



Advocacy Action Toolkit



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ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The purpose of this toolkit is to empower you to advocate on behalf of yourself, your loved ones and others in your community. You'll find sections covering a range of topics, including:

Advocating for yourself

This section will focus on the importance of being an advocate and what you can do individually to speak out about issues that impact your life as well as discovering ways to learn more about your issue topic.

Advocating as a Group

This section will focus on how you can gather with a group of people who share a similar interest to influence and raise awareness among political and social spheres that relate to your cause and the tools that are most helpful when advocating as a group.

Tips and Tricks

This section will focus on reliable tips for successful advocacy, special considerations to be made before you begin advocating, what this process can look like, and some items to be mindful of as you advocate.

How CanAge can help

This section focuses on what CanAge can do to support you in your advocacy efforts, how CanAge can help you stay connected, and outlines CanAge's partners that can support you in advocating for your specific issue as it pertains to older adults.

****Disclaimer****

This toolkit should NOT be relied on in crisis and emergency situations. In case of emergencies, immediate danger or risk of harm contact 9-1-1. Contact 9-1-1 for a welfare check if you have reason to believe someone may be in danger or at risk of danger.

Advocacy 101

What is the definition of advocacy?

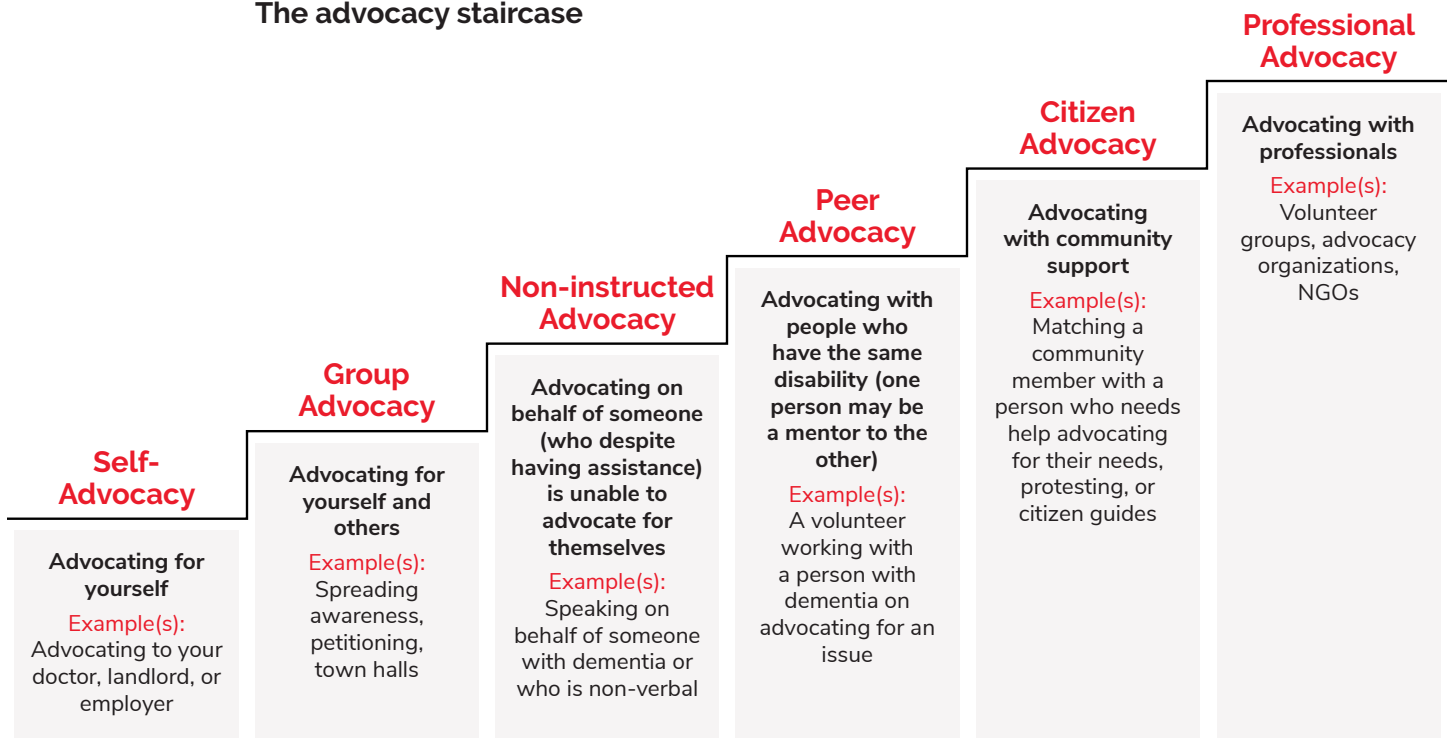
Advocacy is ensuring that you have your voice heard on issues that matter to you, whether the issue affects you directly or you're speaking on behalf of someone else who needs support. Advocacy is about knowing your rights and doing what you can to enhance and protect those rights.

