public/private hearings (if those are occurring). A submission due date will be set. A submission doesn't have a set format, but the guide will assist in putting together a document which addresses the relevant points. This is the opportunity to let the entity know what you are seeing and what your clients are experiencing. You can provide recommendations based on your expertise and experience engaging with the issue being addressed. Include how your clients' human rights are currently affected, or will be affected, by the changes. If the matter is a Parliamentary Committee one (i.e. a member of parliament has submitted a bill to introduce, or to change the law), the bill and any relevant materials will be provided for feedback. Often, submissions are made publicly available

4 Witnesses called

Not every matter will have witnesses, but witnesses may be called, and this can include people or organisations who have made submissions. This is to help unpack the key issues for the entity or ask any additional questions. Not every person or organisation who prepares a submission is called as a witness.

5 Review period

The entity will review all the submissions, and any other evidence that they have received. They may also do their own research into matters. The entity might have a long time to do their review (it might be a few years) or just a few weeks.

6 Report finalised and presented

The entity will write a report that details what the issues are, what they have learned, and recommendations. It may have to go to Parliament before it is published to the community.

7 Outcomes

Outcomes will be different, depending on the matter. It could see laws changed, or government policy amended. New departments might be set up or there might be disciplinary recommendations. It will depend on what the recommendations are, and what is accepted by government. There are no set timelines for outcomes either. Some outcomes can happen quickly, some might take years to implement.