

Turn

**Political Action &
Advocacy Guide**

up

the

Heat!



Alberta Association of
Registered Nurses

September 2004

How to use this guide

The purpose of this guide is to help the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta and its members become more effective in advocacy and political action. If you are interested in becoming more involved in advocacy activities related to registered nurses contact your regional coordinator, provincial council member or the provincial office at: 1-800-252-9392.

Table of Contents

Why get Involved?	2
Influencing Government.....	3
Tools and Tactics	4
Letters	4
Letter Writing Campaigns	4
E-mail	5
Faxes	6
Telephone Calls	6
Meet with Elected Officials	6
Involve Elected Officials in Local Events	9
Attend Government and Political Events	9
Formal Presentations	9
Media Relations	10
Dealing with Media	10
Talking to the News Media	11
Preparing a News Release	12
Sample News Release	13
Develop Strategic Alliances	14
Public Forums and Town Hall Meetings	14
Demonstrations and Special Events	15

Election Campaigns	16
How Public Policy is Developed.....	16
Determining Government Priorities	16
Assessing Public Support.....	17
Legislative Process in Alberta	18
Alberta Political Parties	19
Resources and Readings	
Books and Periodicals	20
Internet Resources	20

Why Get Involved?

There are many reasons why we should be interested in influencing government.

First and most important is that governments pay attention to issues constituents and key organizations feel are important. Governments need the support of their “publics” to govern and therefore are influenced by what they hear.

Second, if we do not speak as individuals and as a profession, the only voices heard by governments will be the voices of others and our issues, priorities and potential solutions will not be considered. Albertans expect us to be vigorous advocates for an accessible, safe and high quality health-care system.

Advocacy is defined as “a process or actions intended to bring about change in the attitudes, behaviours, policies, programs, practices, or laws of individuals, groups, institutions or governments.” Registered nurses are credible, knowledgeable spokespersons for our health-care system. We must use our credibility and knowledge to ensure that decisions made regarding our health-care system are made with quality patient care as the priority.

The terms “politics” and “politicians” refer to the art or science of governing. There are no secrets and nothing underhanded about advocacy and influencing governments. It is a legitimate part of the public policy process and a legitimate part of decision-making in a democracy.

Have you ever managed complex patient assignments on a busy day? Did you ever organize a local committee meeting or Nursing Week event? Have you ever telephoned a municipal councillor about the safety of your neighbourhoods? If you have done any of these actions, then you have been involved in the basics of political action.

Governments and their elected representatives accept that citizens and organized groups will advance their points of view on issues. This process assists governments in their decision-making.

Influencing Government

Whenever entering into advocacy initiatives, there are a number of important principles to keep in mind.

Be involved for the long term. Government policy is not made or changed overnight and influencing policy change is a long-term proposition.

Understand the environment. Know the existing fiscal, political and social context of the government you wish to influence. Know their issues and challenges.

Know the desired outcome. Understand what is trying to be achieved, whether that is to educate, raise awareness or change laws, policies or behaviours.

Have a strategy. Plan what is going to be done and how it is going to be done; don't be haphazard or unfocused.

Be regular and consistent. Don't just appear sporadically when there is a major issue to deal with. To be an effective advocate one must be a regular advocate.

Provide Productive Input. Recognize positive initiatives and bring forward positive proposals.

Be courteous and polite. Do not alienate the people from whom cooperation and support is needed.

Do not be timid or apologetic. As citizens in Canada everyone has the right to present their views and opinions to their governments.

Know governments and how they work.

Understand consultation, legislative, budgeting and decision-making processes of the governments or institutions that need to be influenced.

Know key contacts. Understand who the individual decision-makers are and who will be primary influencers of those decision-makers in the government or institution that is to be lobbied.

Find “champions” to further the cause. Identify individuals within and outside of government and outside of your organization who will “champion” the cause on your behalf.

Speak with many voices. Combine efforts with those of other like-minded individuals and organizations, including the use of third-party independent advocates.

Make it personal. Wherever possible meet face-to-face and get personal involvement from the individuals within the governments or organizations you are attempting to influence.

Focus on solutions not problems. Everybody has problems; try to present specific options to addressing issues rather than focusing on the issues themselves.

Be certain of the facts. Nothing diminishes the effectiveness of an advocacy effort faster than basing the case on inaccurate information.

Use many approaches. Don't rely on one particular tool or tactic to get the message to the government or organization you are trying to influence.

Be persistent. If the approaches being used aren't working then try some different ones. Don't give up. Remember that advocacy is a long-term proposition.