What is most important to know about advocacy?

There are many aspects of advocacy, some of which include the following: researching what the general population already knows about a certain issue of concern, creating a larger objective and actionable plan, and developing an overall clear message that can be easily understood and acted upon by others.

Assembling a group of people that can support you in your cause is a helpful tip to gain more traction as an advocate. Other methods of group advocacy will be discussed in the next section. Additionally, having thorough knowledge of your individual rights and what you hope to achieve as a result of your advocacy plays a significant role as you plan your approach.

The advocacy staircase



There are many different types of advocacy that you can engage in on the 'staircase'. While advocacy can span from self-advocacy to professional organizations, this toolkit is most relevant to those beginning their advocacy journey, or those looking to address problems that are on a personal or municipal level. This toolkit will provide information and tips on how to practice the first two 'steps' on the staircase, identified as **self-advocacy** and **group advocacy**.

Advocacy for Yourself

What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy involves speaking up for yourself and the things that matter to you. You should ask for what you need and want and communicate your thoughts and feelings. Self-advocacy means knowing your rights and responsibilities, and that you are able to make choices and decisions that impact your life. The goal of self-advocacy is for you to decide what you want and carry out a plan to help you achieve this. This does not mean not asking for help when needed, it only means that you are making the choices and you have to be responsible for the choices you make. Some examples of self-advocacy are outlined below.

Examples of when self-advocacy might be needed:

- You feel that you are being mistreated, and you speak up for yourself
- Asking for accommodations you need
- You write to your landlord, communicating you need something fixed in your home
- You speak to your doctor about further information and support on a medical problem you may have
- You express any concerns you have about your health and safety at work to your employer

Tips for Self-Advocacy

Using Social Media

The Internet, and especially social media, have become a significant way for individuals to connect, create community, advocate, and express themselves freely and openly. Social media can be used to practice self-advocacy by increasing engagement and awareness of relevant social issues that matter to you. Increasingly, stories and short form content are used to engage with others and are easily shareable.

Additional Online Research

It is beneficial to go online and do more research towards ways you could further advocate for yourself. This includes looking up your legal rights.

Talking to Others With the Same Experience

Talking to individuals and groups with similar experience may help you organize support for your cause. Reaching out to professionals that have knowledge about your issue can also help you gain further clarification or support.

Advocacy as a Group

What is Group Advocacy?

Group advocacy is accomplished by combining with others who have a shared outlook and working together towards change. This may include jointly reaching out to or partnering with organizations who do work in the domain you are interested in, educating others on the topic, or lobbying. Working in larger numbers enhances awareness of your issue and can be influential in creating the desired change.

Increasing Awareness

Making others aware of the matter you wish to advocate for is an important step in making your campaign successful. The more people who show interest and get involved with your cause, the more likely it is that you will create impactful change.

Some methods to increasing awareness are:

- Write letters or create flyers and send them to your friends, family, community members, local businesses and organizations, and politicians.
- Advocate on social media by creating posts, resharing content you like, and using hashtags.
- Host an online meeting or an in person townhall with your friends, family, peers and community members.
- Create a petition using an online tool and circulate it online to get signatures
- Create a newsletter that people can subscribe to for updates on your given issue and advocacy work

Meetings and Town Halls

Town Hall Meetings are another effective way to mobilize other interested parties in your cause. This is an opportunity for individuals to come together and present issues, discuss opinions and brainstorm solutions.

Joining a Town Hall Meeting

- Follow organizations/communities related to the cause you are concerned about on social media, newsletters, regular meetings.
- Ask questions and provide your outlook throughout the discussion (you might mention something others have yet to think of).
- Talk to others attending the meeting to gain insight as to why they find the cause important.

