



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

# Advocacy Toolkit

*Federal Election 2025*

Canadian Association of Optometrists

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Background</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Purpose</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Guidance for Local Advocacy: Be Prepared, Make Connections</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Guidance for Optometrists: Leverage Your Credibility .....	4
<b>Engaging Your Candidates: Identify, Evaluate, Personalize</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Identifying Your Candidates .....	5
Methods Of Communication.....	6
Social Media: Connecting Communities, Amplifying Voices .....	7
Drafting A Message.....	9
Following Up On Your Message.....	9
<b>Best Practices For Engaging With Your Candidates</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Before The Engagement .....	9
During The Engagement.....	10
Following The Engagement.....	11
<b>Other Local Advocacy Tactics</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Appendix A: The Role of Governments in Canada’s Health Care System</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix B: Glossary</b> .....	<b>15</b>

*For questions, please contact Bonnie Kirkwood, CAO Director of Advocacy and Government Relations at [bkirkwood@opto.ca](mailto:bkirkwood@opto.ca)*

## **Background**

The 45<sup>th</sup> federal election presents a pivotal opportunity to engage with election candidates and help shape the policy agenda of your future Member of Parliament (MP).

Advocacy is a powerful tool for change. By engaging with your local candidates, you have the opportunity to raise issues of concern and request action, while also building a foundation for working together in the future. Whether that be with the government of the day, the official opposition, or your elected officials and their staff.

As election priorities develop, public opinion fluctuates during an election. Yet health care is consistently a top issue for Canadian voters. As you navigate your advocacy on important issues, remember that you are voicing the concerns of many Canadians.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this toolkit is to support advocacy efforts before and during the federal election. A key component of advocacy includes engaging with election candidates, introducing yourself and the CAO, and building lasting relationships ahead of the federal election. Strong personal connections are valuable for influencing decision-making and engaging early can create long-term positive outcomes for policy change.

## **Guidance for Local Advocacy: Be Prepared, Make Connections**

Candidates are often busy during an election campaign. It is important to prepare your outreach goals to improve your chances of making a genuine connection. There are multiple opportunities to engage your candidate - they could knock on your door, you could run into them at the grocery store or on the street, you could attend a local debate and ask a question, you could call into a local radio show - in any of these forums there are a few important things to keep in mind to make your issue memorable.

The following best practices can help guide you to successfully engage with your candidates:

- **Emphasize your position as a constituent:** Candidates and MPs are eager to hear from you to win your vote. Once elected, MP offices prioritize the concerns of residents in their ridings - also known as their constituents. Their primary job as

elected officials is to listen and address your concerns. When interacting with a candidate, contextualize your advocacy as a member of the local community, and your role within it.

- **Build positive relationships:** Fostering long-term relationships with candidates is extremely beneficial. With a close connection, candidates who are elected as MPs are more likely to advocate for your needs which in turn builds trust and credibility toward your advocacy message. Politicians value the opinions of those they trust, and frequent communication is key to gaining that trust, allowing you to provide ongoing advice and feedback.
- **Get personal:** Connect your advocacy goals directly with your personal experiences. Be clear about what commitments you would like for them to make, and how your personal experiences reflect the issue at hand. While numbers and statistics are important, candidates are more likely to connect with you through hearing about how you experience hardships in the health system. Ultimately these are issues affecting you and your community, so it is best to speak from that position.

## **Guidance for Optometrists: Leverage Your Credibility**

Optometrists are respected members of the community with a degree of credibility and play an integral role in promoting the health of people within a community. The close ties optometrists have with their local communities can significantly affect the lives of residents, and consequently, the success of political candidates vying for votes within that area. By speaking on certain issues and highlighting them to candidates, your knowledge and experiences are more likely to resonate with them due to your subject matter expertise.

You may choose to employ this credibility to advocate in other ways. For example, you may request to speak with a candidate after an event and request them to commit to certain policy positions. Even asking pointed questions at a campaign event or through a public social media post can generate desirable interest within your community and encourage local candidates to engage with you and your key messages. Your credibility gives you the upper hand over the candidate during an election campaign as voters are likely to trust your perspective. This is an opportunity to foster a long-term relationship with whoever is elected as your local MP. Given your role as an optometrist, you are more likely to get quoted in local media and people will want to hear your perspective as an expert.