Tools and Tactics

Each lobbying effort requires a variety of tools and tactics depending on the outcome desired and the audiences to be reached. Tools must be selected and adjusted to reflect the local cultural and social base and be appropriate to the knowledge and education of the audiences.

Letters

One of the simplest ways to influence government decisions is to write a letter to your MLA and explain what is happening in health-care.

Writing Effective Letters:

- Add any additional information as an attachment or enclosure.
- Be brief and to the point. Letters should be no longer than 1 – 2 pages.
- Check your spelling and punctuation. In particular, ensure that you have correctly spelled the name of the individual you are writing to.
- Focus the letter on only one issue (two at the most).
- Identify the issues clearly as well as your concern and your recommended course of action.
- Be helpful, polite and courteous. Suggest solutions rather than making threats.
- Compliment wherever possible for good actions that have been taken.
- Write the letter in your own words and personalize it with local facts.
- Personalize, if possible, the relationship with the individual to whom you are writing.
- Request a response to your letter.
- Call or write to follow up if you do not receive a response within three weeks.

- Ask specific questions in the letter to discourage a response by form letter.
- Type the letter, if possible; if handwritten, ensure that it is easy to read.
- Include contact information such as return address, e-mail address and telephone number.
- Send copies of the letter to the health critics from other political parties, other influential leaders and/or the local news media. However, whenever possible send personalized letters to the other interested parties.
- Keep a copy of the letter.
- Address your letter properly.

Examples:

For the Premier:

The Hon. Ralph Klein
Premier of Alberta
Government of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7

For the leader of the opposition :

Dr. Raj Pannu, MLA
Edmonton Strathcona
213, 10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

For Cabinet Ministers:

The Honourable Gary Mar
Minister of Health & Wellness
Government of Alberta
323 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B7

Letter Writing Campaigns

Letter writing campaigns can be an effective part of an advocacy effort as they represent the views

of a number of people. Advantages of letter writing campaigns include:

- they are relatively inexpensive
- they provide a visible and permanent record of people's opinions or arguments
- letters can reach people who might otherwise be difficult to reach
- letters can add a degree of formality and importance to an issue
- letter-writing campaigns can carry the weight of numbers, especially to elected officials

In addition to following the tips for writing individual letters, remember:

- form letters are less effective than personalized letters
- provide basic information or a letter template to the other participants in the campaign, along with letter writing tips to help them develop their own letters
- have the letters arrive at the target audience over a selected period of time rather than all at once, to create the impression of "ongoing concern" rather than a single lobby effort
- ask every member of your local organization to write a letter and have them ask at least one friend or neighbour to write a letter
- share the responses received to determine whether there is consistency in response and/or whether another round of letters is necessary
- ask writers to send letters to the editor of local newspapers; letters should arrive over a period of time rather than all in one day

E-mail

E-mail is an increasingly effective way to communicate with elected officials, including MLAs and MPs. It is fast and inexpensive and it is easy to copy or forward messages to a variety of recipients.

Alberta Connects is an online service available on the Alberta Government website. If you want to send a general note to government about your concerns, go to www.gov.ab.ca and click on Feedback: Alberta Connects. If you wish to e-mail an individual MLA, click on Contact Your MLA.

Using E-mail

E-mail is not yet viewed with the same respect as letters or faxes and thus often carries less influence with the recipient. The volume of e-mail received by elected officials is increasing dramatically and your e-mail messages may be lost in the overall volume of e-mail. In addition, e-mail is often not read personally by the elected official and a member of the office staff usually responds.

To increase effectiveness of e-mail, keep the following in mind:

- e-mail messages should be shorter and more concise than letters
- identify yourself as a constituent when e-mailing your own MLA or MP since a response is more likely if it is a constituent who is corresponding with the elected official
- include your full name, address, and telephone number at the bottom
- avoid attaching documents to your message because software is not always compatible
- remember that e-mail systems are not entirely secure

Faxes

Faxes should follow the same approach as letters. The main advantage of faxes is they are faster than mail, while still providing a written record of your comments. They can best be utilized when advocacy must happen quickly due to an imminent decision.

The disadvantage of faxes is that when sent in large numbers they can tie up the fax machine of the recipient and thus be viewed as a nuisance. On the other hand, a very busy fax machine can draw attention to the large volume of comments being received.