Hosting a Town Hall Meeting

- Make a clear definition of the proposed objectives.
- Assign someone to take minutes for future reference.
- Provide handouts or visuals of materials that you reference.
- Keep your talking and explanations to a minimum so that time remains for others to contribute.
- Be open to hearing the opinions and concerns of all who attend.
- Ensure there are clear next steps to continue momentum.
- Provide opportunities or suggestions for continued activism and engagement.
- Follow up with attendees afterward
- If possible, record the meeting so others can watch and share it after the fact
- Clearly summarize the results of the meeting and next steps so that you can communicate the outcomes publicly

Petitions

A petition is a formal document where you write about a request you have, such as an action you want taken on a certain issue, and submit it to someone or something that has authority to act on the request. Petitions are often submitted to a level of government. A petition becomes more effective the more people sign their support. [Here is the process within the Ontario government.](#)

There are two types of petitions: paper petitions and electronic petitions (or e-petitions).

What is an example of a petition?

Here is an example of another petition that advocates for '[Clean water for Indigenous communities drinking from the Great Lakes Basin](#)'. The petition seeks to secure safe drinking water for indigenous communities that currently rely on polluted sources of water for their daily needs. The petition outlines that access to safe and clean drinking water is a fundamental human right that every Canadian has, and that there should be no exceptions when it comes to indigenous communities and reservations.

How are petitions made?

You can find the link to a paper petition template [here](#).

- On this template, you will find instructions on what you need to include in your petition and how to format it.

You can also make an e-petition by using the following site

- Change.org provides a quick and easy way to make an e-petition. Find the link to their website [here](#).

If you want to submit a petition **specifically to the Ontario Legislature**, [here is the link](#). On this page, you can:

- Search for petitions to sign that have already been submitted
- Create an electronic petition right on the website, or find a template for a paper petition you can use
- Find information on what petitions are and how they work

If you want to submit a petition **specifically to the Parliament of Canada**, [here is the link](#). On this page, you can:

- Search for petitions to sign that have already been submitted
- Create an electronic petition right on the website, or find a template for a paper petition you can use
- Find information on what petitions are and how they work

Extra tips on creating and submitting petitions

If you are submitting a petition to a municipal, provincial, or federal government, go on their website and find information on how they want their petitions addressed and submitted.

Make sure your petition is well researched! Adding facts and statistics to your request will prove that your petition is true and legitimate. Be sure to include the name of the source where you found your information.

The more people you can get to sign your petition the better. To help your petition gain attention, you can tell your friends and peers about it, share it on social media, ask organizations to share it with their networks or include it in your own newsletter

Paper Petition: Template with Instructions

"PETITION TO THE" [\[insert address here\]](#)

Here you select one specific address to send your petition to. For example, you can say: House of Commons, Government of Canada, Government of Ontario, Ministry of Seniors, etc.

WHEREAS

[\[insert issue, opinion and/or research here\]](#)

You can use it to introduce an issue or opinion and any factual research (known as grievances) that support it. Depending on where you are submitting your petition, there may be a maximum word count on this section. If you are using research found in newspapers, websites, or academic articles, please include an embedded citation and a full reference of the source at the end of your petition.

Your embedded citation will look like this:
(Name of author; Year when source was published)
(Smith, 2021)

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED,

[\[insert identity of petitioners here\]](#)

This section is where you can identify who your petitioners are. For example, you can state: "We, the residents of..." and describe the country, province, city or electoral district you are from

CALL UPON THE

[\[insert who you want to act on your request here\]](#)

Here you state who you want to act on the request you are petitioning. For example: the name of a Minister, a member of Government, etc.

TO

[\[insert petition request here\]](#)

State what your request is, and explain what form of action your petition and petitioners wish for

Signatures <small>(here is where you put the names and addresses of petitioners)</small>	Addresses
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	
[insert more rows as needed here]	

Additional Ways to Advocate and Take Action

There are many other ways that you can spread awareness and advocate for an issue important to you. Below you will find information on a few extra methods you can use to take action:

Voting

Exercising your right to vote is crucial. Voting allows you to hold the government accountable, create change on the issues that matter to you, and use your influence for the greater good. You can vote in person at an Election Canada polling station or through a mail ballot. Mobile options are also available, allowing you to vote from the comfort of your home.