# Engaging Your Candidates: Identify, Evaluate, Personalize

## Identifying Your Candidates

To determine your riding, visit the [Elections Canada](#) website, and enter your postal code. Your electoral district will be identified.

We encourage you to engage with candidates from the Conservative, Liberal, NDP, Bloc Québécois and Green parties. Feel free to use your discretion and local knowledge to prioritize your outreach strategy. For example:

- You may feel compelled to engage with a specific candidate to learn more about their party's platform and their vision for health care.
- If you'd like to follow up on a statement that a candidate made during a debate, interview or on social media that aligns with or contradicts your priorities.
- If a candidate is particularly well-connected with the community, it may provide more opportunities for engagement.

## Websites, candidates and electoral district associations (EDAs) of Canada's main political parties:



Liberal Party [website](#), [candidates](#)



Conservative Party [website](#), [candidates](#)



NDP Party [website](#), [candidates](#)



Green Party [website](#), [candidates](#)



Bloc Québécois [website](#)

## Methods Of Communication

### If you have 1-2 hours...

- **Meetings:** While requiring the most resources and effort to schedule, prepare for, and follow up on, meetings are the most effective way for advocates to build strong relationships with potential candidates.
- **Visit their campaign office:** If candidates are available at their office, they may be willing to meet with you. If not, you can indicate your interest to the staff about scheduling a meeting. Be sure to leave your contact information and a document outlining your advocacy priorities with them.

### If you have 5-10 minutes...

- **Phone calls:** Ideal for concise and effective communication by quickly voicing concerns and inquiring about scheduling a meeting. Keep your script simple.
- **Email:** The most convenient option if you are requesting a meeting with a candidate or simply voicing your concerns. You can also attach and send a formal letter via email. We encourage you to personalize your email and to include information on how an issue is affecting you or your community.
- **Letter writing:** An effective option, particularly if it's on behalf of many constituents, as it shows that time was spent by the advocate. Note that letters take a longer time to organize and may not receive a timely response. We recommend attaching a digital copy of your letter to an email.

### If you have 1-2 minutes...

- **Social Media:** An increasingly more efficient way to get in touch with candidates and fellow constituents and follow along with local events.

### If you bump into the candidate in public...


- If you encounter candidates in public during the campaign period, use your judgment and feel free to introduce yourself and express your interest in setting up a meeting with them to discuss your concerns. You can also pitch your advocacy interests to them, so they are aware of pressing concerns in the community.

## Social Media: Connecting Communities, Amplifying Voices

Social media outreach is an increasingly effective strategy for local advocacy and getting the attention of candidates. Most candidates have a presence across multiple social media platforms and tend to be more active during an election campaign. Links to the candidates' social media platforms can be found on their profiles on their party's website. Additionally, most riding associations (known formally as electoral district associations or EDAs) also have social media accounts or party staff who may be contacted. Riding associations are the local party chapters that run the campaign for the candidate in that riding, and have their own elected executives, both types of social media accounts are likely to be managed by staff and should be considered as a secondary path to connect with your candidates.

A professional and polite tone should be maintained even when using more informal channels like a Facebook message. Approaching this as a confrontation likely will not result in productive dialogue, so maintaining a cordial tone makes for a more constructive exchange. Additionally, it is highly recommended that you include your email address or other forms of contact at the end of your message to facilitate continuing dialogue.

Once you are on the party candidate webpage, search for your riding and click on the social media icon of your local candidate to contact them.

<b>Platform</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
 Facebook	<p>Facebook is a widely used platform allowing users to connect, share content, and engage with friends, family, and businesses on their personalized 'timeline.'</p> <p>Many candidates are likely to respond to Facebook messages and post personal updates, as that is where they have the largest personal networks.</p> <p>Join neighbourhood Facebook groups or issue-focused groups in your community to pose questions and elevate issues - many candidates are active on them to increase their name recognition and connect with voters</p> <p>To optimize engagement, do not link news articles to your posts, as they are no longer permitted on Meta sites.</p>



Instagram is a visually driven social media platform where users share photos and videos on their pages and ‘stories.’

When sharing any stories or posts with a candidate, be sure to tag them so that they can repost your content

To optimize engagement, do not link news articles to your posts, as they are no longer permitted on Meta sites.



LinkedIn is a professional networking platform that enables users to build and engage with their professional networks.

LinkedIn is an ideal platform to react to candidates’ updates and share your experience from a professional standpoint. If you have a professional background in health care, you can increase credibility by ensuring your page reflects your professional title.



