

## Getting the voices of psychiatrists, service users and carers heard during the General Election 2010

The General Election is an important opportunity for psychiatrists, service users and carers, and members of the general public to raise the profile of mental health.

The College has sent a copy of the Four-Step Manifesto to all parliamentary candidates across the UK. But we need you, as local voters, to get the message across to them.

Expressing the College's Four Steps through local case studies can and will have an impact.

It's important for the College to hear about any contact that College members, service users and carers have with parliamentary candidates during the General Election period. We are happy to offer advice and keen to learn from your experiences. These can be fed into our national work. You can contact Neil Balmer, our Public Affairs Manager, on [nbalmer@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:nbalmer@rcpsych.ac.uk) or **020 7235 2351 x 6149**.



### Raise the profile of mental health issues with your next MP

Although one in four people in the UK will have a mental health problem at some point in their life, mental health does not have the same priority in general election debates. Your questions at local meetings or on the doorstep will ensure that local candidates know that mental health is an important local issue.

Your conversation on the doorstep could be with the person who becomes your next MP and it is the powerful local stories that candidates hear during the election which influence the work they carry out once they get to Parliament.

It is also worth remembering that whether or not the person becomes the next MP, they may still be influential locally either in politics or community work, and be a good contact for the future.

## What should I discuss with candidates?

When you meet a candidate on the doorstep, or speak at a meeting, you have a chance to send them a strong message. Raise the College's national Four-Step Manifesto ([www.fairdeal4mentalhealth.co.uk](http://www.fairdeal4mentalhealth.co.uk)) and campaign for a Fair Deal, and bring in local examples as to why the College's manifesto priorities are important in your constituency.

## How do I find out who my local candidates are?

### Finding your current MP



If your current MP is standing again, the UK Parliament website provides the best resource for information about them. Where possible, this site provides a link to their email address, website and biography. There is a search engine to help you find your local MP at <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/>. Alternatively, the local town hall or public reference library will have details of your MP, or you can call the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

You can find out if your local MP is standing again, by checking their own website or looking at the UK Polling Report website.



### All parliamentary candidates

UK Polling Report (<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/>) is an independent polling and news website which gives information about every seat in the General Election. It has a search engine which enables you to see up-to-date information on all of the declared candidates in each constituency. The site also provides information about each constituency, general and specific polling data, and interesting election facts.

### More detailed information

Once you have found the names of local candidates, one of the most effective ways of finding out more information about them is to type their name into [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) to see whether they have a website. Most individual candidates' websites will contain:

- detailed biographies
- contact details
- areas of personal interest and news on local campaigns.

Each political party website will also contain a list of the prospective parliamentary candidates and their contact details.

## How might I meet candidates?

### On the doorstep

If you live in a marginal constituency, it is likely that they will be pounding the streets looking for votes. This is a perfect opportunity to tell them why it's important that they champion mental health during the campaign and in Parliament, if elected.



### At local meetings



Local organisations or community groups will hold public meetings, or 'hustings', in the constituency during the General Election period. This is a good opportunity to raise an issue and ask a question of local candidates. You can find out about hustings in the local press, or in public areas such as the town hall, library, doctor's surgery or community centre.

### At an individual meeting

As with your MP, you can request to meet your local candidates. The best way to do this is to write a letter or email, which you can follow up with a telephone call. Candidates will have very busy diaries through the election, but they will often either make time to see you or let you know how you might meet them in the constituency.



Further resources – all at [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/campaigns/fairdeal.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/campaigns/fairdeal.aspx)

### The General Election Four-Step Manifesto

You can visit the website ([www.fairdeal4mentalhealth.co.uk](http://www.fairdeal4mentalhealth.co.uk)) or contact our Public Affairs Officer if you would like hard copies of the manifesto to show candidates – [publicaffairs@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@rcpsych.ac.uk)

### The College's Fair Deal campaign

The College's work at the General Election 2010 is a part of our Fair Deal campaign, launched in 2008. This 3-year campaign covers eight priority areas, linked by the common theme of working towards equality for people with mental health problems. This campaign is underpinned by an evidence-based manifesto setting out our vision for mental health services.

### The Fair Deal Political Pack

Published in 2009, the Fair Deal Political Pack is a set of information sheets, which can be used as practical tools for College members, service users and carers and anyone who might want to raise Fair Deal priorities with parliamentarians.