For more information on how to vote, please visit the [Elections Ontario Ways to Vote webpage](#).

Contacting your Local Politician

Depending on what your issue is, you might want to consider getting into contact with a politician in your town, or province/territory. Member of Parliament (MP), Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) or a municipal councilor are a few types of politicians who you can speak with. Each of these politicians have different roles, and who you can contact depends on what issue you wish to address.

Who to Contact

Member of Parliament (MP)

- Represent their riding and political party at the federal level.
- Make decisions, alongside parliament, in the interest of Canadians.
- Assist in the development of laws and legislation.
- Serve towards their constituents' needs.

Find more about the role of an MP [here](#).

Look [here](#) to find your local MP and their contact information.

Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP)

- Represents their riding at the provincial level.
- Debate and create provincial laws.
- Learns about and responds to the concerns of their constituents.
- Assists in resolving issues pertaining to provincial government services.

Find information on how to contact a MPP [here](#).

Municipal Councillor

- Represents their municipality locally, nationally and internationally.
- Promotes, participates and fosters activities for their constituents.
- Partakes in policy-making for their region.

Find more information about the role of a municipal councillor and their office [here](#).

How to Meet with Politicians

If you are able to book a meeting with the politician you contact, it is important to prepare your information and message in advance to make the most of your time.

Write down the following types of information in a clear and organized format and bring your notes with you:

- Some facts about the the issue you want to discuss
- An explanation of why this issue is important and who it is impacting
- Some solutions about how the issue can be fixed
- Some evidence to provide counter-arguments to anything which can be said against your issue

When it is time to meet, remember to:

- Be on time
- Dress to impress! Wear your favourite business casual clothes
- Bring water with you to stay hydrated
- Have a positive attitude and try your best to keep your composure if you feel frustrated or misunderstood during the meeting
- Try to speak clearly and calmly

Boycotting

Boycotting is when you and other people decide to withdraw your support from a business or social entity. For example, if you want to boycott a certain clothing company that is controversial, you can refuse to buy or use any of the products they produce or sell.

Group-led boycotts can be an effective way of inciting social change. They offer a way for people to stand up for what they believe in while bringing attention to your cause. When boycotts start, people take notice. This allows you to explain your position to a wider audience. Online petitions and social media are a great avenue through which to bring attention to your boycott. You can also try going to the media and sharing your message to garner attention.

Writing a Letter

Composing a letter addressed to a member of government is a direct way of getting your concern into the public domain. Letters can also be a part of a group campaign if you share a template with others to use. Mail sent to certain members of government as well as certain offices can be sent without postage in Canada. Check out a list of who and how [here](#).

Tips to Writing a Letter to a Government Official

Ensure that you properly address your letter towards the intended

Check [here](#) for how to address different members of the government.

Frame your issue as it relates to the constituents of the letter addressee.

Do not bury your issue by providing too much of a back-story. Be clear and concise when you present your argument and relate your issue back to what they can do about it within their role.

Be polite in the wording of your request.

Advocacy is more effective if you maintain a calm, confident and informed tone. Coming off as angry or overly aggressive can cause the person you're addressing to disengage from the conversation or become defensive, limiting the opportunity for a productive dialogue.

Your use of language and how you write are important as it communicates both your message and position.

Avoid overuse of underlining, **highlighting** and WRITING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, as this can be interpreted as overly aggressive.

You may consider using the FILAC approach to inform your letter writing, especially if it relates to a law. This would also be beneficial if you hope to set up a meeting with a government official to discuss your issue.

The FILAC method stands for Facts, Issues, Law, Analysis/Applications, Conclusion/Communication. To find out how to use the FILAC approach to write a letter, look [here](#).

Additional Resources

- [Template for a letter to a member of government](#)
- [Additional tips on writing a letter to a member of government](#)

Key Skills

Here are a few tips and tricks that you can use which will help enhance your advocacy.

Understanding Your Position in Society as an Advocate

Every person is shaped by their experiences, and those experiences are often shaped by factors that do not apply to everyone equally. Factors including, but not limited to race, skin colour, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, religion, education level, spoken language, age, (dis)ability, citizenship, and financial status all contribute to the unique perspectives and opinions we all have as individuals.