Candidates are unlikely to respond to meeting requests on X, but it is a good platform to share posts. Posts on X should be concise and could include general hashtags such as #cdnpoli and #Election2025

Also, note that X is a contentious platform as many people are leaving the platform and joining other emerging microblogging sites (aka Bluesky and Threads).



Bluesky is a microblogging social networking service modelled after and formerly owned by Twitter. Users can share text messages, images, and videos in short posts and its layout is reminiscent of Twitter before its acquisition by Elon Musk.

With Twitter becoming more politically and algorithmically polarised, a large number of users have moved to Bluesky. This platform might be especially useful for reaching out to your local Liberal or NDP candidates, especially if you're in an urban riding.



## Drafting A Message

When reaching out to a candidate, keep the message brief and incorporate three key points:

- **Introduction:** The first line of your message should include your name and identify yourself as a local constituent. If you are an optometrist, be sure to include your title and location of practice as well.
- **Key message:** Briefly articulate the purpose of your outreach. We recommend you also briefly describe how the issue you are advocating for has affected you personally as a constituent in the candidate's riding. The CAO has uploaded a key message document to assist you with your meetings on <https://opto.ca/policy>.
- **Contact information:** Always include an alternate contact at the end of your message, preferably a phone number or email address so that the candidate can get back to you conveniently.

## Following Up On Your Message

Given that campaigns are brief, don't hesitate to follow up with a candidate - it is their responsibility to engage with you. Their lack of engagement is an indicator of their potential performance if elected. If you haven't received a response within a week, it is appropriate to follow up via email or a phone call to their campaign office.

## Best Practices For Engaging With Your Candidates

Be sure to scan through the social media pages of candidates and their parties, as well as local news channels, as you may hear about events, debates and rallies hosted for your candidates. These are opportunities for you to meet your candidate, introduce yourself, and inquire about scheduling a meeting. At the very least, these moments can also make your candidate aware of the issues affecting their community, so take advantage of asking a question at the debate, talking to them before or after events, and engaging with their teams at rallies. Meetings can also be made effective if you convene a group of people with shared interests and experiences.

If you are planning on meeting a candidate in-person, the following tips will guide you to prepare for and conduct a successful engagement as well as appropriate follow-up.

## Before The Engagement

Once you have an engagement planned with a candidate, it is important to:

- Provide any materials to the candidate's staff via email in advance of the meeting so they have time to review the materials.

- Review the key messages you plan to convey ahead of time to ensure you are prepared.
- Review information on the candidate – What party do they represent? Does the party have any commitments to health care policy in its platform? Did they have any previous roles in the House of Commons? What is included in their bio? Do you have a personal connection to the candidate or any of their past experiences?
- Print any materials you would like the candidate to take with them.
- Ensure you can start the meeting on time because a candidate's time is usually short, and you must be able to cover all your materials within the meeting time.
- If your candidate would rather meet you in their campaign office, arrive at least 10 minutes early to ensure the meeting can start on time.

## **During The Engagement**

During your engagement with a candidate, it is important to keep in mind:

- Building a rapport with the candidate is key.
  - Share parts of your personal story that you are comfortable with sharing.
    - If you are an optometrist, share your story of how you began working in the health care sector and why it is important to you. It is a powerful way to engage the candidate and personalize the message.
    - If you are a person with lived experience, share your experience of the health care system and how the issue you are advocating for directly affects you. Sharing your lived experience is a powerful way to show candidates how this issue is directly affecting voters in their riding.
- Connect the key messages back to your story and community. Issues that matter to the candidate's voters are the ones that will matter most to the candidate.
- Be clear with what you are asking the candidate to do. If there is one key message/ask that sticks out, focus on it.
- Most candidates do not have technical backgrounds and may need background information on the topic you are speaking to them about.
  - Avoid technical jargon or acronyms and watch for any signals that the candidate may not understand something you are saying.
- Not all candidates will be supportive of each key message. Keep the conversation thoughtful and calm.
- Always leave with a thank you and a commitment to follow up with any relevant information.
- Feel free to ask the candidate what platform, email address, or phone number they would prefer for continued communication.
- Ask to take a photo and if it can be shared on social media at the end of the meeting.