Telephone Calls

Telephone calls are especially useful when time is of the essence. There are two ways to contact your MLA or MP: through the constituency office or their office in the legislature or parliament. However, in many cases you will not get to talk directly to the elected official you are calling. You will often be required to leave your message with a member of the office staff. However, most elected officials keep track of the number of calls on a particular issue and the concerns expressed.

Advantages of Telephone Calls:

- Inexpensive
- Allow for fast reaction to an issue
- Easy for individuals or large groups of people to do
- You will have personal contact with the individual or organization you wish to influence

Effective Phone Calls:

- Write down your key points prior to making the call, possibly write out the entire script for your call.
- Share key messages and scripts when recruiting other callers.

- Keep the messages brief and concise.
- Be polite and do not criticize the staff member or receptionist taking your call. Elected officials receive large numbers of telephone calls and cannot possibly take each one personally.
- Leave your name, number and mailing address and request a response to your call.
- Call a number of elected officials not just your local MP or MLA as the total volume of calls will likely be recorded by government.
- Follow-up with a letter if appropriate.

Meet with Elected Officials (MLAs, MPs) or Senior Administrators

When meeting with an elected official such as an MLA or MP, it is important to remember that they are subject to many influences: their constituents, their party, individuals and groups who may have supported their campaign, and local interest groups who may want their views to be heard in the legislature.

Regular contact and meetings with MLAs or other elected or administrative officials are invaluable. It gives you an idea of their views, concerns, and challenges. Listening, understanding, and empathy for the MLA will help you later when you need their active listening, understanding and empathy on an AARN issue.

The advantages of meetings are:

- direct personal contact, which then makes it easier to personalize the issue
- the opportunity to ask and respond to questions
- the opportunity to leave behind more detailed information
- the opportunity to have more than one “voice” speaking out on the issue

Sample Letter to Set up a Meeting with an Elected Official

RN Name

Address

City, Province, Postal Code

Date

Mr. Rob Renner, MLA

Medicine Hat

Constituency Office

620 – 3rd Street S.E.

Medicine Hat, AB T1A 0H5

Dear Mr. Renner:

I am a registered nurse who has worked at the Lethbridge Regional Hospital for more than twenty years. Like my 27,000 registered nurse colleagues throughout Alberta, I believe the interests of the public and patient safety should be a priority in any reforms to the health-care system.

I am interested in meeting with you to discuss measures which can improve public access to health-care services, reduce wait lists and improve sustainability of the health-care system. I will be in touch with you in the next few days to establish a time to meet and trust that we can work together, in the public interest, to ensure the public receives safe, quality health care.

If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact me at 403-123-4567 or at email@provider.com.

Yours truly,

_____, RN

Meeting your Elected Representatives

Preparation:

- Make an appointment well in advance, at least three weeks ahead.
- Mail or fax a letter confirming the time, date, and location of the meeting, with whom the MLA or other individual will be meeting (no more than three people) and the topic to be discussed.
- Find out the name, political party affiliation, any special assignments and any pertinent background information about the individual you will be meeting.
- Develop your key messages. Limit messages to one or two (three at most) and determine what you want to accomplish with the meeting.
- Emphasize specific examples and the fact that you are providing evidence of the impact of the issue on patients and nursing care.
- Hold a planning session and determine who will ask questions, who will take notes and who will take the lead in the meeting (if more than one RN is participating).
- Prepare the presentation. Gather key documents, questions and answers. Allow time for questions.
- Go armed with facts, figures and best of all, personal examples.
- Be prepared for a shorter meeting than planned. Be ready to make your essential points quickly.

The Meeting:

- Dress professionally (business attire and RN pin if available).
- Arrive on time.
- Smile, establish eye contact, keep chit chat to a minimum.
- Explain why you are there, what the issue is and how the MLA, MP or other individual can help.
- Stress why your position is in the public's interest and use personal examples that support patient advocacy.
- Avoid jargon. Don't assume the politician has any knowledge of nursing or health-care issues.
- Be direct and forceful but polite.
- Be open and honest.
- Do not dominate the meeting. Let the other person speak or ask questions. This is intended to be an exchange of views.
- Be a good listener. If the MLA or MP supports the issue, ask how he/she could assist you.
- Don't overstay the scheduled length of the meeting unless requested.
- Remember, a short, well-prepared and presented production is more impressive and effective than a longer, rambling one.

After the Meeting:

- Evaluate the meeting with your colleagues immediately afterwards.
- Make notes and plan to stay in touch.
- Send a follow-up thank you letter, summarizing your discussions and any action or commitments.
- Once initial contact has been made, follow-up regularly with information on progress, action or concerns on your area of interest.

