

How to Advocate for Systems Change

WELCOME! This document is adapted from Jack.org's many resources to train and equip young leaders to take action for mental health across Canada.

Objectives:

- To provide an introduction to systems-change activities
- To provide a framework for young leaders new to systems-change and advocacy work
- To introduce a roadmap of preliminary steps to take to guide systems-change work

Systems change involves engaging with your school administration or government to advocate for changes in policies, rules, laws, and mental health services. As an advocate for systems change, you will be working to synthesize and elevate the voices of your community to effect change on a larger scale. Below are some steps to help guide you when advocating for systems change in your community.

1. Research the Issue and Do a Community Scan

Your credibility will come from your knowledge surrounding the issue you are advocating for with your local school or government and the lack of related resources or services in your community. Once you know what it is you want, research everything you can around that topic. If you are seeking more services on campus, consider researching what services already exist at your school, the university's operating budget (how much are they spending on mental health compared to other services?), the impact that this lack of services has on the student population, and any other information that helps justify what you're asking for.

2. Be Specific in Your Ask

Knowing what it is that you want, or the outcome you are looking for, is absolutely crucial when advocating for systems change. Try writing down what you are asking for in one sentence or make a list of goals you would like to achieve to ensure you can clearly articulate your demands. For example, "We want our university to invest in a greater number of mental health support services at our school."

3. Set Achievable Timeframes

It's important to remember that change doesn't happen overnight. When advocating for systems change, it will take time to achieve your goals and there may be many steps along the way. Setting a reasonable timeframe and remaining flexible is an important part of sustaining the momentum of your movement and achieving your goals.

4. Plan A Meeting

Meeting with your school administration or government officials directly is a good first step in starting a dialogue around the changes you wish to see. Local Members of Parliament are often eager to hear from students and student groups in the community, and meetings can be booked with your school administration to discuss your concerns.

5. Always Remain Respectful

As a systems change advocate, you are undeniably passionate about the cause you are fighting for. It can be frustrating when your demands are not met, or changes are not being made as quickly as you would like, but it is important to remain respectful when engaging with school administration and government as you continue to build relationships and work alongside these individuals. You can still be persistent and firm on your demands, but keeping a respectful tone throughout the process will go a long way towards achieving your goals.