## Following The Engagement

Following your engagement with a candidate, it is important to:

- Email a short thank you note to the candidate for their time. Let them know you appreciated the discussion and that you look forward to engaging with them in the future.
- If the candidate made a commitment to do something, follow up if they don't respond.
- Capture your impressions of the meeting and any concerns or questions the candidate raised as soon as possible.
- Let the staff at the CAO know how your meeting went! Feedback is an important tool for the CAO to identify its allies, adjust its messaging, and plan the next steps effectively.

Please submit your feedback to Bonnie Kirkwood, CAO Director of Advocacy and Government Relations at [bkirkwood@opto.ca](mailto:bkirkwood@opto.ca).

## Other Local Advocacy Tactics

- **Write an op-ed/letter to the editor for your local newspaper**
  - You can begin by [finding your local community newspaper](#).
  - On the website of your local newspaper, there will usually be an 'Opinion' or 'Letters to the Editor' section. Click on that tab and explore the page until you find the option to submit your own letter or send in your opinion piece.
  - If the aforementioned tabs are not available, you can always click on the 'Contact Us' tab or scroll to the bottom of the web page to find the email address of the editor or the newspaper's general contact email to send in your op-ed. You can also use this contact to follow up on an op-ed or letter to the editor you submitted but have yet to hear back about.
  - In this [sample letter to the editor](#), a community member in B.C. is suggesting the usage of helicopter transport as a solution to the issue of rolling ER closure in rural and remote areas. In just a few paragraphs, the writer outlines the problem and offers a solution in their authentic voice. In such letters, you are not required to provide a full policy brief or academic citations, but it is your authenticity as a community member that carries the most weight.
- **Contact your local radio channel**
  - Begin by [finding your local radio stations](#). You can also directly reach out to [CBC Radio/Radio Canada](#) as they are available nationally.
  - By exploring the web pages of your local radio station, you will be able to find a 'Contact Us' tab which will have an email address, phone number or submission form where you can submit your thoughts. CBC Radio, for example, has a chatbot embedded into the website which will guide you through the process of submitting a story.

- For avid listeners of local radio, you may be aware of call-in sessions where listeners are encouraged to phone a number and get the opportunity to talk about local issues concerning them. If you happen to be listening to the station during such sessions, it would be a good idea to call in yourself and share your thoughts about health care and the election with your community.
- **Organize an event and offer a candidate the opportunity to meet community members**
  - During an election, candidates are looking for all kinds of ways to connect with voters, so facilitating such an opportunity gives you the chance to directly engage with candidates on your issues.
  - During an event, you can directly ask your candidates about your concerns and gently push for some kind of commitment. Be sure to communicate the purpose of the event to your candidates in advance via their emails or their campaign offices to make them feel prepared.
  - For example, an event could be as simple as inviting members of your community and your local candidates to a coffee party at your local coffee shop. Or, if you are looking to organize a bigger event, you could arrange a health-focused debate at your local community centre and invite all candidates to participate.
- **Attend a debate, and ask a question**
  - Information about upcoming debates is often advertised in advance in local media as well as the social media platforms of your candidates. Keep an eye out for any announcements and sign up to attend.
  - Debates are an opportunity for you to see politicians in action and get them to speak on issues that matter to you.
  - **Know the format:** Depending on the structure, questions can either be asked throughout, or at the end.
  - **Be prepared:** Review key messaging ahead of the debate and focus on questions that matter most to you. Prepare a few in case others ask similar questions.
  - **Keep it simple:** Aim for your question to be about a minute long.
  - **Document it:** If your question results in enthusiastic answers or commitments, be sure to share photos, clips, highlights or selfies to spread the message.
- **Write a post on social media platforms calling for action and tagging your local candidates. Make sure to share it in local neighbourhood Facebook groups!**
  - In many smaller communities, it is increasingly rare to find functioning local media outlets. In other cases, the local media is too overwhelmed with more pressing matters and may not respond to your requests to publish an opinion piece. This is when connecting with your community online is most effective.