Involve Elected Officials In Local Events

Invite elected officials, such as MLAs and senior administrators to events hosted by local or provincial organizations such as Nursing Week events, symposiums, forums, annual general meetings, local awards/long service ceremonies, social events. This provides opportunity for personal contact and the delivery of your key messages.

These events can also be the opportunity to demonstrate your professionalism and the high value of registered nurses in the health system and gain support for the profession's positions on health-care issues.

Attend Government and Political Events

Participation and attendance at government and political events can raise the profile and credibility of registered nurses and can provide opportunities for informal advocacy. Possible events include:

- premiers' dinners
- prime ministers' dinners
- political party conventions and annual meetings
- constituency meetings hosted by MLAs
- fund-raising events for elected officials
- throne speeches
- budget presentations
- public consultation sessions hosted by government

The basic principle is to be at the same places and same events as the decision-makers and those that influence them.

Formal Presentations

Formal presentations can be somewhat similar to meetings except they are usually with a larger group of individuals, more formal in nature and focus more on the presentation of information than on questions and responses. There is usually less time or opportunity for dialogue. A brief is a written outline of the position being advocated and sets forth the main concerns, solutions and supporting arguments.

Effective Presentations/Briefs:

- Be clear, concise and to the point.
- Ensure in advance that any necessary audio-visual aids will be available.
- Use easily understood terminology and avoid technical or health-industry jargon.
- Keep the presentation or brief as short as possible but include all necessary factual information.
- Make sure the brief or presentation is proofread carefully in advance.
- Have additional copies of your brief/presentation and supporting information to leave behind.
- Be prepared to answer any questions that may arise.
- Recruit supporters to attend the presentation if possible.
- Consider inviting the news media to attend the presentation or send them copies of the brief after it is presented.
- Follow-up with your audience after the presentation to receive results of government consideration or action on the issue at hand.

Opportunities for formal presentations or briefs are numerous and include:

- appearances before a provincial standing policy committee
- federal royal commissions
- special task forces
- special Senate committees and standing committees
- round tables and forums as part of formal consultation processes
- national, provincial or local government and opposition caucus meetings
- municipal advisory and regulatory committees and special task forces

Media Relations

Health care continues to be one of the most frequently reported public policy issues in the news media and it continues to be rated as the number one public policy issue of concern for Albertans.

As a result, coverage of health care issues is broad and frequent. Unlike other public issues such as education, the environment, transportation or energy, health care is seen as impacting every citizen, young and old. Media coverage over the past five to ten years has revolved around five main themes:

- access to quality care, including waiting lists
- government funding (impact of downsizing and restructuring)
- restructuring and reform, including privatization
- shortages of physicians, nurses and other health-care workers
- labour disputes in the health sector

Any advocacy effort that attempts to gather broader public consensus and support will involve a media relations component. The media can carry messages to the public and key target audiences and thus influence public opinion and the opinion of governments, institutions and health organizations. Among the media relations activity that can be considered are:

- news releases
- news backgrounders
- news tip sheets
- news conferences
- letters to the editor
- guest columns and editorials
- editorial board visits
- media special events
- appearances on radio and TV talk shows
- media interviews
- public service announcements
- paid advertising

Dealing with Media

News is more about people and less about trends, things, technology or policies. Therefore to attract media attention the ‘stories told’ should focus on people.

News must relate and have an impact on the viewing or reading audience. Therefore “news” provided to the media must be seen to be relevant to people other than RNs.

News is timely and often is tied into some other event or issue, so efforts to attract media attention must also be timely.

Get to know local journalists. Suggest story ideas to them that are not always directly related to RNs. The media will appreciate the fact that a

contact does not always seem made for self-serving reasons.

All media, particularly television, favour visual stories. Suggest ways of telling the story visually.

Reminder

While any AARN member can talk to the media and express their personal views as a registered nurse, only designated members can speak to the media while representing the views of AARN as a whole.

Having different AARN spokespersons taking opposing views on a given issue undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the association and our profession. Therefore, coordination of media responses is essential.

If in doubt contact the AARN communications staff at 1-800-252-9392.