It is important to understand that your experience may not be the same as another's, and no one experience is inherently more valid than anyone else's. When advocating, always remember that your experience may not apply to everyone else, and to be mindful and respectful of how an issue might affect someone else differently, or that their experiences might cause them to have a different opinion than you.

Try to always be open-minded and receptive to the experiences of others, and remember that just because someone does not agree with something you are saying, does not mean they are against you. Whenever possible try to listen to the experiences of others and see things from their point of view before drawing conclusions such as "I'm right" or "They're wrong".

Some resources to help you learn about identity, positionality, and oppression:

- [Privilege and Intersectionality Definitions](#)
- [How to Navigate Your Own Privilege - VeryWellMind](#)
- [Exploring My Power and Privilege Toolkit](#)

Research

Having the facts to back up your argument or ask is extremely important. The more about your topic you know, the more effective and persuasive your advocacy will be.

If you want to advocate on a certain issue, it is best to take your time and look to different sources to learn more about it. Here are some ways you can find information:

- Watch the news and read newspaper articles
- Go on the internet and search for key terms
- Talk directly with people impacted by the issue in person or on social media
- Talk to organizations that work on or around the issue in question (for example, a community support organization or research institution)

As well, always remember your rights and review your local, provincial and federal laws and regulations.

Advocating on Behalf of Someone

Remember to be an active listener when they are sharing your concerns.

Practice empathy for the person you are working with and advocating for.

Give them a safe space to talk by not interrupting when they talk, being respectful, kind, patient, and non-judgemental, and providing comfort and support if they become emotional.

Make sure they are comfortable in the setting and place where you are meeting with them.

Having a Positive Attitude

Practice having a positive attitude as much as possible and remember the following pieces of advice:

- Have confidence! Remember you are valuable and so is the work, time and effort you are contributing
- Whether it be presenting in a meeting, talking to the community, or writing to a politician, try to remain calm and friendly to your audience, while also clearly and firmly stating your advocacy knowledge, beliefs, needs, and goals
- Don't give up on fighting for what you believe in - be persistent and assertive
- Self care is also so important - Don't forget to give yourself a break or reach out and ask for help when needed.
- Develop a strong support system to cheer you on and assist you through challenging times

Additional Advocacy Tips and Resources :

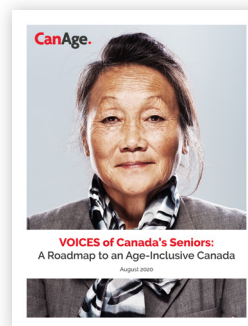
- [20 Ways to Be An Advocate for Social Change and Transformation](#)
- [Ten Steps to Being an Effective Self-Advocate](#)[Ten Steps to Being an Effective Self-Advocate](#)
- [6 Ways To Advocate For Seniors And Provide Support During A Hospital Stay](#)
- [Communication Skills: Definitions and Examples](#)

How CanAge Can Help

CanAge is dedicated to advancing the rights and wellbeing of older Canadians. We work hand-in-hand with all levels of government, and an extensive national network of partners, to move the needle on important issues that matter to real people like you.. If you have any questions about how to approach your advocacy, or need ideas on who you might reach out to to help, we are happy to talk to you. You can write to us at info@canage.ca.

Read our Policy Book

Our evidence-based policy book, '[VOICES: A Roadmap to an Age-Inclusive Canada](#)', makes 135 policy recommendations on 40 major issues affecting older Canadians and caregivers. Our policy book is the foundation of our advocacy, and guides everything we do. Reading it is a great way to get an overview of the current landscape of issues and concerns around aging in our country!



Partners

You can find a [partial list of some of our key partners](#) on our website. We also have a [panel of Fellows](#) who are experts in various aspects of aging, and who help guide our advocacy work.

Inquiries:

- General: info@canage.ca
- Media: media@canage.ca

Becoming a Member

[Joining CanAge](#) as a free member is a great way to take your advocacy to the next level. Not only will you keep up to date on our work and emerging issues affecting older adults, you'll also get access to other perks, including:

- Priority and free access to exciting events
- Advance notice of the chance to participate in innovative studies and research around issues affecting older people
- The chance to guide our advocacy by giving your opinions in surveys
- Access to exclusive content geared to your interests
- Our monthly newsletter is full of important updates that keep you on top of what we're doing and how you can take action.

