



“Hey - I’ve got something to say..!”

Tips for writing a submission to government

Why write a submission?

Governments sometimes want to review or change a particular law or develop new laws. It is very important that they hear what the community thinks about the law – what problems people have had with the law, what people have liked about the law, and what suggestions people have to improve the law.

Writing a submission is a good way to put forward your case in a meaningful way. It is important that lots of people and organisations with different views and perspectives are heard. This means the government department, or agency or commission conducting the review will be better informed about how the law affects people.

Your voice and your views matter. You have a right to be listened to and making a submission is an important way of being heard.

How do I know if my story and my views are relevant?

You may have appeared before a Board or Tribunal or a court. You may have been directly affected by a decision made by a government agency such as Centrelink, or by a government department such as the Office of Housing, or by a public authority such as Victoria Police or a public mental health service. You may be or have been in the past, subject to an Order made under a particular law, such as an Involuntary Treatment Order, or an Administration Order.

In all of these cases, you have experienced the effect of a law or laws. The information the government publishes about its review will usually tell what law they are reviewing or what kind of law they are developing. If your experience has something to do with the law or you have an interest in that law, then your views are relevant.

But I’m not a lawyer – am I qualified to make a “law reform” submission?

Don’t worry – you don’t have to be a lawyer or have studied law to make a law reform submission. In fact, some of the most powerful and persuasive submissions come from the experiences and stories of people who themselves are or have been directly affected by the law.

Your experiences are incredibly important and will shape what you think about the law. Your experiences may be unique, or they might be similar to other people’s experiences. Either way, whoever is conducting the review will want to hear what you have to say.

How do I write an effective submission?

Remember, you don't have to have any particular legal expertise to write a submission. A submission doesn't have to be overly technical or "legal" to be effective. You can write an individual or joint submission.

Do I have to identify myself?

Most submissions become public once they are made. They may be available on the government or agency's website. You may not feel comfortable identifying yourself. If that is the case, make it clear in your submission or cover letter that you are making the submission anonymously. Your submission may still be publicly available, but your name and contact details won't be.

Even if you don't identify yourself by name, you should still explain who you are. For example, "I am a mental health consumer" or "I have been actively involved in the psychiatric survivor movement for many years" or "I am a woman who was subjected to abuse in the public mental health system".

What format should I use?

Most submissions are made in writing. You don't have to write in any particular format. You can write a letter, or you can write a report and attach a cover letter.

A hand-written submission is also fine, provided your handwriting is clear and legible. If you don't have access to a computer, try contacting your local library as many have computers and printers which you can use. You may need to make a prior booking.

What style should I use?

A submission doesn't have to be in any particular style, but try to write in a clear, concise way. Try to make your submission as easy as possible for someone else to read. It's a good idea to use punctuation and to separate out different points into paragraphs. Don't be put off if your spelling and grammar aren't perfect.

Headings are another good way to indicate that you are commenting on a different topic or making different points.

Your submission doesn't have to be long. Concentrate on the things that you know about and leave out those things that you don't have much to comment on. Explain why you are looking at some things and not others.

It's a good idea to proof read or get someone else to read your submission before you send it.

What should I include?

- A clear heading that states what your submission is about. For example, “Submission to the Exposure Draft Mental Health Bill”
- Introduce yourself or, if making a joint submission, introduce the group and say how many are in the group. Say why you are interested in the issues and why it affects you.
- Strong, clear statements about what is wrong with the law or the proposed law, or what should change, or what parts should stay the same.
- Give examples about why you have particular views. Include evidence, case studies or stories that illustrate how the law has failed you, or what problems it caused. Examples like this that support your arguments are very persuasive.
- Any other submissions, research or reports you have done, or you know of that support what you are saying. Remember to acknowledge other people’s work and cite it if you can, so the person reading your submission can find it. You can always attach a hard copy as an appendix to your submission.
- Make recommendations if you can, but if you don’t feel confident doing this, outlining your concerns is just as important.
- Any positive things you have to say or anything that you support in the law or proposed law. Remember that there may be other people or organisations that will attack the same points and want to get rid of those parts of the law. It’s important that the government hears your support.
- If you are willing to meet with the government or agency conducting the review, say so.

I’ve got some questions about the law or the review – who do I ask?

You can often contact the agency responsible for the review and ask them questions. Otherwise, a community group or legal centre may have a policy officer or lawyer who can help you. For more info: www.communitylaw.org.au

How do I send in my submission?

Check the deadline for submissions. If the deadline is getting close and you don’t think you’ll have your submission finished in time, contact the agency or department responsible by phone or email and ask for an extension. Many will say yes. It is better to ask for an extension than not submit anything.

You can usually send your submission in by email or by post. Remember it may take a day or so for your submission to arrive by post.