Talking to the News Media:

- Return media calls promptly.
- Decide whether you are indeed the best person to talk to the media or whether it should be another AARN member, or even another organization.
- Find out in advance who will be interviewing you. Find out their name, who they work for, what their story is about, who else has been or will be interviewed, what the reporter already knows about the issue, when their deadline is and - if it is on radio or television – when it may be broadcast.
- If you agree to be interviewed, set a time and location. You can choose! You do not have to give the interview immediately. Take time to prepare.
- Before the interview, identify two or three main points (key messages).
- Reduce your key messages to simple, clear and if possible ‘colourful’ statements (quotable quotes).
- Support your points with simple examples, statistics, etc.
- Prepare some anticipated questions and write out your answers in advance.
- Everything you say can be used. Forget about ‘off the record’ comments.
- Manage the interview as much as possible. Don’t be dominated by the questions. What is most important is your answer. Your role is to communicate the information you have identified as your key messages, not just answer questions.
- Don’t speculate. If you don’t know, it is okay to say so.
- Treat reporters with courtesy and respect. They are doing a job just as you are.
- Be honest. Credibility takes a long time to earn but can be lost in a moment.
- Don’t argue with reporters. Simply restate your key messages.
- Give reporters your business card after the interview. This will increase the chances that your name and title will be used correctly.

Preparing a News Release

News releases are the most commonly used means of alerting the media to a story. They can be sent by mail, fax, courier, e-mail or news wire. They should be:

- **complete and easy to understand.** Do not use jargon or acronyms and answer the key questions of who, what, where, when, why and how. A news release should contain the relevant facts necessary for your point to be understood. It will not necessarily provide detailed background. This can be provided in supporting documents if necessary – a backgrounder or fact sheet – and via interviews.
- **written for the audience.** Your primary audience is the editor or reporter and through them, the general public. Consider first what will stimulate interest by the editor or reporter. Write at the level of your audience. Most newspapers are written at a grade eight level.
- **written in the active voice whenever possible.** “Nurses appreciated the opportunity to tour the new hospital,” not “Hospital tours were appreciated by nurses.”
- **starting with a strong lead.** The lead or first paragraph is the most important piece of the news release. It should include answers to as many of the so-called 5Ws (who, what, where, when, why) as is possible. Decide which of the 5Ws are most important. Include these in your lead paragraph and use the second paragraph to address the remainder. Always include the ‘who’ in the first paragraph. This may be the organization or an individual.
- **supporting the lead.** The remaining paragraphs should provide details that support the statements made in the lead. If the lead said new skills or education acquired by RNs would improve patient care, then indicate how this has been made possible. Communicate information in the news release in the order of importance, going from most important to least important.
- **using quotes.** Quotes by individuals make the release more personal and people-oriented and make it more readable. Most reporters and editors like to use quotes to bring the story closer to their readers.
- **focusing on key messages.** The news release should connect with overall AARN key messages and themes. Make the connections for the reader.
- **using the standard news release format.** Include headline, release time or “For Immediate Release,” dateline, and contact name and number. Indicate that there are additional pages by using the word “more” centered below the last line on the page. Indicate the end of the release by using “30” centered below the last line of the release. Use double or 1.5 spacing and never end a page in the middle of a paragraph.

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 28, 2004

REGISTERED NURSES RESPOND TO HEALTH RENEWAL PLAN

Edmonton – The Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (AARN) considers aspects of the Alberta government’s health renewal plan to be steps in the right direction.

“We support a publicly funded, not-for-profit health-care system so we are pleased to hear that the Alberta government will consult with Albertans before considering measures that would increase privatization of the health-care system,” says Sheila McKay, president-elect, the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. “It will be essential to ensure that all Albertans are involved in decisions which could significantly impact the types of health-care services they receive in future and how those services are funded.”

According to McKay, AARN also supports increased funding for the regional health authorities, which is a critical step towards providing the staffing levels that are required to ensure patient safety and quality patient care.

“As highlighted in the report comparing health systems in OECD countries, creating and maintaining a satisfied and productive workforce is one factor which is needed to improve health outcomes,” says McKay. “A team approach to providing care which uses the full knowledge and skills of registered nurses and other health professions can also go a long way towards improving access to services and maximizing resources.”

McKay also stated that the investment in health promotion is another positive step because the real key to a sustainable health-care system lies in improving population health.

AARN is the professional and regulatory body for Alberta’s more than 27,000 registered nurses, the largest health-care profession in the province. It sets nursing practice standards and ensures Albertans receive effective, safe and ethical nursing services. Its members include registered nurses working in direct care, nursing management, education and research.

- 30 -

For more information:

Jane Smith, Director of Communications
Alberta Association of Registered Nurses
780-453-0515

Develop Strategic Alliances

The building of coalitions, networks and alliances of like-minded individuals and organizations is an essential part of any government relations or advocacy strategy, usually undertaken as one element of an overall campaign.