- You can publish your thoughts as a public post on your Facebook page, or join local groups (e.g., 'Burlington Moms' or 'Cochrane Updates') and ask permission from the group admins to post there. Tagging your local candidates gives them a chance to respond in a public manner.
- As always, keep the post polite and succinct, and avoid any partisan politics to ensure that the users reading the post engage with the actual message instead of igniting a distracting debate in the comment section.
- **Start a petition**
  - Petitions can often be a call to action for the community to address pressing issues. You can create such a petition on websites like [change.org](https://www.change.org) and promote it through local Facebook groups, etc. Petitions also give you the chance to point out to your candidates the interest this issue has and push them to make commitments to that effect.
  - A well-structured petition includes background information, an outline of the issue and the impact it would have and the 'ask'.
- **Create/place a sign on your front lawn for the cause you are passionate about**
- **Search for local coalitions and groups advocating for health issues, and seek to participate in their efforts**
- **Talk with your neighbours**
- **Volunteer for a candidate you resonate with to bolster your advocacy efforts**
  - You can reach out to the campaign office to inquire about volunteering, which may include door-knocking, making phone calls and soliciting donations.
- **Donate directly to a candidate's campaign**
  - For more information on donations, contact the candidate's campaign office.

## Appendix A: The Role of Governments in Canada's Health Care System

Federal Responsibility	Provincial / Territorial Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Setting and administering national principles for the system under the <i>Canada Health Act</i></li> <li>● Financial support to the provinces and territories</li> <li>● Funding and/or delivery of primary and supplementary services to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ First Nations people living on reserves</li> <li>○ Inuit</li> <li>○ Serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces</li> <li>○ Eligible veterans</li> <li>○ Inmates in federal penitentiaries</li> <li>○ Some groups of refugee claimants.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Health protection and regulation (e.g., regulation of pharmaceuticals, food and medical devices)</li> <li>● Consumer safety</li> <li>● Disease surveillance and prevention</li> <li>● Support for health promotion and health research</li> <li>● Health-related tax measures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Administer and deliver most of Canada's health care services, with all provincial and territorial health insurance plans expected to meet national principles set out under the <i>Canada Health Act</i></li> <li>● Administration of health insurance plans</li> <li>● Planning and funding of care in hospitals and other health facilities</li> <li>● Services provided by doctors and other health professionals</li> <li>● Planning and implementation of health promotion and public health initiatives</li> <li>● Negotiation of fee schedules with health professionals</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Glossary

**Canada Health Act:** Canada's federal legislation for publicly funded health care insurance. The Act sets out the primary objective of Canadian health care policy; to protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of residents of Canada and to facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers.

**Candidate:** Someone running to be a member of Parliament in the federal election.

**Dissolution of Parliament:** Dissolution terminates a Parliament, ending all business in the Senate and in the House of Commons, and is followed by a general election.

**Election Cycle:** There are three phases of an election cycle: pre-election, election and post-election.

**Pre-Election Phase:** This phase involves the preparation and planning of the election and begins with the dissolution of Parliament. During the pre-election phase, Elections Canada recruits and trains election workers, prepares and conducts a voter information campaign and identifies polling locations. During this phase, political parties are finalizing their list of candidates for each of the electoral districts.

**Election Phase:** This phase can last anywhere from 37 to 51 days, begins on the date the writs are issued, and ends on election day. During this time, political parties and candidates are promoting their party's platform, going door-to-door to meet with voters, and taking part in debates with candidates of other parties. Voting day must fall on a Monday.

**Post-Election Phase:** After the election, Elections Canada validates the results, produces a series of reports, and ensures compliance with and enforcement of the *Canada Elections Act*.

**Electoral Districts / Constituencies / Ridings:** Canada is divided into 338 electoral districts, also known as constituencies or ridings, and each is entitled to one seat in the House of Commons.

**EDA:** Electoral District Associations (EDAs), also known as riding associations, are the local branches of political parties that run the campaign within that specific riding. They are the grassroots of political parties.

**Members of Parliament (MPs):** are elected to represent different geographic areas across the country, called constituencies or ridings. MPs voice concerns in the House of Commons on behalf of individuals living in these areas.

**Official Opposition:** In our parliamentary system, the official opposition is the largest party that is not in government. Currently, the Liberals are the governing party, so the Conservatives are the official opposition since they are the next biggest formation in parliament. The official opposition is charged with keeping the government of the day in check, and they will form a shadow cabinet that will scrutinise government activities and question government ministers in the House of Commons.

**Writ:** A formal written order instructing the [returning officer](#) in each electoral district to hold an election to elect a member of Parliament. The writ:

- specifies the day by which candidates must be nominated
- sets a polling date; and
- sets a date by which the writ, with the name of the successful candidate noted on the back, is to be returned to the Chief Electoral Officer.