10 Tips for Effective Advocacy

1. Identify the Issue

Advocacy often falls into one of two categories; Self-Advocacy and Group Advocacy. Depending on the scale of the issue, you may choose to advocate alone, or as a group. In either case, the issue you are choosing to advocate for/ on behalf of will shape the scale of your advocacy-strategy.

What is it that you want to advocate for? Clearly identify the issue. In order to effectively advocate, you must be knowledgeable on the issue of your choosing, be able to present that knowledge in a clear and concise manner, and support your arguments with relevant and reliable evidence.

2. Know Your Audience

Effectively advocating requires a firm understanding of the position of the person or organization you are advocating to, and their capacity to influence the issue you are advocating for.

3. Do Your Research

Research may pertain to your legal rights as an individual, or the law more broadly. It may also pertain to issue-specific data, public testimony, or other relevant information.

Be sure to record and cite your sources appropriately!

4. Clearly Define Your Goals

Effectively advocating means clearly communicating the changes you hope to see with respect to the issue you have chosen. Ideally, you should have specific outcomes in mind, and be able to articulate the ways by which those changes can be realized. And identify what it will look like when the issue is remedied.

5. Identify Potential Stakeholders and Allies

The more support you can garner for your issue, the stronger your advocacy efforts will become. Engaging with like minded individuals or groups can significantly empower your message and create awareness of your issue where there may not have been before.

6. Craft Your Message

Be prepared to present your argument succinctly and emphatically. Preparing materials such as slogans, easy-to-understand statistics and facts, and identifying your most important arguments will be extremely helpful when you need to articulate your thoughts.

If your issue is highly technical, or requires special terminology to discuss it, make sure you are able to articulate your ideas to both the average person and to an expert/professional. This ensures that your message can be understood and absorbed by all possible audiences.

7. Develop an Advocacy Strategy

Your advocacy strategy should identify the appropriate method of communication for each of your intended audiences. For example, when advocating to a government official, a formal letter is often the best first step, to ensure that the recipient is aware of your issue, and understands your core arguments and goals.

Ideally your strategy should contain contingencies in case your first attempt does not have the desired outcome. For example, if formal channels of communication prove unsuccessful, then it may be appropriate to escalate your efforts to include public demonstrations such as protest, social media or, if you have sufficient support, a petition or even a boycott.

8. Engage Your Audience / Take Action

Based on your advocacy strategy, begin to send letters, draft petitions, organize public demonstrations, or any other advocacy activities that you have identified.

Remember that advocacy is often a lengthy process, and your first attempts may not get the reaction you hope for, so it is important to persevere.

9. Evaluate Your Effectiveness

Perform evaluations on the effectiveness of your efforts, and identify weaknesses or gaps in your advocacy strategy that you may not have been aware of when you began.

Once you have identified the gaps in your strategy you can begin to address them. This might include identifying additional audiences, shifting from a direct messaging approach to a more public strategy, or narrowing your focus to try and achieve more reasonable outcomes in the short- to medium-terms.

10. Don't Get Discouraged

Inducing change is no small feat. Your efforts may not achieve the outcomes you desired right away, and a tepid response (or lack of response altogether) can be disheartening.

Perseverance is paramount to realizing your advocacy goals. Keep engaging your audiences as best you can, and incorporate new strategies as your campaign progresses.

No matter what, always remember to take care of yourself. Advocacy can be stressful and emotionally draining, and can take a significant toll on your mental health. Make sure that your advocacy activities are not at the cost of your health.

Conclusion

This toolkit is meant to provide you with a basic understanding of what advocacy is and how you can take action to fight for change on an issue that is important to you and others. It should not be used in emergency situations.

Advocacy is about amplifying the voices of those who are impacted by a certain issue, policy, and or action. Effective advocacy is achieved through ample research, influencing those in positions of power, and engaging your broader community on an issue with the end goal of creating a just and equitable change.





For more resources on advocacy, please reach out to CanAge at info@canage.ca for general inquiries, and getinvolved@canage.ca for volunteering inquiries.

We wish you the best of success in your advocacy!



Authored by CanAge.
May 2022

Stay Connected with CanAge

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Visit CanAge.ca/join for your membership!
- 3** Follow us on social media
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 -  CanAge
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