The ability to present your side of the issue with many voices, faces and interests will add to the strength of your voice.

The building of networks and alliances begins in the analysis of the issue and analysis of potential target audiences, when possible allies are identified. Some tips for effective network building include:

- identify potential allies as early as possible
- communicate regularly and frequently among partners
- build consensus on goals, approaches, objectives and tactics
- ensure understanding and agreement on the decision-making process
- ensure everyone has a role to play
- ensure everyone receives appropriate recognition for their participation
- be responsive to unique organizational needs, priorities and sensitivities

Imagine alliances with other nursing organizations, other health-care professional associations, labor unions, patient advocacy groups, and employers.

Again, coordination is vital. Contact your AARN regional coordinator, council member, or provincial office to learn about existing alliances, political sensitivities or other issues.

Public Forums and Town Hall Meetings

Forums and town hall meetings provide the opportunity for an issue to be discussed and debated publicly, sometimes involving the attendance of the parties who are the target of the advocacy effort. These events also provide the opportunity for media coverage of an issue.

Forums tend to focus more on discussion of an issue among a panel of experts while town hall meetings focus more on hearing the voices of the general public.

Effective Forums and Town Hall Meetings:

- Select a date as far in advance as possible.
- Select a location and facility that will be adequate and appropriate to accommodate the anticipated attendance.
- Decide on a format and ensure that all participants understand the format in advance.
- Provide written invitations and agendas to guest speakers or presenters.
- Make sure that the date, location and topic are well publicized.
- Ensure that participants are aware of who else will be participating.
- Select a strong moderator who will be able to control timing, topic and format in a neutral manner even in the heat of contentious debate.
- Start on time and end on time.
- Tell the audience the rules at the beginning of the session and stick to them.
- Allow adequate time for questions.
- Invite the media.

Demonstrations and Special Events

Demonstrations, parades, mass gatherings or vigils can be an effective means of pressuring a government, institution or organization. They are not stand-alone advocacy efforts however and must be part of a broader overall plan. They require significant time and resources to effectively plan and implement and can sometimes be costly.

Effective Demonstrations:

- Determine in advance the specific target and objective of the demonstration.
- Determine the number of demonstrators required to make a significant impact.
- Recruit participants far in advance of the event.
- Ensure that the required logistical supports are in place for the demonstration including transportation for participants, food, public address systems and signage.
- Acquire any necessary approvals or permits well in advance.
- Select speakers who will be able to make an emotional and factual connection with the participants.
- Use high profile, well-known speakers if possible.
- Ensure physical security arrangements for participants, passers-by and property.
- Invite news media and ensure spokespersons are available to do interviews.
- Arrange for cleanup of the demonstration site after the event.

Election Campaigns

Elections provide unique opportunities to influence federal, provincial and municipal government policies. During election campaigns candidates for office are much more open to hear the ideas and concerns of constituents and to make commitments for future action. Some activities you can undertake during an election campaign are:

- invite candidates to forums, debates and town hall meetings to discuss your issue
- write to political leaders and request their position on your issue
- send letters and e-mails to candidates urging specific positions
- attend candidate public meetings and ask questions or provide comments
- monitor political party and individual candidate Internet websites and urge them to post their position on your issue
- send surveys to political party leaders to complete regarding their parties' position on your issue
- arrange meetings with local candidates regarding your issue
- use media relations tools to highlight party/candidate positions on your issue and their responses to your questions

Look on the AARN website at www.nurses.ab.ca for briefings on key issues in the campaign, comparison of the party platforms and suggested questions to ask candidates.

How Public Policy is Developed

Determining Government Priorities

Government policy develops and changes through a variety of influences and initiatives which arise from all levels of government. Issues, needs and opportunities are identified by:

- provincial and federal cabinets and municipal councils through reviews of provincial, federal and local needs in the context of overall government priorities and directions, as well as political party philosophies
- provincial MLAs, federal MPs and municipal councillors through input received from citizens and organizations at the local constituency or ward level
- formal and semi-formal advisory committees, boards and agencies through reviews and citizen input
- government administrators/bureaucrats through program reviews and assessments

Government priorities with respect to what policies and legislation move forward, and which move forward first, are based on:

- overall government philosophy and directions
- commitments made in previous election campaigns
- availability of, or the need for, resources to implement a policy direction
- perceived immediacy of need for action
- perceived degree of public support or desire for action
- timing in the election cycle, for example the most contentious policy decisions are frequently made early in a government's mandate with the last year of a government's mandate tending to avoid controversial decisions

- public/stakeholder pressure
- personal commitment or priorities of elected officials
- sunset clauses in existing legislation that require policy decisions within a specified time frame
- new inventions and discoveries which stimulate policy or program changes
- global economic or social pressures

Assessing Public Support

Whenever any level of government is developing new policies or legislation it tries to assess public support for that policy or legislation. Processes used to assess public attitudes and support include:

- informal input received by local MLAs, MPs, or councillors
- recommendations from advisory committees, boards or agencies, including provincial standing policy committees such as the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living
- formal input received from key stakeholder and special interest organizations (such as AARN) to cabinet, caucus, standing policy committees, etc.
- recommendations and resolutions from political party conventions and meetings
- public opinion polls
- focus groups of community/provincial residents
- formal consultation processes
- discussion papers, “Green Papers” or “White Papers”
- letters, telephone calls, petitions, etc., to MLAs, MPs and municipal council members

The principal input at the provincial government level often comes from the premier and cabinet ministers, who develop their own perception of what is best for Alberta and what is politically wise in terms of continued re-election of the party. The options from which they choose are often those presented by senior department officials, with whom ministers are in constant consultation. Similarly, the prime minister and his cabinet greatly influence federal government policy and directions.

Input from interest groups such as AARN is a well-respected and influential part of the policy-making process. AARN meets regularly with ministers and standing policy committees at the provincial level while the Canadian Association of Nurses plays that role nationally.

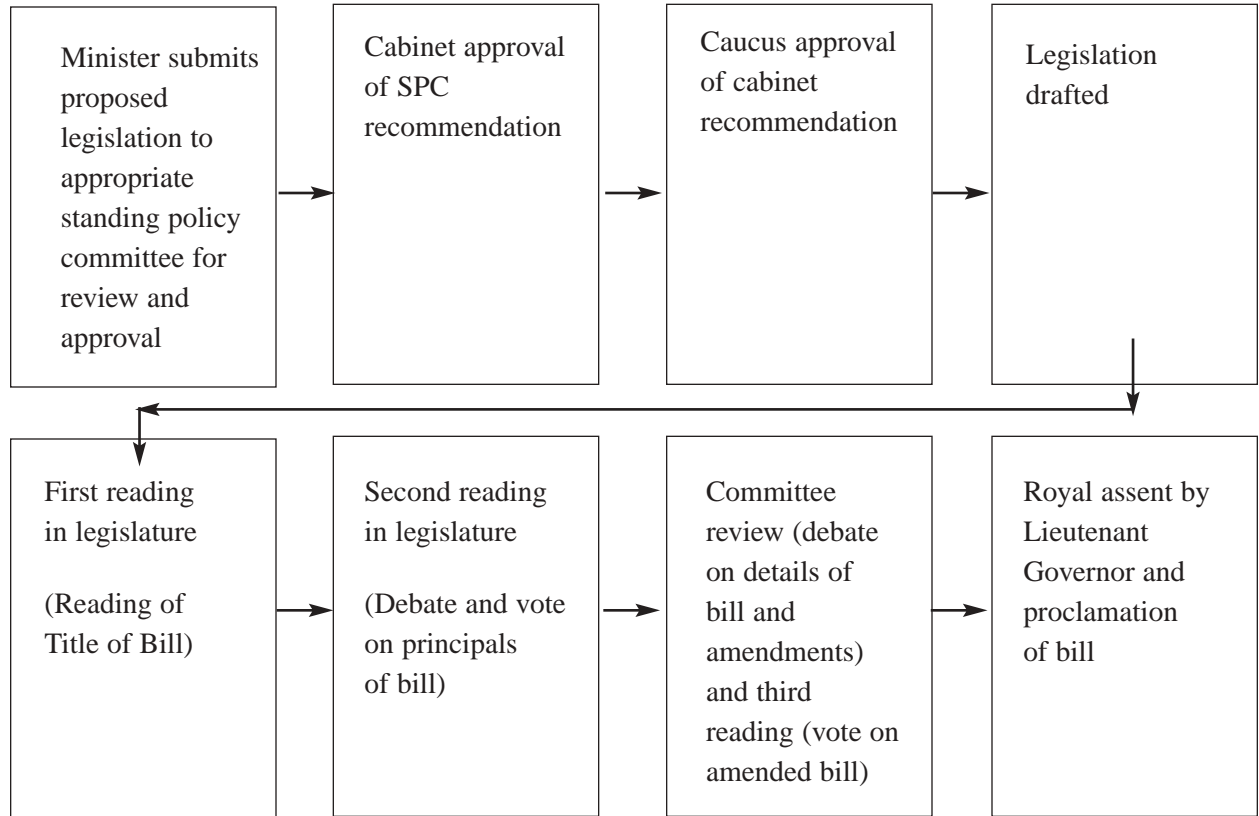
The government process of formulating policy involves a careful balancing of demands and priorities. Input provided by AARN may sometimes conflict with that of other professional groups.

Government caucus (all MLAs or MPs of the governing party) must approve all policy initiatives and legislation. Strong opposition, from within caucus or from the Official Opposition may result in further study or outright rejection of a proposal.

In Alberta, because of the existing large government majority, the passage of government-proposed legislation is very likely unless there is major opposition from other political parties and the public.

While opposition parties have limited direct influence on government policy, they can play an important role in influencing broader public opinion and, ultimately, government policies.

Legislative Process in Alberta



A similar process is in place for federal legislation. However, federal legislation passed by the House of Commons must also be passed by the Senate, with royal assent provided by the Governor General.

Alberta Political Parties

At the time of printing, there are 11 registered political parties in Alberta. The Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta provides an updated list and contact information at www.electionsalberta.ab.ca.

Alberta Alliance Party
www.albertaalliance.com

Alberta Greens
www.albertagreens.ca

Alberta Liberal Party
www.liberalparty.ab.ca

Alberta New Democrats
www.newdemocrats.org

Alberta Social Credit Party
www.socialcredit.com

Alberta Party Political Association
www.albertaparty.ab.ca

Communist Party – Alberta
Phone: 780.465.7893

The Equity Party
Phone: 780.421.1867

Progressive Conservative Association
www.albertapc.ab.ca

Reform Party of Alberta
www.albertapc.ab.ca

Separation Party of Alberta
www.separationalberta.com

Resources and Readings

Turn up the Heat! Political Action and Advocacy Guide Contact Information is available on the AARN website at www.nurses.ab.ca, through the AARN library, or by contacting AARN at 1.800.252.9392.

Books

Baly, M., (Ed.). (1991). *As Miss Nightingale Said... Florence Nightingale through her sayings – a Victorian perspective*. London: Scutari Press.

Buresh, B., & Gordon, S. (2000). *From Silence to Voice: What Nurses Know and Must Communicate to the Public*. Ottawa: Canadian Nurses Association.

Canadian Nurses Association. (1993) *Nurses Know, Nurses Can – An Election Handbook*. Ottawa: Author.

Picard, A. (2000). *Critical Care: Canadian Nurses Speak for Change*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

Shiller, E. (1994) *The Canadian Guide to Managing the Media*. Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada Inc.

Stanbury, W.T. (1993). *Business-Government Relations in Canada*, (2nd Ed.). Scarborough: Nelson Canada.

Van Loon, R.J., & Whittington, M.S. (1981). *The Canadian Political System: Environment, Structure, & Process*, third edition. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Periodicals

Alberta Political Scan: A weekly summary of Alberta public policy. Published by Word of Mouth Communications, Box 12067, Edmonton Main, Edmonton, Alberta T51 3K7, (780) 421-9077.

A Guide to Alberta's 24th Legislature, (2000) published by The Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 St. NW, Edmonton, Alberta, T5N 2R1.

(780) 447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208 or <http://www.teachers.ab.ca>.

Rick Vivone's Insight into Government: Alberta's independent weekly newsletter on policy and politics. Published by Rich Vivone and Associates Ltd. News and Public Affairs, 11208 – 66 St. Edmonton, Alberta, T5B 1H3, (780) 479-7084 or <http://www.vivone.com>.

Internet Resources

Alberta Association of Registered Nurses
www.nurses.ab.ca

Alberta Center for Injury Control and Research
www.med.ualberta.ca/acicr

Alberta Health and Wellness
www.health.gov.ab.ca

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta
www.cpsa.ab.ca

Health in Action
www.health-in-action.org

Health Sciences Association of Alberta
www.hsaa-alberta.org

Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta
www.phaa.com

Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association of Alberta
www.rpnaa.ab.ca

United Nurses of Alberta
www.una.ab.ca

Political Sites

Government of Alberta
www.gov.ab.ca

MLA Contact Information
www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/mla/index.asp

MP Contact Information
www.parl.gc.ca

Government of Canada
www.canada.gc.ca

